

Ontario's special education crisis: ETFO exposes chronic underfunding, systemic neglect

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Toronto, ON – The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is calling out the Ford government's record of inaction and chronic neglect of special education as it releases a damning new report, [Promises Unfulfilled: Addressing the Special Education Crisis in Ontario](#). The report exposes the dark history, broken policy, and chronic provincial underfunding that has led to limited resources and other systemic barriers that have left Ontario's most vulnerable students without the supports they need to thrive.

“For more than two decades, ETFO has been sounding the alarm about Ontario's broken special education system. Nothing has changed. If anything, it's gotten worse,” says ETFO President Karen Brown. “The Ford government has abandoned students with disabilities, forcing them into an under-resourced system that cannot meet their needs. This is a crisis of their making, and they must take swift action to improve the system by implementing the recommendations outlined in *Promises Unfulfilled*.”

The report, informed by front-line educators and independent research, highlights a range of systemic failures, including a lack of early intervention, increasing school violence due to unmet student needs, the declining availability of specialized educators, barriers to accessing essential programs, and insufficient resources for English language learners with special education needs.

“The Ford government has the audacity to claim it supports public education while systematically stripping away resources,” notes Brown. “Classrooms are overcrowded, school violence is rising, and students with disabilities are being left behind because the Conservatives refuse to provide the funding necessary to support them. Their neglect and disregard are shameful, and our children are paying the price.”

ETFO's report exposes the consequences of years of austerity and policy failure, including the loss of 5,000 classroom educators since 2018 and the recent closures of special education programs across the province. The report outlines 27 recommendations for the Ontario government to finally address these long-standing issues, including increasing special education funding to match student needs, reducing class sizes, hiring additional support staff, ensuring timely access to psychological assessments, and updating the flawed funding formula with current data.

“All children have the right to an education that allows them to reach their full potential. But under the Conservatives, that right is being denied to thousands of students with disabilities. This is an issue of equity, justice, and human dignity that supports the economic and social health of Ontario. The government's refusal to act is unacceptable,” adds Brown.

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ETFO is calling on the Ministry of Education to immediately implement the report's recommendations and take meaningful steps to fix Ontario's broken special education system.

[ETFO](#) represents approximately 83,000 members, including public elementary teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel, and professional support personnel. Visit BuildingBetterSchools.ca.

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