

Policy Backgrounder: Restoring the promise of public education in Ontario

Ontarians believe deeply in our public education and the equality of opportunity it provides. But the status quo under Doug Ford is failing our kids, our educators, our apprentices and our university and college students.

Since Doug Ford took over, class sizes are ballooning,¹ per pupil funding has dropped by \$1,200², fewer schools are getting built or repaired even as our population swells,³ and the mental health of our educators is at a crisis point.⁴ Sadly, Ford's failures are pushing more Ontarians to turn to private and independent schools — a choice not available to many low- and middle-income families — because the promise of public education is unravelling. While the vast majority of kids continue in public education, worryingly, enrolment in private and independent schools is rising, and the number of these institutions has exploded in recent years.⁵

¹Tranjan, Ricardo (2019). "The board by board impact of larger class sizes and mandatory e-learning". *Monitor Magazine*. October 30, 2019.

<https://monitormag.ca/articles/the-board-by-board-impact-of-larger-class-sizes-and-mandatory-e-learning/>. Accessed: August 30, 2023.

² Tranjan, Ricardo (2023). "Inflation-adjusted school funding is down \$1,200 per student since the Ford government came to power". *Monitor Magazine*. April 18, 2023.

<https://monitormag.ca/articles/inflation-adjusted-school-funding-is-down-1-200-per-student-since-the-ford-government-came-to-power/>. Accessed: August 30, 2023.

³ Inflation adjusted capital spending is projected to be 14% lower over the next decade compared to 2012-13 to 2021-22, according to the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario. See: Gordon, M. et al. (2022). *Ministry of Education: Spending Plan Review, 2022*. Toronto: FAO.

<https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/2022-education-estimates#program2>

⁴ According to the latest Annual Ontario School Survey, conducted by People for Education, only one third of all school principals agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "My school has the resources necessary to support the mental health and well-being of its staff" (35%). Source: People for Education (2022). *2021-2022 Annual Ontario Survey Data Handbook*. Toronto: P4E.

<https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/2021-2022-annual-ontario-school-survey/>

⁵ Van Pelt, Deani (2022). "Growing independent schools show the value of education pluralism". *The Hub*. May 13, 2022.

<https://thehub.ca/2022-05-13/independent-schools-are-growing-across-canadawhat-can-we-learn-for-education-reform/>. Accessed: August 30, 2023.

And it doesn't stop there. Doug Ford is failing Ontarians — especially students and hard-working educators — when it comes to education at all levels, putting at risk the future of our economy and our wellbeing:

- There is increasing private sector involvement in public education through giveaways to private tutoring firms.⁶
- Low retention rates in the trades — barely half of people who enter apprenticeship programs complete them.
- Our college and university sector is incentivized to go after lucrative international students because the Ford government won't fund them properly, putting immense pressure on housing availability and prices, and leaving international students vulnerable to exploitation, a fact even his own supporters acknowledge.⁷ In Doug Ford's Ontario, colleges can generate more than four times the fees from an international student than a domestic one.

These are all choices.

Doug Ford has allowed this to happen because he's more interested in helping his wealthy buddies with his Greenbelt giveaway than doing the hard work to build an Ontario where we all have a fair shot at success.

A Yasir Naqvi-led government will challenge the status quo and focus on three key planks to fix public education and restore the promise of Ontario:

1. Fix K-12 so that the public system is better than private schools, and parents will no longer feel the need to pay exorbitant fees to educate their kids

Doug Ford and his Conservative government have had public education in their sights since taking power. Their reckless and hap-hazard approach to educating

⁶ Teotonio, Isobel (2022). "Report cards are out. The Ford government says it has a plan to help students catch up. Is turning to the private sector a solution — or part of the problem?" *Toronto Star*. November 13, 2022.

https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/report-cards-are-out-the-ford-government-says-it-has-a-plan-to-help-students/article_4099c94e-3ea9-5ba9-a18e-3e60f69bd17c.amp.html. Accessed: August 30, 2023.

⁷ Denley, Randall (2023). "Time for Ford to act on Ontario's reliance on international students for post-secondary funding." *National Post*. August 24, 2023.

<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/ontario-international-students-post-secondary-funding>. Accessed: August 30, 2023.

Ontario children has led to chaos in our schools – constant threats of labour unrest⁸, unprecedented levels of violence in our classrooms⁹, and fewer teachers instructing students at all levels¹⁰. They have fought with teachers, ECEs and support workers instead of providing the tools they need to help our kids thrive.

Yasir Naqvi will restore confidence in our public education system, work instead of against with educators to improve the system, and remove the burden of paying for expensive private schools from families who feel they have no choice. He will **start by introducing hard caps in class sizes and enforce these caps with strict compliance measures** and do away with the toothless class size guidelines we see under Ford’s watch.

With Yasir as premier, will create hard classroom caps of:

Grade	Students	ECE or Special Educator
Junior & Senior Kindergarten	<15	At least one
Grade 1 to 8	<20	At least one
Grade 9 to 12	<25	Special Educators as required

Yasir will also commit to an ECE or a Special Educator in every classroom up to Grade 8, depending on the needs of the students.

Students cannot be expected to perform to their top potential when their schools are crumbling around them. This government is sending our kids to school this September with an embarrassing capital repair deficit of over \$16.8 billion.¹¹ As Premier, Yasir will address this backlog and **bring all our schools to a proper state of repair by the end of his first four years in government.** He will also address the realities of school in the twenty-first century by bringing **proper high-speed internet and air conditioning to every school in Ontario.**

⁸ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-etfo-1.6950647>

⁹ <https://www.etfo.ca/news-publications/media-releases/etfo-member-survey-shows-violence-pervasive-in-schools>

¹⁰ <https://globalnews.ca/news/5954159/ontario-class-size-changes-fewer-teachers-five-years-fao/>.

¹¹ <https://fixourschools.ca/15-billion-repair-backlog/>

As Premier, Yasir will use the power of the school curriculum to teach the students of today to be builders of tomorrow. He will **reform the curriculum to bring hands-on, real-life skills into the classroom**. These changes include:

- **Starting Civics education in Grade 1** and including Civics in every grade through to the end of high school
- **Introducing real financial literacy instruction** in schools to teach students about money management, budgeting, and the importance of saving
- **Including coding throughout the K-12 cycle**, so students are continuously learning the latest digital skills they need
- **Bringing back home economics and shop classes**, so all students learn the fundamental skills they need to be independent
- **An increased focus on experiential learning and counselling** so that students have a better sense of what potential career paths actually entail, with a focus on local labour market needs

Curriculum must be developed by education experts, based on most recent research on pedagogy. It also requires sound input from parents, students, teachers and educators. Yasir will create a robust system that ensures that all these voices are heard and decisions reached that will best position our children for the challenges of the future.

Nor will Yasir stand for Conservatives playing dangerous dog-whistle politics with our children and our schools. Nothing is more important than the safety and wellness of our children. Yasir will always strive for safe and inclusive schools, that protect human rights, including race, religion, ability, gender identity, expression and sexual orientation. He will take the politics out of education policy and curriculum development and bring experts, educators, parents and students together.

- 2. Make postsecondary tuition free for those with a family income under \$90,000, cap international student tuition fees, and reinvest in our colleges and universities**

Ontario's postsecondary education system is under incredible stress due to the cuts and chronic underfunding of the Doug Ford government. While post-secondary enrollment has grown by almost 100,00 students in the last five years, operating grants and student financial assistance have not budged since Doug Ford arrived in office.¹² This conservative government has spent its time on the postsecondary education file cutting grant programs that make college or university affordable for working- and middle-income families, while simultaneously limiting the ability of schools themselves to pay for the high-quality education that Ontarians expect.¹³ This is an unacceptable status quo; it puts Ontario's future in jeopardy and places our colleges and universities at a major disadvantage in the global race for talent.

A Yasir Naqvi-led Ontario government would do things much differently to unleash the promise and potential of Ontarians. **We will help postsecondary students, especially those from working- and middle-class backgrounds, afford their tuition and living expenses by restoring and improving the former Ontario Liberal government's free tuition plan.** This program will provide grants that **fully cover the cost of tuition to any domestic student whose family makes less than \$90,000 per year.** As family income rises, our plan will cover all of a student's assessed financial need through more generous grants and supplemental interest-free loans. This will continue on a sliding scale until a student's family income reaches the \$200,000 threshold.

In addition, we will improve Ontario's student assistance plan (OSAP) in a variety of ways, with the goal of making postsecondary education – and any loan repayment after school – as affordable as possible. This includes **the elimination of interest on provincial student loans**, changing the OSAP repayment assistance plan to **ensure that monthly loan servicing payments do not reach more than 5 per cent of a graduate's income** and **defers repayment until the graduate earns over \$50,000 per year.** A Yasir Naqvi-led government will also make changes to the OSAP application process to make it easier for students to waive parental contributions if their parents or

¹² [The State of Postsecondary Education in Canada \(2022 Edition\)](#), High Education Strategy Associates. Page 116. Accessed September 1, 2023.

¹³ CityNews Toronto. [Ford government eliminated free tuition for low-income students](#). January 17, 2019.

guardians have chosen not to assist them with the costs of postsecondary education.

For international students, **we will put an end to the obscene and unsustainable year-over-year increases in their costs by capping tuition at its current rate for the next five years.** Following this five-year cap, we will create regulations to ensure that international student tuition does not increase at a rate that outstrips domestic tuition levels. In addition, we will also work with our federal government counterparts to cut red tape around off-campus work and streamline the application system for international students, while simultaneously working to improve the system's overall integrity.

To make colleges and universities whole due to the decrease in revenue from an international tuition cap, a Yasir Naqvi-led government will commit to increasing operating grants for postsecondary institutions for the first time in over ten years.¹⁴

Finally, A Yasir Naqvi-led government will improve the postsecondary education system to truly unlock the potential of Ontario students as they enter the labour market. We will increase funding for undergraduate and graduate research, so that more young scholars can look to research as a sustainable pathway. We will also increase funding for co-op programs and ensure that provincial agencies, boards, and commissions increase their participation as co-op employers. We will also provide increased incentives to co-op employers in clean energy industries as well as in rural and northern parts of the province to encourage Ontario students to settle in all regions and thrive in the jobs of tomorrow.

3. Revamp pathways and access to trades so we can create the workforce of the future

In Ontario, we will need to find almost 120,000 positions in construction by 2033, and if we don't, we are putting our ability to build the housing we desperately

¹⁴ [The State of Postsecondary Education in Canada \(2022 Edition\)](#), High Education Strategy Associates. Page 116. Accessed September 1, 2023.

need at risk¹⁵. Without the right people, no housing plan can be completely effective. And that doesn't include the number of skilled tradespeople we will need to support a 21st century green economy, and to position Ontario as a destination for green investment.

In order to successfully continue growing Ontario's economy, we need to rethink our approach to the skilled trades. A Yasir Naqvi-led government will **begin by positioning the skilled trades as an education-to-employment pathway equivalent to college or university and by building a strong high school-to-trades pipeline.**

We will **focus not just on attracting people to skilled trades, but on supporting them through the process so that they complete their training and become journeypersons.** Currently, the 15 largest Red Seal trades have a 61% completion rate¹⁶. We will increase this by providing better financial supports for apprentices, including looking to shift those supports to up-front financial aid, instead of credits and deductions.

We will also **provide enhanced training to journeypersons who take on apprentices, so that they can improve their ability to pass on their knowledge.** Financial supports to help them improve their ability to teach and a wage top-up for journeypersons who take on apprentices will help ensure that the most experienced tradespeople are encouraged to pass on their knowledge before they retire. 80% of all apprenticeship training occurs on the jobsite, so investing in those doing the teaching just makes sense.

Finally, **we will provide more supports to small businesses so they can take on more apprentices in all trades,** including unregulated trades. We will help them navigate available subsidies, bolster supporting organizations like Support Ontario Youth that help find and screen potential apprentices, and increase mobility for apprentices by taking on the role of signing Registered Training Agreements.

¹⁵ CBC.ca. [Ontario's construction industry faces a severe labour crunch and it seems it's about to get worse.](#) July 5, 2023.

¹⁶ Canadian Apprenticeship Foundation. [Apprentice Demand: A 2021 Labour Market Information Report - Ontario.](#) Accessed August 30, 2023.

A practical plan for Education, Mental Health and Housing

This plan also accompanies Yasir's other policy solutions to [support the mental health](#) of Ontarians and [build more homes](#) across our province. A Yasir Naqvi-led government would invest in on-campus housing for students and hold postsecondary institutions accountable when they are accepting more students than the regional rental market can sustainably absorb. Yasir's plan for universal access for mental health and addictions care will also have incredible benefits for on-campus mental health services, including shorter wait times and more counselors to meet the growing mental health needs of students.