

Liberal Party Response – May 2, 2018

What distinguishes your party's education platform from those of the other parties?

The Ontario Liberal Party's education platform builds on our record of investment and transformation. After inheriting an education system that was severely underfunded and in complete disrepair, successive Liberal governments made historic investments that are contributing to the high school graduation rate reaching an all-time high of 86.5 per cent – up more than 18 percentage points compared to the rate when we took office. Today, Ontario's students consistently rank amongst the highest in national and international student achievement results in reading, math and science.

But we also know that there is more to do. Our government's vision for education focuses on four interrelated goals: achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being, and enhancing public confidence.

While other parties have made promises about education, their platform budgets do not allocate a single new dollar to fulfill them, and would even roll back much of the \$625 million invested through the 2018 Ontario Budget. The Ontario PCs would make dramatic cuts to the education system, leading to thousands of fewer teachers and education workers and to green school repairs funded through the province's cap and trade program. Under our plan, this funding will go to support 2,000 additional teachers and education workers who will help to address:

- **Excellence** – An additional 450 guidance teachers in Grade 7 and 8 will help students make a successful academic transition to high school, and engage in career pathway planning. This will ensure students have the same access to a guidance counsellor from Grade 7 right to Grade 12.
- **Equity** – An additional 600 staff forming multidisciplinary teams of social workers, psychologists, behavioural specialists and speech-language pathologists and resources to eliminate the waitlists for special education assessments, while an additional 500 Education Assistants will mean more support for our highest needs students.
- **Well-Being** – An additional 400 mental health workers will ensure support exists in every high school across the province. It will be focused on expanded mental health awareness and education, earlier identification and assessment, and improved timely referrals to community mental health services.
- **Public Confidence** – An investment of \$16 billion over the next ten years to invest in school infrastructure to build on our government's record of building or rebuilding one in six schools in Ontario and historic investments in school renewal.

The Ontario Liberal Party's focus has been, and will continue, building the best publicly-funded education system in the world for our children.

What is your party's plan to support children and youth and their families who require timely access to community based services for issues related to mental health?

The Ontario Liberal Party cares deeply about student mental health and well-being, because we know how many of our young people are facing mental health challenges and needs support both in their schools and broader communities. In fact, up to 70 per cent of mental health and addictions challenges begin in childhood or adolescence.

That's why we recently announced we are supporting quicker access to better care for mental health and addiction services for people of all ages through a historic \$2.1 billion investment over the next four years. This is the largest provincial investment in Canadian history in mental health and addictions care.

On top of the Mental Health Leads that we created in every school board, this investment means an additional 400 mental health workers to support every high school across the province. They will be dedicated to supporting continued and expanded mental health awareness and education, earlier identification and assessment, and improved timely referrals to community mental health services. This investment will also support enhanced mental health literacy for our educators and school staff, and social emotional learning skills embedded in the curriculum.

This is all in addition to our government's investment of \$49 million over the next three years to promote and support the well-being of Ontario's students, which includes doubling funding to school boards for locally-determined priorities including mental health.

How would your party modify educational programs and instructional practices to ensure students have the skills, attitudes, values and knowledge to succeed in today's complex global context?

Every child in Ontario should have the opportunity to succeed — regardless of background, identity or personal circumstances. The Ontario Liberal Party believes student achievement, well-being and equity must be closely interwoven in day-to-day teaching, learning and assessment in a way that enables all students to reach their full potential.

Moreover, the latest research, as well as ongoing engagement with our education partners, suggests that our curriculum is overcrowded and does not place sufficient emphasis on transferrable skills like creativity and collaboration that are increasingly required to succeed in today's world.

That's why in September 2017, our government announced a multi-year plan to modernize our curriculum and assessment tools from Kindergarten to Grade 12, including new provincial report cards and changes to EQAO assessments. We established a Transformation Steering Committee consisting of a broad representation of students, parents, educators, school and system leaders, Indigenous partners and business to secure input and advice that will inform changes moving forward.

At the heart of our work, we are committed to providing all students with access to culturally relevant, inclusive, engaging and motivating learning experiences and the opportunity to become resilient, and compassionate global citizens. The Ontario Liberal Party believes that our schools are the foundation for a caring and competitive Ontario.

How will your party review the education funding formula to ensure that school boards receive full and adequate funding?

Our government has made historic investments year-after-year in our publicly funded education system. By reviewing the funding formula each year through an annual engagement with our education partners, we were able to make incremental changes. As a result, today's funding formula is completely different than what Mike Harris put in place. We have changed about 90% of the education funding formula since 2013 and are committed to continuing to review the formula to advance student achievement, well-being and equity.

The investments made by successive Liberal governments have enabled the hiring of more than 40,000 additional teachers and education workers into the system to support student success during a period of declining enrolment. They also contributed to caps on K-3 class size, reduced average class size and the complete roll-out of full-day kindergarten for every four and five year old in Ontario.

But we also know that there is more to do. Next year, the Grants for Student Needs will be increasing by another \$625 million to \$24.5 billion, further increasing per-student funding to \$12,300 – that's 9.4 per cent more than in 2012-13. This will support 2,000 additional teachers and education workers to advance student achievement and well-being.

How would your party increase student achievement and improve the learning environment for Indigenous students?

The Ontario Liberal Party is committed to supporting the well-being and achievement of Indigenous learners and increasing all students' knowledge and understanding of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures, contributions and perspectives. Our government created the first ever Indigenous Education Strategy and now provides over \$66 million each year in dedicated funding to help school boards support Indigenous students. Every school board is now required to have an Indigenous Education Lead and an Indigenous Education Advisory Council.

We know students are more engaged in their learning when they see their culture, community and history reflected in the curriculum. In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) calls to action, we worked with Indigenous partners to revise Ontario's curriculum to incorporate mandatory learning about residential schools, the legacy of colonialism and history of treaties. We also know language is the foundation of culture, and this is deserving of respect, understanding and support. That's why we have invested \$10 million in the revitalization of indigenous languages, and are supporting Indigenous Institutes with \$56 million in funding over three years.

We know that many Indigenous students continue to face complex challenges. Through our government's leadership, we have now collected baseline data for the first time that will inform further action to close the achievement and well-being gap. One such action is our government's Education Equity Action Plan, a three-year roadmap for identifying and eliminating discriminatory practices, systemic barriers and bias from our schools and classrooms. The Plan addresses the need for accountability among education leaders for upholding equity and human rights, enhanced diversity in hiring and promotion, data collection, professional development, and organizational culture change.

How would your party maintain labour peace in our school system?

The Ontario Liberal Party knows that communication and collaboration are key to building trusting and respectful relationships with our partners that, in turn, allow us to solve problems while avoiding labour disruptions for educators, students and families. We continue to support and foster collaborative professionalism in Ontario's education system is central not only to labour peace but to advancing the vision of *Achieving Excellence*.

We recognize that labour disruptions can be difficult for students and their families, and we want to make sure our school communities are well-informed in advance of any labour disruption that may affect them. That is why we amended the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act to include 5 days' notice in the event that a strike could impact the school day.

Our government respects the importance of collective bargaining and is committed to ensure it is carried out in good faith.

How would your party support the important role of school boards and the democratically elected school board trustee?

The Ontario Liberal Party respects the critical role of democratically elected local school board trustees in addressing the unique needs of students in their communities.

In addition to providing greater funding to school boards and advancing provincial priorities for publicly funded education, the Ontario Liberal Party is committed to supporting local school board autonomy and flexibility. In fact, the proportion of the Grants for Student Needs that is enveloped has decreased since our government took office in 2003. Recent investments in the Rural and Northern Education Fund, Learning Opportunities Grant, Local Priorities Fund, and many others, are specifically designed to enable local trustees to address local needs.

The Ontario Liberal Party is also committed to building public confidence in our education system and supporting good governance. We continue to work with school boards to identify and implement effective practices that foster strong, accountable and transparent boards of trustees. For example, all school boards are now required to adopt a publicly available code of conduct for trustees and review their code every four years after each general election. Boards will also now be required to have at least two student trustees to strengthen the important role of student voice. We have also increase the trustee honoraria rate and will continue to review the honoraria formula with our partners next year.