

School boards

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Education. In 2024, the Minister of Education brought in Deloitte to investigate the Toronto Catholic District School Board to find efficiencies, and the report is now complete.

The Toronto Catholic District School Board has to submit a school budget by June and has asked to see the Deloitte report numerous times so that they could look at the recommendations, yet the government refuses to give it to them. Instead, they're launching another investigation, paid for by taxpayers, into the school board's financial position.

Minister, my question is simple: Before you launch a new investigation, can you release the first report by Deloitte to the Toronto Catholic District School Board?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the member for the question.

As a matter of fact, I have been speaking with the Toronto Catholic District School Board, and they are actually very anxious and encouraged to work with the investigators in the weeks ahead, so we're going to continue to do that. I will have the basis of the initial report that we've already done. As you know, they have a significant deficit of—I believe it's over \$70 million in that. By the end of the month not only will we have the benefit of the investigator's report, that will be based on some of the work that was done by the team that had already gone in there.

So the member will have to wait until the end of the month, but, as I said, we're working very closely with the Toronto Catholic District School Board. They're excited for the opportunity to work with us, and I'm encouraged by their openness to get to the bottom of their overspending.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for the supplementary.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Minister, I think they'd be excited to see the first report.

It's not just the Toronto Catholic District School Board that has already been audited; the Toronto District School Board has also been audited by Deloitte and the Auditor General. These audits have found, time and time again, that there's no fat left to cut in our school boards. They're cutting into muscle.

If Ontario wants to see improvements in schools—the repair of school buildings, pools to remain open and smaller class sizes—the only solution, the only long-term solution, is to secure more provincial investment.

My question is to the minister: Can this government commit to properly funding our schools so that our kids can succeed in the classroom?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Therein lies the difference between the opposition and this government. Every single year that we have been in office we have increased funding for classroom education across the province of Ontario. We're continuing to do that.

The boards that she's talking about have significant multi-year deficits. We have sent an investigator in to ascertain why these deficits continue. We expected to get multi-year recovery plans from these two boards. They did not provide us with that in a satisfactory fashion, and we're sending an investigation team to tell us whether we should assume greater responsibility—whether the ministry should assume responsibility.

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But as I've said in this House time and time again—and I'm not going to stray from this—I expect the money that we send for classroom education to be spent on classroom education, full stop. I'm not here to fund programs that aren't part of classroom education.

What I want is teachers to have all the resources that they need to properly educate our kids for the jobs of tomorrow. If teachers don't have those resources, then we will not graduate the best students that we can, so I'll make sure that teachers get the resources and boards don't stand in the way.

Labour dispute

MPP Lise Vaugeois: While giving billions of dollars away to employers, WSIB president Jeffery Lang stated, "We're in the strongest financial position in our history," and yet management has forced WSIB workers into a strike position and is demanding concessions.

Will the Minister of Labour instruct WSIB management to stop their anti-worker tactics, get back to the bargaining table and negotiate a fair deal for WSIB workers?

Hon. David Piccini: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I want to first off start by thanking the workers at WSIB: 97% of claims receive a decision in 10 days or less; 88% of workers have returned to work within the three-month window, which is key to giving people a return to work, the dignity of a job. It's the best performance in a decade.

We know that the best deals are done at the table, and that's based off of a system of neutrality, where good-faith negotiations are underscored by a shared commitment to outcomes. As I've said in the past in this place, 98% of deals are done at the table. I'm pleased to say that the WSIB and union are at the table with the support of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, and I look forward to them landing a deal.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I believe they are not at the table. The government claims to have workers back, yet they stand by as management takes big raises and bonuses, while demanding concessions from WSIB's front-line workers. The WSIB needs to hire more staff to make workloads manageable. Workers need wages and benefits that match their responsibilities and keep up with the rising cost of living.

Will the Minister of Labour demand that the WSIB use their so-called surplus to support fair wages and working conditions and get back to the bargaining table with the Ontario Compensation Employees Union?

Hon. David Piccini: You know, Speaker, real progress is made at the table, and both sides are in mediation, supported by the Ontario Labour Relations Board. That's a fact, Speaker.

Since 2023, the WSIB has hired 100 new staff. Their case management team has increased by 5%. The onboarding program and retention is 22 weeks, which really helps with the retention piece.

They're actually at the table today. That's a key fact, and the members opposite should be underscoring the importance of landing a deal at the table—they are at the table—and not the sort of theatre we're seeing. It's completely unhelpful.

Autism treatment

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Right now in Ontario, over 60,000 children are waiting for critical services through the Ontario Autism Program. I'm hearing directly from families and service providers that many are waiting two to four years or even more just to access basic supports.

These are critical therapies during the most crucial stages of a child's development, but children are aging out of the program. Will the Premier commit today to increase funding for the Ontario Autism Program in Thursday's budget so that children can access the services they need without having to be on a years-long wait-list?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the important question.

Madam Speaker, I would just like to remind my honourable colleague: We have been increasing supports in the Ontario Autism Program. When the member's party was in power they provided supports to only 8,000 families across the province, and that was it.

Today, more than 45,000 families are receiving multiple services and supports. That's done because our government has prioritized families. We listened to families. We listened to service providers, our partners, those with lived experience—listened to them and increased the program funding to more than \$720 million, in comparison to the previous government with \$300 million, Madam Speaker. As a result, as I said, more than 45,000 have and continue to receive supports and services.

Unlike the previous government, where the families had access to one program, today they have access to programs immediately when they sign, with access to OAP—and I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: This government took a program that was starting to work for families and blew it up and put families in chaos. Since 2019, that wait-list has tripled.

This government promised to deliver support to every child with autism, but, frankly, the reality is different. I've heard directly from parents who have had to leave their jobs to help their children while they wait in the dark, year after year, with no timeline, no clarity and no hope, Speaker.

Will the Premier admit that the current funding envelope is insufficient, and will he commit today to expand the budget and improve the Ontario Autism Program so children can finally get the help they need when they need it?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Let me make it very clear to all my colleagues in this House—we've said it many, many times: Children and youth are maybe a portion of today's population; they're 100% of our future. We will continue to support them.

Madam Speaker, the Ontario Autism Program—the member talks about a program that was working. Let me remind the member: 75% of families had zero access to supports and services.

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Why? Because they weren't listening to families. They weren't listening to service providers. They weren't listening to partners.

What did we do? We came in. We immediately doubled the funding of the program. We listened to families. We listened to providers. The program that we have in place today that the member doesn't agree with was developed by the autism community. It's the community that put this program together. That's why we are proud of it: because we know parents, families and service providers know best—better than anybody, Madam Speaker.

So we'll continue to work with families, and we'll make sure every single child and youth in this province has the opportunity and the supports to succeed and thrive.

University and college funding

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. Ontario's colleges and universities are a cornerstone of our economy. They train the next generation of workers, innovators and leaders. In a time of global economic uncertainty, we need to take measures to protect this vital sector.

That is why our government has a plan to act. We are investing \$750 million in STEM programs. This funding will give students the skills they need to thrive in high-demand fields. It will help build the workforce of tomorrow—one that drives our economy forward.

Can the minister share how these investments are making our post-secondary institutions stronger and ensuring our students have the skills to compete and succeed—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you to my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora for that important question.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government has been continuously working to strengthen the links between post-secondary education and the evolving needs of Ontario's labour market, because we know that at our colleges and universities, we are building the labour force of tomorrow—a workforce that is cutting-edge, dynamic and ready to drive our economy forward no matter what.

Which is why, as part of our plan to protect Ontario and continue growing our skilled workforce of tomorrow, we're investing \$750 million to support STEM programs at colleges and universities across the province. Through this investment, we are equipping graduates with the skills to thrive in high-demand fields so that when they graduate, they can quickly contribute to the province's economic growth.

Through active collaboration efforts between our government, post-secondary partners and industry, we are providing Ontario students access to critical programs that lead to rewarding, in-demand careers, today and for decades to come.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the minister for that response. Ontario's colleges and universities are at the heart of our plan to build a skilled workforce. They train our workers,

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innovators and leaders we need to keep our economy strong. That's why our government is showing leadership and making historic investments in this sector.

These investments are helping to support cutting-edge and in-demand programs. This includes AI, vehicle manufacturing, medicine and skilled trades.

These programs are building a skilled workforce that can compete globally. They are helping protect Ontario against foreign economic pressures. This will ensure that our students have the right skills for good jobs of the future.

Speaker, can the minister share how this funding will help colleges and universities prepare students for the careers of tomorrow and drive Ontario's economy forward?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Our government's strategic investment of \$750 million will not only support our world-class post-secondary system and workforce, but it will also function as a catalyst to drive Ontario's economy forward for years to come. This critical investment will get students into rewarding careers that address the province's current and future labour market needs, such as AI, vehicle manufacturing, medicine and so much more.

Speaker, we know that we need doctors, we need engineers and we need skilled manufacturers. This investment will fund up to 20,500 seats in those programs in Ontario every single year. This is on top of the \$100 million invested in 2023-24 to support STEM programs at our publicly assisted colleges and universities.

Our government will do whatever it takes to protect Ontario's future, and that work is happening right now in Ontario's colleges and universities across the province as they build the workforce of tomorrow. We will continue to work closely with our post-secondary institutions to ensure that students receive the high-calibre education and training they need to drive our critical industries and economy forward.

Taxation Amendment Act (Promoting Leisure Activities for Youth), 2025

Mr. Blais moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 20, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to provide for a non-refundable tax credit to encourage children's extra-curricular activities

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Does the member wish to explain the bill?

Mr. Stephen Blais: As we continue to come out of the experience with COVID—where children lacked physical activity—and we're dealing with the affordability crisis and challenge to parents being able to put their kids in extracurricular activities and sports, the bill amends the Taxation Act, 2007, to provide for a non-refundable tax credit of up to \$1,000 for residents of Ontario for their children's activities.