

Hansard Thursday, May 8, 2025  
(Education Week, Education Funding, Skills Development)

### **Education Week**

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** It's Education Week here in Ontario. I'd like to begin by thanking everyone who works in schools: the teachers and EAs, who instruct and help our kids every day; principals and vice-principals, for making sure their school is a great place to learn; office administrators, who not only keep the trains running on time but are also a hub of support for so many students and families; custodial staff, who keep the place clean and safe; school bus drivers, who get students to school safely; parent volunteers and other volunteers, who fundraise and contribute greatly to the school community.

In particular, I want to give a shout-out to my sister Stephanie, who has been working in schools for a decade. It's her second career, and she's an educational assistant. I'm very proud of her work with children with exceptional needs, and the love and care she shows them daily.

There's a lot of work left to be done to make our schools a better place to learn. All our kids deserve the best schools, where they will get an opportunity to thrive and succeed.

### **Youth and public service**

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Today, I rise to recognize and give thanks to many exceptional youths in my riding of Richmond Hill. They all showed keen interest in Ontario's democratic process.

Olivia Fang requested an interview with me to learn about the role of an MPP. She wants to understand what it is like to be a politician, why and how I get to be an MPP. I was asked to share the achievements and the satisfaction I have being an MPP.

I also spent time with my legislative page from Richmond Hill, Leah Wong. Leah enjoys her time as a page and is interested to find out more and wants to serve the community as a volunteer in my office.

The day before, I welcomed students from Christ the King Catholic Elementary School to Queen's Park. They also showed a keen interest in public service.

Investing in our youth is our responsibility, to ensure that the next generation is given mentorship, education and opportunity. By investing in our youth, we're investing in a strong democracy and future for all of Ontario.

### **Education funding**

**Mr. John Fraser:** My question is for the Premier.

But first, it's Education Week here in Ontario. I would just like to say, on behalf of my party—and I'm sure everybody here—thank you to all the educators, everybody who is in our schools, helping our kids, keeping them safe, teaching them. We count on you, and, quite frankly, you need to be able to count on us.

When adjusted for inflation, Ontario is spending about \$1,500 less per student than we did in 2018.

So my question to the Premier is, does he really think that spending \$1,500 per student less every year is good for their education?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the Minister of Education.

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**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I appreciate the question.

Obviously, we don't. That's why we've increased funding each and every year to education well beyond what the previous government was spending on education.

Madam Speaker, I agree with the member opposite on one thing: We have some of the best educators in the world. And we have a system that needs to refocus itself on providing maximum resources for our students in the classroom. It is also a system that needs to refocus itself on restoring the respect that was a hallmark of our education system, basically for generations—respect for teachers by students, respect for parents by the system—and ensuring that our teachers felt supported in the classroom. That is what I am insisting on. That is what our Progressive Conservative government is insisting on. More importantly, I think that's what parents and students and educators are insisting on—a system that focuses on students and maximizes results for them.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Supplementary?

**Mr. John Fraser:** With all due respect to the minister across, I've heard repeatedly the government—and not the member this time—saying “historic funding” and, “We spend more money this year than we've ever spent before.” Well, that's literally what every government has done on health care and education since I've been alive.

Don't tell me what you're spending. Tell me what you're doing.

The results show just that—crumbling schools, crowded classrooms, exceptional needs not being met, violence in schools.

Back to the Premier: Does he really think that spending \$1,500 a year less per student is actually going to deliver the results that our families need?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** The member opposite knows that figure is absolutely incorrect. But it doesn't matter to parents. He can get up here and say, “Oh, we're spending this and that.” Do you know what parents care about? It's that when their kids go to school, they're getting the education they deserve; that they're being prepared for the jobs of tomorrow; that we're educating students so they can be prepared to meet all of the challenges of tomorrow. They don't care that you argue with me over \$1,500 here and there. What they want to know is that when they go to school, the teacher will have the resources to properly educate the student and they will feel safe in the classroom.

What parents are telling me is, “Make sure that the boards are maximizing those resources in the classroom.” That is what I'm asking the boards to do—work with me, double down on ensuring a line-by-line approach to funding so that we can ensure that maximum resources go to our teachers so that they can maximize the time that they spend with students, and that parents have the confidence that our public education system is giving their kids all of the help they need to succeed in the future.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Supplementary?

**Mr. John Fraser:** You're giving them less money. That's the point. You're making it harder for them to maximize the dollars, because the dollars are fewer.

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I know what's happening in schools because I talk to parents and educators. I've got educators in my family. And the reality is, in particular, year over year, students with exceptional needs are getting less and less and less. We all know that's happening in our boards.

I respect the member, but I don't respect the premise of what his answer is—really, what you're saying is, "I'm asking them to do more with less." And I don't think that's what we've done in education in Ontario to be successful. So I guess the question is, will you restore that \$1,500?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I'll tell you what I will restore, Madam Speaker: I will restore, in the province of Ontario, a school system that respects our teachers, a school system that respects our students, and a school system that gives our teachers the maximum resources they need in order to give our students the tools to succeed in the jobs of tomorrow.

I am singularly unconcerned with what the member opposite talks about, because what we have right now in our school system is a system where parents don't have the confidence that the system is listening to them. I have a board in Durham region that built an elementary school where all the kids use one washroom. I have parents calling me, writing me and saying, "That is not what we want for our kids. They're afraid to go to the washroom." That is where we lose respect, and that is where people think that the system isn't listening to them.

So that is what I'm going to do. I'm going to double down and make sure that the school system does what it is charged to do: educate our kids—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Question?

### **Subventions destinées à l'éducation / Education funding**

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Le sous-financement chronique en éducation pousse les conseils scolaires francophones de l'Ontario au bord du gouffre. La taille des classes augmente, le soutien aux élèves ayant des besoins particuliers diminue et les enseignants signalent des milieux de travail dangereux et stressants. Les syndicats comme l'AEFO tirent la sonnette d'alarme concernant la montée de violence et l'épuisement professionnel. Ce ne sont pas des cas isolés mais les symptômes d'un système qui est littéralement à bout de souffle.

Si ce gouvernement valorise réellement l'éducation et la dualité linguistique, comment peut-il justifier des décisions budgétaires qui laissent les écoles de langue française lutter pour servir leurs élèves et protéger leur personnel?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the Minister of Education.

**L'hon. Paul Calandra:** Madame la Présidente, comme vous le savez, et comme la députée le sait, nous avons fait beaucoup d'investissements dans le secteur d'éducation. En fait, nous avons fait des investissements historiques dans le système d'éducation.

Mais je suis en accord avec la députée : nous voulons assurer que nos élèves ont les ressources pour « success ». I apologize; I don't want to get the words wrong. We'll want to make sure that our students—francophone, English, Catholic, public and even those who aren't in the system, frankly—have all of the tools that they need to succeed.

What I want to ensure is that our school system respects teachers, respects students and respects parents. It shouldn't matter whether you're in the public system, you're in the Catholic system or if you're a parent who has chosen to not put your kid in one of those systems, you

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should have all of the tools that you need to succeed. We are a rich province, and we will make sure that that happens, not because we say so, but because that's what our kids and parents need and that's what they demand.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Le gouvernement aime se vanter des investissements, qu'il qualifie d'historiques, en éducation, mais lorsqu'on tient compte de l'inflation et de la croissance démographique, surtout dans les régions en pleine expansion, les écoles de langue française accusent un retard qui est important et qui est très préoccupant. Sur papier, les chiffres sont beaux, mais sur le terrain—la réalité—ce sont des portatives surpeuplées et un manque de ressources essentielles.

L'éducation en français, ce n'est pas seulement l'instruction académique, c'est la préservation de la culture et de l'identité d'un peuple.

Quand ce gouvernement va-t-il reconnaître les besoins distincts du système d'éducation de langue française et offrir un financement ciblé et durable qui reflète cette réalité?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Quite frankly, I'm actually very proud of our French-language school boards and the public boards and what they're doing to encourage students to take up the French language.

In York region, our French-language schools are exploding at the seams—and she's absolutely right—because so many parents want to send their kids there. I was just at école Pape-François on Friday. I was touring that school. It is a wonderful French-language school. The French-language board runs it. They are doing incredible work at that school. I'm going to ensure, working, of course, with the Minister of Francophone Affairs and the other members—the Minister of Labour would be very happy to hear that at that school, the work that they're doing on the trades was absolutely groundbreaking. I went and visited the class, and there were young grade 9 women learning how to use the different machines. The coding class was full with both girls and boys. It was an exciting time.

We're going to double down and make sure that our kids in French-language schools or in any school have the resources they need to succeed, full stop.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Final supplementary.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** A key driver of strain is this government's failure to invest sufficiently in the pipeline of French-language educators—not just in our francophone schools, but across the whole system. English boards are turning away thousands of students from French immersion due to a lack of qualified teachers. This shortage pressures the broader French-language sector and weakens Ontario's francophone landscape.

French immersion isn't a luxury. It's a bridge between communities and a tool for building a bilingual workforce.

Will this government address the root causes of this systemic pressure by committing to train more French-language educators and by legislating equitable access to French immersion programs across Ontario?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the Minister of Francophone Affairs.

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**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Notre gouvernement et, je pense, tous les députés ici sont très fiers du bilan en matière de francophonie et de l'éducation francophone et bilingue ici en Ontario. Notre gouvernement a fait des efforts soutenus pendant les sept dernières années pour assurer que nous adressons le problème de la pénurie des enseignants francophones, qui malheureusement n'est pas simplement un problème ici en Ontario, mais est un problème à travers le pays.

C'est pourquoi, en tant que ministre des Affaires francophones, je représente la francophonie ontarienne directement au gouvernement fédéral, et je parle constamment du besoin d'adresser, en partenariat avec les autres provinces, les territoires et le gouvernement fédéral, cette pénurie des enseignants francophones. Madame la Présidente, c'est pourquoi je travaille avec le ministère des Collèges et Universités, pour augmenter l'offre de programmation en enseignement francophone pour que nous puissions adresser ce problème directement ici en Ontario.

### **Skills development**

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** My question is to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Workers in Ontario want to know that their jobs are secure in the face of growing economic threats. They want to know that they have the skills to compete in a changing world. Global pressures, including from the US and other nations, are a real concern.

That is why our government is focused on making sure our workers have the skills they need to succeed. With the Skills Development Fund, we're closing the gap between the jobs that are open and the people looking to fill them.

Can the minister explain how this fund is helping to protect Ontario workers and secure their futures in a competitive global economy?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I appreciate his leadership in Brampton. He's always there at every event, advancing the interests of the next generation, giving them opportunity, whether it's from the medical school, right down to the trades and everything in between. It's incredible.

The Skills Development Fund that Premier Ford and I announced at the Skills Ontario Competition—it was remarkable to see thousands of students in Canada's largest skilled trades competition. We announced another billion dollars in the Skills Development Fund.

I want to illustrate a success story that I think we can all get behind. Abdullah from Local 44 was a Hammer Heads youth graduate who won the sprinkler fitter competition—proudly from the GTHA. He was a graduate of Hammer Heads, a program supported by the Skills Development Fund.

We're changing lives. I'm proud of the craftsmanship exhibited by these remarkable youth.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The member from Brampton West.

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** Thank you to the minister for the response.

Ontario's economy is built on the skills and hard work of our people.

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It is clear that the Skills Development Fund is not just about numbers; it's about real people and real jobs. From training auto workers in Windsor to supporting bilingual trades in Ottawa, to providing opportunities for communities in the north, this fund is making a difference. It's about helping workers in every corner of our province get the skills they need for good, high-paying jobs.

Can the minister share more about how this approach is helping local workers succeed and support their families while building Ontario's future?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Again, I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

Let's look at what an impact the Skills Development Fund is having. We've seen both major parties in the last federal election campaign on similar funds, recognizing the impact the SDF is having. It has trained over half a million workers here in Ontario—better training, better jobs with bigger paycheques.

Let's do a little trip around the north—I know the finance minister loves to do that in the budget—2,300 workers. In the north, we're delivering for Indigenous and remote communities with a \$17-million investment benefiting over additional 3,600 workers: Agnico Eagle Mines; Kiwetinohk Red Seal project; Northern Centre for Advanced Technology, or NORCAT; Science North—a new facility, \$3.2 million; the sheet metal workers' union; SMART; Local 397—a new facility. I visited the team up there. It's going to change lives.

The International Association of Bridge Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers, Local 759, Adam MacGillivray and the team up in Thunder Bay—I saw the new concrete pad. They're going to train a next generation of ironworkers.

Speaker, it's changing lives—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Question?

### **School boards**

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** My question is to the Minister of Education.

The TDSB is being forced to make major cuts to schools because of chronic underfunding by this government. The board is looking at closing nearly half of its swimming pools, axing music programs, and there are huge funding gaps for special education and mental health.

Can this government address our schools' funding shortfall so we can see improvements in the classroom in the coming school year?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I appreciate the question.

As I've said multiple times, yes, we are sending an investigation team in there to look at how the TDSB spends money, to ensure that maximum resources are being spent in the classrooms. But again, as I said yesterday, I simply will not allow pools to be closed, and I will not allow teachers to be fired.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The member for University–Rosedale.

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**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Back to the education minister: If this government wants to find the true culprit who's harming our kids' education, he doesn't need to do an investigation; he needs to look in the mirror.

Since the Conservatives came to power, our schools have seen funding cut by \$1,500 per student. We have overcrowded classrooms. We have aging schools in urgent need of repair. Schools are losing vice-principals and principals, and kids with special needs are falling behind.

Parents do not want this government to play political blame games with the school board. They want their kids to have a good public school education, and that requires investment.

My question to the minister is, can this government commit to reinvesting the \$1,500 more per student into our education system so our kids can see improvements in the classroom?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Madam Speaker, I don't know why it is that the NDP and the Toronto District School Board are so afraid of an audit happening of where money is being spent in the school board. I don't understand why they're so afraid, because, presumably, their numbers are so firm that the investigation will find that what they've been talking about is accurate. That could be the result of this.

I suspect what will be found is that money is not being put into the classroom for classroom education as it should be; I will ensure, through this process, that it is—because that is the ultimate goal of an education system: to maximize resources that are going for students and maximize the resources that teachers have, to give our students the ultimate opportunity to succeed.

I don't understand why the opposition is so supportive of a school board that has run multi-year deficits. But ultimately, if an investigation finds that the TDSB is correct, then they'll have their answer—if they don't, then I will ensure that the resources being misplaced are being put back into the classroom where they belong.

### **Kids' Online Safety and Privacy Month Act, 2025**

Madame Collard moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 15, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Kids' Online Safety and Privacy Month

**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?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Briefly—thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Internet is central to daily life in Ontario, offering many benefits, but also serious risks for children, including cyberbullying, online exploitation and trafficking. Protecting children online requires actions from parents, educators and policy-makers. Education and awareness are key. Parents need support to supervise online activity, and children must learn how to stay safe. Proclaiming October as Kids' Online Safety and Privacy Month would raise awareness, promote education and emphasize the shared responsibility of families and communities to ensure children's online safety.