

The Ontario School Boards' Association 2021 Federal Election Resource Guide for School Boards and Trustees

Federal elections will take place on September 20, 2021. On this day, Canadians will elect Members of Parliament (MPs) across the country. MPs are elected to represent the views of their constituents in the legislative assembly. The policies of government are far-reaching. These decisions affect everyone, whether or not they have children in the school system.

During federal elections, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) advocates for non-partisan strategies to engage politicians on issues that affect public education and our children and youth.

Election Day: Monday, September 20, 2021



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

THE ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. Together our members serve the educational needs of 1.3 million children and youth, nearly 70% of Ontario's elementary and secondary students.

The Association advocates for the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA believes that the role of public education is to provide universally accessible education opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, social or economic status, individual exceptionality, or religious affiliation.



Cathy Abraham
President

W.R. (Rusty) Hick
Executive Director

Ontario Public School Boards' Association

439 University Avenue, 18th Floor

Toronto, ON M5G 1Y8

Tel: (416) 340-2540

Fax: (416) 340-7571

webmaster@opsba.org

www.opsba.org

Twitter: [@OPSBA](https://twitter.com/OPSBA)

Instagram: [@OPSBA_Official](https://www.instagram.com/OPSBA_Official)

Facebook: [@OPSBAOfficial](https://www.facebook.com/OPSBAOfficial)

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LOCAL ACTION ON NATIONAL ISSUES

At election time, it is important to encourage public reflection on how members of society work together and the obligations we have to the future. Actions can include:

- Reviewing party platforms
- Evaluating the promises of the various parties in the context of:
 - Are they socially responsible?
 - Are they economically just?
 - Are they inclusive—who is left out?
 - Are they environmentally sustainable?
 - Do they contain plans that support environmentally sustainable schools?
- Encouraging everyone to vote and, in particular, creating opportunities for the participation of children and youth, which can include:
 - Participating in Student Vote: <https://studentvote.ca/>
 - Giving young people an opportunity to participate in and help organize a virtual all candidates' meeting
 - Suggesting to young people that they volunteer to provide child care so that people can vote
 - Encouraging family viewing and discussion of televised debates
 - Promoting virtual debate watching with friends and family

It is also important to note that school boards are committed to supporting and meeting the objectives and provincial requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). This could be supported with additional federal funding.



FEDERAL ISSUES FOR SCHOOL BOARDS

CURRENT AND ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC SUPPORTS

Background information:

Since first declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020, COVID-19 has been, and continues to be, one of the great social and economic disruptors of our time with widespread impact on one of society's most traditional institutions – school.

The pandemic has accentuated long-standing and largely unchanged school structures and processes directed by government policy and associated funding streams. The pandemic disruption has also exposed how some of these structures have compromised policy commitments regarding equitable access and opportunity for student communities. These inequities are inevitably linked to students' overall well-being and future prospects.

Technology and E-Learning

Equity and inclusion work in school systems has, in recent years, shifted its stance from equitable access to equitable student outcomes. However, remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of continued advocacy for equitable access to the infrastructure fundamental to successful remote learning. In addition to factors such as access to specialized learning supports, authentic interpersonal relationships, physical safety, and psychological security, educators have observed that underachievement in school, and its consequential relationship to learning outcomes and future opportunities, has now become a function of access to reliable internet connectivity and digital learning devices in the home.

The use of technology is an essential vehicle for learning and teaching, especially in remote locations, provided there is equitable access to modern, affordable high speed internet and infrastructure. In small rural and northern schools, and in Indigenous community schools where distance and low enrolment numbers tend to limit course options available, access to webcasts, online learning and web-based information help to reduce the inequities students might face in these situations.

Capital-Related Issues

In October 2020, the COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream (CVRIS) was introduced under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) to provide up to \$700 million in combined federal-provincial funding for education-related infrastructure projects. School boards were invited to put forward proposals to support retrofits, repairs and upgrades to school board facilities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by supporting health and safety. Many schools have dedicated funding to improving and installing heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment and these will need to be updated and maintained regularly.

Questions for Candidates:

- What could school look like in the years beyond the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Will your government continue to increase broadband development and implementation to ensure affordability and equity of access for all school boards and families across the country?

- How will you invest in technology that enriches the classroom experience for students and teachers?
- Will your government extend the deadline for ICIP projects to be completed? And will additional joint funding be announced?



Photo Credit: Khalid Abdi, Ottawa-Carleton DSB student

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Background information:

The pandemic is not a situation anyone currently working in Ontario's public education system has managed before, and the long-term impacts to mental health, well-being and student achievement are yet to be fully understood. It has highlighted how central and stabilizing the school system is to our communities, children, youth and their families. The current ever-changing environment of lockdown measures and delays to the return of in-school learning in many parts of the province has reinforced the importance of an educator knowing their students and their students' learning needs.



Canada requires an integrated mental health and well-being approach that includes collaboration across the sectors that serve children and youth. So many young lives have and continue to be dramatically affected and there is a clear and immediate need to accelerate the efforts to leverage effective and evidence-based practices across the country.

These issues are not the responsibility of one individual sector. They are complex and require layers of coordination and funding across all sectors. They require a national strategy for children's mental health and well-being that will ensure facilitated access to timely, integrated, responsive and equitable children and youth mental health services across Canada. We need a strategy that engages all political parties to support this much needed multi-sectoral approach.

Questions for Candidates:

- How would you and your party work collaboratively with the provinces to ensure that Canada takes swift action to further develop a National Mental Health Strategy that includes a particular focus on children and youth?
- What would you do differently to make sure there is adequate funding to address the crisis of children and youth mental health across this country?
- What particular strategies would you employ to make sure there is equitable access to supports and services in Canada's northern and rural areas, for Indigenous peoples, for Francophone communities and for newcomers settling in Canada?

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Background information:

The term Healthy Schools encompasses many things and can be different for each school community based on their local circumstances. As an Association one of our priorities has been The Whole Child and Student Well-Being. We believe that improving student achievement and student engagement is directly linked to ensuring that we work collaboratively for the social, emotional, mental and physical well-being of all children and youth. This means striving to make our schools and communities healthier places for students to learn and grow.

Healthy schools includes supporting students with medical conditions and enforcing polices such as Sabrina's Law (anaphylaxis) and Rowan's Law (concussion) They include Daily Physical Activity (DPA), nutrition choices in vending machines and cafeterias, the provision of free and accessible menstrual products, the awareness around the effects of vaping and cannabis, responsible digital citizenship and healthy relationships.

In addition, many school trustees report the visible strain on students, parents, and teachers, both inside and out of the classroom. It is seen in the increased stress in the home, the growing need for breakfast and nutrition programs, the decline of volunteers in schools and the erosion of fundraising capacity that affects all the extra benefits a strong community school can provide. Families are making hard choices and settling on basic household priorities that can result in loss of opportunities for children.

We encourage the federal government to support school boards, students and their families across Canada.

Questions for Candidates:

- Would you advocate for your party to create a federally funded student nutrition program?
- How would you encourage community and private sector partnerships to help with this issue?



INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Background information:

Indigenous Education is a top priority of school boards. We believe that through education we will move towards a Canada where the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians is founded on mutual respect. Our Association has worked with Indigenous partners to champion the Calls to Action of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). We support comprehensive curriculum that contains clear expectations that every student will acquire knowledge and understanding of Treaties and of the historical context that gave rise to residential schools, the impact on First Nation, Métis and Inuit children and their families, and the ongoing legacy that is the responsibility of all Canadians. The recent and ongoing discovery of unmarked graves of First Nations children across Canada, while abhorrent and beyond comprehension for most, is a sad and shared history Canadians must accept and acknowledge. We must insist on this shared history being taught in our schools, from a lived Indigenous historical perspective, and not sanitize this history with words, statements or empty promises.



School boards and trustees want to see children in schools in Indigenous communities have the same opportunities and the same level of resources as children in Ontario's publicly funded schools. If and when Indigenous children make a transition from their community school to a provincial school, we want that transition to be as easy as possible for them. It is not at all easy to leave your community and travel to a school full of people you have never met. It is all the more difficult if the children in that new school have had far greater advantages in their education and have had access to resources that you never had.

Federally funded schools in Indigenous communities are seriously underfunded and are starved for the kinds of resources that are common in the provincial publicly funded school system. An effective school is much more than the teachers and students in a classroom. An effective school is housed in a building that is safe, sound and welcoming. An effective school has a library and a gym; it has computers and extra-curricular activities; it has teachers who are supported by curriculum leaders and who get regular professional development; it has special education services; it has regular maintenance and information systems that support it every day and help it to run well for the benefit of children. The funding of schools in Indigenous communities does not provide for all of these things and the children suffer for it.

Questions for Candidates:

- How would you and your party work collaboratively with Indigenous peoples in Canada toward the full and effective implementation of the Calls to Action of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?
- How will you and your political party work to secure federal funding commitments that will ensure equitable funding and equity of opportunity for education in Indigenous communities?
- How will you and your political party work with Indigenous leaders, as well as provincial Ministries of Education, to ensure that Indigenous children have every opportunity to attain an education comparable to children in the rest of Canada?

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, & INCLUSION – SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS

Background information:

Ontario's English public school boards pride themselves on providing a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment that empowers all of our students to thrive no matter what their background or circumstances. To ensure that they are meeting this standard, school boards across the province are engaged in a wide variety of anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Given the national prominence of issues like anti-black racism and Canada's tragic history and ongoing legacy of residential schools (among others), the federal government should be seeking to support these initiatives in a variety of ways – be it through funding, policies, or public statements.

School boards would like to bring to your attention one specific concern where we can and should do more for school-age children and their families. Given the recent unfortunate events in Afghanistan, we know that our schools we soon be welcoming an increased number of refugees.

At present, a large number of refugee children who attend school in Canada are ineligible to receive support services provided by federally funded settlement workers. Since 2014, the children of temporary residents, refugee claimants (yet to be processed), and immigrant parents (yet to become Canadian citizens) are ineligible to receive such services. While school boards throughout the country are providing the best services possible to these students within limited funds and without access to federal support, some of the neediest children in schools across our country do not receive the level of services they need to be successful, both at school and in the community. Certainly, this gap in service is a significant hindrance on the educational success of these children, as well as their families.



Refugee children attend publicly funded schools and their needs most often extend far beyond what is typically found in the education funding envelope. Yet, their needs have a direct impact on their achievement and success. School boards must be able to ensure they have the capacity to provide the services that new families need to settle and integrate successfully into life in Canada.

The evidence has shown that settlement programs and services at the school level have continuously benefitted families and made a measurable difference to students and their adjustment to school in Canada. When services are cut, the casualties are the families who chose Canada as their new home.

Questions for Candidates:

- What will you and your party do to support anti-racism, diversity, and inclusion initiatives taking place in our schools, and how will you demonstrate leadership on this issue of national significance?
- Will you and your party commit to a change in federal policy combined with an increase in funding to allow refugee children attending Canadian schools to receive appropriate support from settlement workers?
- What will you and your party put in place to ensure that newcomer families to Canada, and in particular children who are integrating into the school system, have full and timely access to settlement services to support adjustment to life in Canada?

THE ROLE OF DEMOCRATICALLY, LOCALLY ELECTED TRUSTEES

Background information:

Our Association believes that trustees make a significant and direct contribution to the achievement of all students through their leadership in directing the policies and priorities of the local school board that shape a culture of continuous improvement.

Parents expect school boards to protect the quality of education in the classroom and to make decisions that are focused squarely on what is in the best interests of all students and the learning environment. One of the key roles of democratically-elected school boards is to be responsive at the local level to the expectations of parents of school-age children and youth.

Trustees are responsible for identifying the needs and priorities of their community and for ensuring these are heard at the board level and considered in the decisions that result in practical and equitable educational opportunities for all students.



School trustees advocate for local communities and represent the “public” in public education. Trustees have a direct and personal relationship with their communities that is unique in political life. Trustees come face-to-face with their constituents every day – on the street, in schools and in the boardroom.

The next Municipal and School Board Elections will be held on Monday, October 24, 2022, and there will be a focus on encouraging a more diverse group of individuals to consider becoming a trustee candidate and to increase overall voter turnout for municipal and school board elections.

OPSBA also recognizes the important role of appointed Indigenous Trustees, Student Trustees and the Trustees who serve on our School Authorities and Children Treatment Centres. They bring a much-needed voice to the students and families they serve.

Questions for Candidates:

- How will you and your party support public school boards and the role of elected trustees?
- How can the federal government support the Canadian Schools Boards Association (CSBA) and individual provincial associations in this advocacy?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

- What distinguishes your party's platform from those of the other parties?
- What is the most important plank in your party's platform?
- How would your party increase student achievement and improve the learning environment?
- What will your party do to ensure that ministries and community agencies work together in an integrated way to help children and youth and their families get timely access to community based services for mental health issues when they need these services?
- Health and Physical Education is seen as a cornerstone to supporting healthy, active living for children and youth. How does your party's platform address this important issue?
- Trustees and MPs are both elected officials. How will you work with your local public school board trustees to ensure you have an open channel for communications and kept well-informed of education-related issues?



ELECTION WEBSITES

Elections Canada
<https://www.elections.ca>

Green Party of Canada
<https://www.greenparty.ca/en>

New Democratic Party of Canada
<https://www.ndp.ca/>

Liberal Party of Canada
<https://www.liberal.ca/>

Conservative Party of Canada
<https://www.conservative.ca/>



STUDENT VOTE

Canada



Student Vote is an authentic learning program that provides students with the opportunity to experience the voting process firsthand and practice the habits of active and informed citizenship.



REGISTER YOUR SCHOOL

The program is open to all schools and there is no cost to participate. Schools may offer Student Vote to a single class or engage the entire student body in the program.



RECEIVE MATERIALS

Registered schools are supplied with election materials and learning resources, including lesson plans, slides, animated explainers and Q&A videos with the federal party leaders. The resources are targeted at Grades 4 to 12.



ENGAGE WITH THE CAMPAIGN

The activities are intended to inform students about government and the electoral process, encourage research into the parties, candidates and issues, and foster discussion among students and their families. Learning pathways cover key topics over two, four, or more lessons.



STUDENT VOTE DAY

Students vote for the official election candidates running in their school's electoral district. The results are shared publicly and with the media after the close of the official polls.

More than 7,000 schools are registered to participate throughout the country.

Schools can register at: www.studentvote.ca/canada

Twitter: [@CIVIX_Canada](https://twitter.com/CIVIX_Canada) and [@studentvote](https://twitter.com/studentvote)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat (and whatever else is out there!) – Some trustees may not use any of these tools themselves, but no one can deny their potential communicative powers, both positive and negative. They offer the capacity to have an informative and interesting Twitter debate with fellow influencers, discuss local issues directly with constituents on Facebook, or participate in a YouTube video campaign.

While printed school newsletters with messages from local trustees are still being used in some regions, the fact that they can never be as current or as quickly dispatched as an online publication or tweet makes them less popular. Twitter, TikTok, classroom and school blogs, websites and Facebook pages are changing the way families get news from their local community schools, teachers and elected officials. Trustees across Canada are turning to social media to reach their constituents and build support for issues affecting students, staff and local communities.

Consider using a social media platform to communicate with communities regarding your activities related to the 2021 Federal Election.

Hashtags you'll want to use to in your posts include #elxn44 and #cdnpoli.

**The above section has been adapted from [OPSBA's Guide to Good Governance, 2018-2022](#).*





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