

## ETFO responds to auditor's report on special education

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TORONTO, ON – The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is raising urgent concerns following the release of the Auditor General of Ontario's *Special Report on Special Education Needs*, which confirms that the provincial government has chronically underfunded special education and neglected the needs of students with disabilities.

"This report is another damning indictment of a government that has abandoned its responsibility to Ontario's most vulnerable learners," says ETFO President David Mastin. "After more than a decade of chronic underfunding and policy decisions that have stripped supports out of classrooms, school boards simply cannot meet the needs of children with disabilities. The system isn't just strained; it's fundamentally ableist."

The Special Education Needs report examined whether the Ministry of Education and school boards have adequate procedures to ensure that special education programs and services comply with requirements and meet students' needs. The audit found that many students waited months for specialist assessments, with about one-third waiting over a year to be formally assessed. It also found an absence of standard criteria and guidelines for identifying and supporting students. Sixty per cent of surveyed teachers reported that they received minimal or no training in the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans. Staff absences and vacancies went unfilled by a qualified individual between 49 and 72 per cent of the time. The report further revealed that students with special needs were sometimes sent home, or asked to stay home, without schools formally tracking the number, documentation, or rationale.

Forty-six of Ontario's 72 school boards collectively spent almost \$400 million more than they were funded for special education in 2023-24. This underscores the widening gap between student needs and supports available in Ontario schools.

The auditor's report echoes ETFO's [Promises Unfulfilled: Addressing the Special Education Crisis in Ontario](#) report (2025), which documented the severe and growing gaps in special education funding, staffing, and service delivery, and laid out [27 urgent recommendations](#), including the hiring of specialized staff, reducing wait times, and implementing class size caps. Increasing funding to ensure all children with exceptionalities have access to the full range of special education placements that meet their needs, from full withdrawal to full integration, with accompanying services, programs, and resources, is also essential.

"Ensuring all Ontarians thrive is essential for the economic and social health of the province. That support begins in elementary school. The unfortunate reality is that educators and families continue to be faced with an ableist system that is failing our children on a daily basis," adds Mastin. "Students with disabilities cannot wait any longer. The need is urgent, and the Ford government must act now."

ETFO Federation represents approximately 84,000 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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