

### **Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025**

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 27, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to child, youth and family services, education, and colleges and universities

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Good morning, Madam Speaker. Je vais reprendre la parole aujourd'hui pour exprimer ma réelle préoccupation à l'égard du projet de loi 33. En fait, j'avais amorcé mon intervention hier, et je souhaite maintenant poursuivre en français, puisque bon nombre de mes préoccupations concernent directement le système d'éducation francophone, un système qui est déjà fragilisé par des défis majeurs que le gouvernement semble peu pressé de résoudre. Alors, l'entièreté de mes notes de débat aujourd'hui seront en français.

Lorsque le ministre a présenté ce projet de loi au printemps, j'avoue avoir cru—naïvement, peut-être—qu'il allait enfin proposer de vraies solutions aux problèmes criants de notre système d'éducation. Après tout, avec un titre comme « loi sur le soutien aux enfants et aux élèves », on avait le droit d'espérer pour des ressources accrues en santé mentale pour les élèves, du soutien pour les enfants ayant des besoins particuliers ou encore un plan d'action clair pour s'attaquer à la grave pénurie d'enseignants qui prend des proportions inquiétantes et affecte directement la qualité de l'enseignement dans nos écoles.

J'espérais aussi voir des engagements fermes en matière d'infrastructure scolaire, comme la modernisation de nos écoles vieillissantes, la construction de nouvelles écoles là où les besoins explosent, notamment dans le réseau francophone. Parce que la réalité, madame la Présidente, c'est que la demande pour des écoles de langue française dépasse largement l'offre actuelle. On estime, en fait, qu'il faudrait au moins 80 nouvelles écoles francophones en Ontario pour répondre à la croissance de la population et assurer à chaque élève le droit fondamental à l'éducation dans sa langue. Malheureusement, le projet de loi présenté par le ministre de l'Éducation ne fait, en fait, rien de tout ça : aucune mesure concrète pour soutenir nos élèves, aucun plan pour renforcer nos écoles, aucune vision pour l'avenir de l'éducation francophone.

Pire encore, plutôt que de s'attaquer aux véritables besoins de nos écoles, le ministre choisit d'élargir ses pouvoirs. Le projet de loi 33 ne parle pas de soutien aux élèves; il parle de contrôle accru du ministère sur les conseils scolaires. On y trouve des mesures de centralisation qui éloignent la prise de décision des communautés locales et qui risquent d'affaiblir encore davantage la voix des parents, des enseignants et des francophones dans la gouvernance scolaire.

Ce que le gouvernement appelle « responsabilisation », c'est en réalité une recentralisation du pouvoir entre les mains du ministre. Et cela est particulièrement inquiétant pour les conseils scolaires francophones, qui ont été créés justement pour garantir une gestion par et pour les francophones, conformément à nos droits constitutionnels. Chaque fois que le ministère s'arroge un nouveau pouvoir, c'est un recul pour l'autonomie scolaire francophone et pour la capacité de nos communautés à décider de leurs priorités éducatives.

Et pendant que le ministre se dote de nouveaux leviers administratifs, les problèmes réels demeurent entiers : des écoles surpeuplées, des classes combinées, le manque d'appui en

santé mentale, les retards dans la construction d'écoles francophones et un personnel enseignant qui est à bout de souffle. Nos élèves méritent mieux que des réformes bureaucratiques qui ne règlent rien sur le terrain. Le projet de loi rate sa cible. Il ne soutient pas les enfants ni les élèves : il soutient le pouvoir du ministre. Et cela n'aidera ni nos enseignants, ni nos familles, ni surtout nos élèves à réussir.

Monsieur le Président, le projet de loi 33 introduit en effet des changements majeurs dans trois domaines essentiels, soit l'éducation, la protection de l'enfance et le postsecondaire. Et bien qu'en apparence ces changements visent à renforcer la transparence et la reddition de comptes, ils traduisent en réalité une tendance inquiétante vers la centralisation excessive du pouvoir au sein du ministère, qui est au détriment de nos communautés locales.

Commençons par le secteur de l'éducation. Le projet de loi accorde au ministre de nouveaux pouvoirs qui lui permettent de procéder à des examens financiers, d'intervenir directement dans les affaires internes des conseils scolaires et même de nommer des conseillers spéciaux qui pourraient contourner les décisions des conseils élus. C'est une ingérence directe dans la gouvernance scolaire locale. Les conseils scolaires, rappelons-le, sont des instances démocratiques élues qui existent pour refléter les réalités de leurs communautés, qu'elles soient urbaines, rurales, francophones ou anglophones. Les remplacer ou les neutraliser par des directives ministérielles, c'est affaiblir la voix des parents et des éducateurs sur le terrain.

Pour les conseils scolaires francophones, cette dérive est particulièrement préoccupante. Nos conseils servent des populations plus petites, souvent réparties sur de vastes territoires, et doivent composer avec des défis linguistiques et culturels qui sont uniques. Leur autonomie n'est pas un privilège : c'est une garantie constitutionnelle qui a été reconnue par la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés et qui a été confirmée de nombreuses fois par les tribunaux. Toute mesure qui permet au ministre d'imposer des décisions uniformes à l'ensemble des conseils risque de nier la spécificité du système francophone et de compromettre sa mission de protéger et de promouvoir la langue et la culture françaises en Ontario.

Le deuxième volet touche la protection de l'enfance. Ici encore, le gouvernement justifie ses nouvelles prérogatives par la nécessité d'assurer la reddition de comptes et la bonne utilisation des fonds publics. Mais dans les faits, il s'arroge le pouvoir de nommer des superviseurs, de retenir le financement et d'imposer des directives aux sociétés d'aide à l'enfance. Or, beaucoup d'entre elles—notamment celles qui servent des communautés autochtones, racialisées ou francophones—sont déjà confrontées à des défis structurels profonds : un manque de ressources, une surcharge des dossiers, difficultés dans le recrutement. Le contrôle accru du ministère, sans investissement correspondant dans les services de prévention et de soutien communautaire, ne fera qu'alourdir la bureaucratie et éloigner encore davantage les décisions des enfants et des familles qu'elles concernent.

Enfin, le troisième volet du projet de loi concerne l'enseignement postsecondaire. Le gouvernement veut imposer que les admissions reposent uniquement sur le mérite. Mais qu'est-ce qu'on entend par mérite? Si le mérite est défini uniquement selon les notes ou les résultats standardisés, alors on ferme la porte à ceux et celles qui n'ont pas eu les mêmes chances d'accès ou les mêmes outils de réussite. Les programmes d'accès, de transition ou de soutien aux groupes sous-représentés—qu'ils soient francophones, autochtones, issus de milieux ruraux ou à faible revenu—risquent d'être remis en question, voire supprimés. Et en donnant au Cabinet le pouvoir d'imposer des directives aux universités et collèges, le

gouvernement menace l'autonomie institutionnelle et la liberté académique qui sont au coeur de la mission éducative.

Monsieur le Président, sous couvert de transparence, ce projet de loi concentre le pouvoir entre les mains du ministre et affaiblit les structures locales, démocratiques et représentatives. C'est une pente dangereuse qui menace la diversité du système ontarien, y compris la vitalité du réseau francophone. Le projet de loi 33 s'inscrit dans une tendance plus large que nous observons depuis plusieurs années, soit la réduction graduelle de la démocratie scolaire en Ontario. Les conseils scolaires, qui devraient être des espaces de représentation et de débat public, voient leur rôle constamment diminué au profit de décisions centralisées à Queen's Park.

Or, il ne faut pas oublier pourquoi ces conseils existent. Ils sont nés de la conviction que les communautés doivent pouvoir participer directement aux décisions qui touchent leurs enfants : les programmes offerts, les services de soutien, les infrastructures scolaires. Quand le ministre se donne le pouvoir d'intervenir, et ça, sans consultation, de nommer des conseillers spéciaux ou de réviser de façon unilatérale les finances d'un conseil, il envoie un message clair : il ne fait pas confiance aux élus locaux, ni aux communautés qu'ils représentent.

Cette concentration du pouvoir est d'autant plus préoccupante pour les conseils scolaires francophones. Nos conseils ont été conquis de haute lutte par la communauté franco-ontarienne, à la suite de décennies de revendications et de batailles juridiques. Ils incarnent un principe fondamental : celui du contrôle, par et pour les francophones, de leur système d'éducation. C'est une question de droits linguistiques, mais aussi une question de survie culturelle.

Monsieur le Président, la réalité, c'est que les écoles francophones font face à des défis croissants. On a une pénurie aigüe d'enseignants francophones, des manques criants en infrastructures—parce que plusieurs régions attendent encore la construction d'écoles promises depuis des années—et des ressources limitées pour soutenir les élèves ayant des besoins particuliers ou issus de l'immigration récente.

Les conseils scolaires francophones travaillent avec acharnement pour offrir un environnement où la langue, la culture et l'identité francophones peuvent s'épanouir. Mais sans moyens adéquats et sans autonomie réelle, leur mission devient de plus en plus difficile à remplir.

Et maintenant, avec le projet de loi 33, le ministre veut se donner le droit d'intervenir dans leurs affaires internes sans garantie de consultation et sans respect du principe de gouvernance distincte. C'est un recul inacceptable. Ce projet de loi risque d'affaiblir l'un des piliers les plus importants de la vitalité francophone en Ontario.

Si le gouvernement veut réellement soutenir les enfants et les élèves, il doit commencer par écouter ceux qui les accompagnent au quotidien, soit les enseignants, les directions d'école, les conseils scolaires et, bien sûr, les parents. Ce n'est pas en retirant le pouvoir à ces acteurs qu'on améliorera l'éducation, mais en leur donnant les moyens et la confiance nécessaire pour agir.

Monsieur le Président, le projet de loi 33 ne se limite pas à l'éducation. Il s'étend aussi à un autre domaine tout aussi sensible, soit la protection de l'enfance. Là encore, le gouvernement

prétend vouloir renforcer la reddition de comptes et la transparence, mais ce qu'il propose en réalité, c'est une centralisation sans précédent du pouvoir ministériel.

Selon ce projet de loi, le ministre pourrait désormais intervenir directement dans les sociétés d'aide à l'enfance, nommer des superviseurs et même retenir ou rediriger des fonds publics à sa discrétion. Or, ces organismes sont souvent déjà fragilisés par un sous-financement chronique et par des demandes de plus en plus complexes : crises de santé mentale chez les jeunes, pénurie de familles d'accueil, manque de ressources spécialisées—je pourrais continuer. Les défis sont immenses. Plutôt que de leur donner plus de moyens pour prévenir les situations de crise, on leur impose plus de surveillance et de contrôles administratifs. C'est une logique punitive plutôt qu'une approche de soutien.

Et dans le cas des communautés francophones, cette centralisation est particulièrement inquiétante. Les services en français dans le domaine de la protection de l'enfance sont déjà trop rares et trop fragiles. Les sociétés d'aide à l'enfance francophones ou bilingues—comme celle d'Ottawa ou dans le Nord—peinent à recruter du personnel francophone qualifié et à offrir des services culturellement adaptés. Si le ministre s'arroge le droit d'intervenir sans égard à ces réalités, c'est toute la spécificité du service en français qui risque de s'effriter.

Monsieur le Président, la protection de l'enfance exige de la confiance, de la collaboration et de la proximité avec les familles et les communautés. Une gouvernance trop centralisée risque d'imposer des décisions uniformes et déconnectées des besoins locaux, surtout dans les régions rurales ou minoritaires. On ne protège pas mieux les enfants en éloignant la prise de décision de ceux qui les connaissent et les accompagnent au quotidien.

Si le gouvernement veut vraiment améliorer le système, il doit investir dans la prévention, renforcer les capacités locales et soutenir les travailleurs de première ligne—pas les surveiller davantage depuis Toronto.

Le troisième volet du projet de loi 33 touche au secteur postsecondaire, et là encore, le gouvernement prétend agir au nom de la transparence et de l'équité. On y introduit notamment l'idée que les admissions doivent être fondées sur le mérite et que le Cabinet pourrait désormais imposer des directives aux collèges et universités sur leurs politiques internes.

Mais, il faut le dire clairement, la notion de mérite n'est pas neutre. Dans les faits, elle tend souvent à favoriser celles et ceux qui ont déjà les meilleures conditions de départ : les étudiants qui ont eu accès à de meilleures écoles, à du soutien privé, à des ressources familiales. Le mérite, sans contexte, devient un filtre qui reproduit les inégalités plutôt qu'il ne les corrige.

Nos établissements postsecondaires ont développé, au fil des années, des programmes d'accès et d'équité pour corriger justement ces désavantages : programmes passerelles pour les étudiants issus de milieux défavorisés, initiatives pour les jeunes autochtones, pour les étudiants francophones en milieu minoritaire ou pour ceux en situation de handicap. Ces programmes visent à assurer une véritable égalité des chances, et non une égalité de façade.

Avec ce projet de loi, le gouvernement risque de délégitimer ou de restreindre ces initiatives au nom d'une définition étroite du mérite. Ce serait un recul majeur pour la diversité et l'inclusion dans nos universités et nos collèges.

Et pour le réseau postsecondaire francophone déjà fragile, les conséquences pourraient être encore plus graves. On le sait, l'offre postsecondaire en français en Ontario reste insuffisante et

menacée. Les étudiants francophones sont souvent contraints de poursuivre leurs études en anglais faute de programmes disponibles près de chez eux, ce qui accélère l'assimilation linguistique.

Plutôt que d'accorder au Cabinet plus de pouvoir pour imposer des directives uniformes, le gouvernement devrait renforcer l'autonomie des établissements francophones comme l'Université de Hearst ou l'Université de l'Ontario français, et leur garantir un financement stable et prévisible. Car la survie du postsecondaire en français, c'est aussi la survie de notre culture et de notre communauté.

Le projet de loi 33 prétend vouloir soutenir les enfants et les élèves. Mais à y regarder de plus près, ce qu'il soutient surtout, c'est la centralisation du pouvoir entre les mains du ministre, au détriment de la démocratie locale, de l'autonomie des conseils scolaires et de la vitalité de nos institutions francophones.

Ce dont nos écoles ont besoin, ce n'est pas une surveillance accrue depuis Queen's Park, mais de ressources, de respect et de confiance.

En matière de protection de l'enfance, il en va de même. La supervision ne peut pas remplacer la prévention. Les sociétés d'aide à l'enfance ont besoin de soutien réel pour répondre aux réalités des communautés autochtones, racialisées et francophones, et non d'un contrôle bureaucratique qui alourdit leur travail.

Et pour le postsecondaire, il faut redonner un nouveau souffle à nos établissements, particulièrement les établissements francophones, en leur permettant de croître, d'innover et d'assurer un accès équitable à la formation en français partout en Ontario. Parce que le mérite sans égalité d'accès, ce n'est qu'un mirage.

Monsieur le Président, ce projet de loi fait partie d'une tendance inquiétante : celle d'un gouvernement qui concentre le pouvoir, qui réduit les voix locales et qui prétend tout savoir mieux que les gens qui sont sur le terrain. Mais l'éducation, la protection des enfants et la vitalité de nos communautés ne peuvent pas se gérer à distance. Elles se construisent avec les communautés, pas contre elles.

C'est pourquoi je ne peux pas appuyer le projet de loi 33 dans sa forme actuelle. Je demande au gouvernement de revoir sa copie, de consulter sincèrement les partenaires du milieu et d'intégrer des garanties claires pour protéger la gouvernance francophone, l'autonomie locale et la transparence réelle.

Soutenir les enfants et les élèves, c'est leur donner les outils pour réussir, pas les enfermer dans un système centralisé où les décisions se prennent loin d'eux. C'est leur offrir une éducation de qualité dans la langue de leur choix et un avenir où chaque voix compte.

Alors, je veux vous remercier pour votre écoute, monsieur le Président. Je vais céder la parole à mon collègue d'Ottawa-Sud. Merci.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Ottawa South.

**Mr. John Fraser:** Merci, monsieur le President. I beg your indulgence just for a second. I just want to say that there's a terrible storm in the Caribbean right now that is going to be affecting a lot of people, particularly in Jamaica but not just Jamaica. We have a lot of families in our ridings who have family back there, so think about them, say a prayer if you pray, and I think as

individuals and as a government we have to be ready, because what it looks like is the destruction that's possible down there is going to be terrible. I just wanted to say that because I know I have a lot of families in my community who are worried, who are concerned—we all do—and I know that we're all sharing our concern with them.

I'd like to start talking about Bill 33 by talking about a couple of things in the bill that I don't find particularly offensive. Often, what isn't in bills—what we talk about isn't the important stuff, so I'm going to start with schedule 1 and the Child, Youth and Family Services Act. The changes in there, they look reasonable. There is some grab for power there. They're not all back; it's not a surprise. The government doesn't get it when it comes to children's aid societies. They actually don't realize what is affecting the children's aid societies is the stuff I'm going to talk about later in special education, which is in schedule 3, I believe—schedule 2, I should say.

Right now, we have a huge increase in the number of families who just can't cope anymore because their kids aren't getting what they need, either at school or in services. They are desperate. How desperate are you when you take your child, who's part of you, probably the most important thing to you in the world, and say, "Please take care of this; I can't"? And the government is upset because money is being spent at children's aid societies because we can't house all these kids who are coming in because their families can't cope—honestly can't cope.

All of us know families in our ridings—families that we know that are trying to cope with an exceptional need. For the government to say, "We're going to audit these guys. We're going to audit children's aid societies; it's their fault." The Premier is great at pointing a finger, but what I would really hope is that he would just lift a finger to make sure that they had resources that they need to ensure they could properly house—hotel; whatever you want to call it. Provide a safe space. They have to be safe places. You're not going to warehouse kids.

So I think that the changes here—and you can see where the government is trying to insert more power over children's aid societies. What I really wish they would do is provide the resources that are necessary to ensure that children—not just children who are there because their parents just are at the point of breaking, but children who, through no fault of their own, find themselves needing us. We're their parents, the government. We are. That's what our job is. That's our responsibility. So I think the government needs to focus more on that responsibility and work with children's aid societies to provide the resources that are needed.

Now, I didn't get the answer to this question—maybe somebody can ask this question or answer this in the questions after. We used to have post-secondary scholarships for wards of the crown—I know that; I worked for the Premier who did that. I was talking to someone the other day, and they said, "Well, no, that's stopped; we're doing it differently. It doesn't come from government anymore. It comes from somewhere else." I could be wrong, but if that's the case, I think the government's missing the point, because they're certainly missing the point with what's happening with families of children with exceptional needs who just can't do it anymore. They've given up. It's too hard. They feel that their child is not safe anymore. They're exhausted.

I want to talk a bit about schedule 3.

Interjection.

**Mr. John Fraser:** What's that? Sorry. I thought he was heckling, but he was just yelling at his colleague.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** He was yelling at me.

**Mr. John Fraser:** He was yelling at you. I heard it. I don't know why.

Schedule 3, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act: This feels like another heavy hand coming in, a very heavy hand. It's interesting, particularly with colleges: There's a difference between colleges and universities. Universities should be independent, right? Governments aren't the only funders; students and their families are, other people, donors. So the government is trying to assert way more control over something that they don't fully pay for.

In the case of colleges: The college system that a former Premier, Bill Davis, who I think was a Progressive Conservative, because I haven't seen a lot of them lately—I remember, back then, he created the college system. It's something that governments of all stripes continued and built up because we wanted it to be there for our young people.

We had a great college system, but this government is allowing it to wither. Ten thousand people who work at colleges lost their job last year—10,000 people. Algonquin College—it's not in my riding but it's in my city. Their first tranche of programs was 37 programs. So all over this province right now colleges are letting go of staff, cutting programs, and guess what? You've got a \$2.5-billion Skills Development Fund—the thing they do at colleges. But it's not going to colleges. It's going to friends and insiders and donors and lobbyists.

So they're pulling apart our college system, letting it wither, while they're funding their friends. And you know who's getting the short end of the stick? Our young people.

Where does skills development mostly happen in this province? It's happening in apprenticeships at colleges and with trade unions, and it's happening in colleges, where we can adapt to the labour market. Hello? You don't need to give \$27 million to bars and restaurants and nightclubs in downtown Toronto. You've got colleges that can do that. But you're not doing that. You're giving it to somebody, and I think what you're doing is actually just backfilling somebody's payroll. You're not really training; you're just paying for the people who are going to work for them that they have to pay to be trained, that they have to pay anyway. We all know that. It's not rocket science.

So the government is coming in with its heavy hand in schedule 3, and at the same time, with its other hand, it's taking money away. And then it's passing that money to a whole bunch of people—insiders, donors, friends, people with connections—and our students suffer.

I can't support schedule 3, and not just because the government is letting the college system—that one of them, one of the longest-serving Progressive Conservative Premiers, built and started, because he understood. He understood that it's important for us to do things together for each other that we can count on, that we can make solid, that's going to be there for the future. This government is letting it wither.

I'm just going to go right on to schedule 2 now. It's actually ironic—totally ironic—that the egg farmers are here today. Because if the Minister of Education wants to make an omelette out of school boards, it only needs four ingredients: It needs to be local, democratic, transparent and effective. I don't care what it looks like: Make the omelette. That's not the problem in our schools.

Governance always has to be fixed, it always has to be worked on. For God's sake, in here, our governance—we didn't sit. We sit for 14 weeks. We have a \$230-billion corporation here. That's what we run. The government doesn't think they have to be here. It's like, "We don't have to have a board meeting. It's not important. Nobody gets to ask any questions." So, again, he wants to make an omelette? Make sure it's local, democratic, transparent and effective. That's what governance should be.

Schools belong to the families and the communities they serve. It's been that way for 200 years. It's been that way for 200 years for a reason: because that's how it works best. Schools are local. The idea—the minister's idea, and it's very clear in this legislation—that we're going to run everything from downtown Toronto and that's going to be okay for Timiskaming or Essex or Niagara or Brantford: It's not going to work. On top of that, 90% of the decisions—maybe not quite 90%; maybe 85% of the decisions—and control over education is already there, and it's not working.

Our problem is, we don't have safe schools, and we don't have safe schools for three reasons. Class sizes continue to grow. Special education is in a mess. Boards—they're not short \$1 billion; they have to find \$1 billion somewhere else—\$850 million, but it's probably more like \$1 billion. They get \$850 million less than they need to serve the kids who have the highest needs.

We have a mental health problem in our schools that's just a reflection of the society that we live in. By that, I mean—I don't know if you've noticed, but when I go into a bank or phone my insurance company or walk on a bus, I see a sign or I hear the message, "Foul language and harassment won't be tolerated."

We've got a problem, and it's in our schools. It's not the kids' fault. We just came through a pandemic. The mental health needs of our children are not being met in school. They're not even being recognized. There's lots of lip service—tons of lip service, tons of historic investments. Every investment is historic, folks. I'm glad you've stopped saying that, or at least I think you've stopped saying that.

I went to Hamilton; I went to Brantford—I did a little local matters in education tour. I went to Niagara; I went to Thunder Bay; I went to Windsor and a bit of my city of Ottawa, and I heard the same things—a lot of the same things. And you know one of the things I heard consistently? "We don't have enough adults in the school." There are not enough adults in the school to manage what's going on. That's incredible.

The government has got a piece in here about policing in schools. I've always had a good, healthy relationship with the police. I do believe that we should have healthy, strong relationships with the people whose job it is to protect us. The most important thing we do in here is public safety. So we have to build those relationships. But simply using police in schools as just another adult—that the government doesn't have to pay for, by the way, that somebody else pays for—is not the right way to go. You need mental health workers. You need social workers. You need youth workers. It's no good doing that, it's no good policing in schools if you're not going to have the other things, because they need those tools. For God's sake, we have mental health workers with police in the community, right?

I know the government likes to push these buttons by saying this, but what I'd really like for them to do is to have a coordinated plan that dealt with this, that dealt with mental health. It's a big problem. It's a really big problem.



The ministry and the boards across the province are leaning really hard into a policy of inclusion and I think that that's important. But what it's done is, when you have inclusion and you have children with exceptional needs and you don't meet the needs and you include them, that's not any good. It doesn't work.

I talk to parents and educators and kids, and I'm going to tell you, every day in every board in this province—maybe more than one in a board—there's a classroom that's evacuated because a six- or seven-year-old is dysregulated, or a 10-year-old or a 12-year-old. That's what happens.

I had one mom say to me, "They called me because it happened at the school and I got the message." We'll say little Billy; I can't remember his name. "Billy came home, and I said to Billy, 'How was your day at school?' Billy's usually pretty forthcoming and he basically said, 'Well, I had to do this with Bobby in the schoolyard' and this and that. He didn't even talk about the fact that his classroom was emptied out."

I talked to a principal who lives in my riding—a really good principal, one of the best principals I've ever met. He says, "We've got a problem." I said, "Well, explain it to me." He said, "Well, this is just this week. Thursday, I had a desk thrown at me by a 12-year-old." A 12-year-old, okay? And then he said, "It was just another day."

What's happening in our schools, especially in the elementary panel, is shocking. I've got a sister who's an educational assistant, an SSL, they call them as well. She's been doing that for six or seven years. The incivility, the physicality—people are getting injured. People are being threatened—teachers, other kids. There's a problem, folks, and we're not paying attention to it. It's just not happening.

There's a whole cohort of kids who are struggling because of the pandemic. They're struggling with their mental health. They're struggling with special needs. They're struggling with getting caught up on math and reading. They're struggling and there's no plan for them.

But the government wants to say, "These bad trustees." You know what? Yes, what they did was bad. I'd actually say stupid in the case of the trip. But we've got a bill and we're perseverating on this stupid mistake while hundreds of thousands of children with special needs aren't getting what they need because the government is not giving enough money per student. It's that simple.

Don't say funding formula. I'm tired of hearing funding formula. It's not the formula, it's the factor. It's the amount of money that you're using per student.

If boards in this province are spending \$850 million more than you give them to help those kids, where is that money coming from? Anybody have an answer? No answers? Class sizes. It's coming from class sizes. Classes are getting bigger—split grades, right?

I've got a school in my riding between grades 2 to 7. They're all split grades. What's that all about? I don't know when you went to school—I mean, I did go to school in an urban school, so I can see that happening in a rural school where you really didn't have enough to have a classroom. But this is an urban school where there's enough to have a classroom of grade 5s or grade 6s. You don't have to split them up.

Why does that happen? The government is not paying attention to what's happening in schools. Because you know what the problem is right now? This government, although it likes to tout

itself as great fiscal managers, is approaching half a trillion dollars in debt and they created for themselves a revenue problem. But you know what, Speaker? You got a free licence plate or two. But in your riding right now there's a child with special needs not getting what they need. I don't know about you, Speaker, but I don't mind paying for my licence plate if a child is going to get what it needs—not just because it's nice, not just because it's the right thing to do, which it is. It's because it's the smart thing to do. It's the smart thing to do.

The smart thing to do is invest in people, to make sure that child can succeed, that that child will be successful. You got a free licence plate, but there are two million people out there who can't find a family doctor. I'm happy to pay for my licence plate if they're going to get a doctor. You know what? I want there to be enough adults in school and enough EAs. You know what? I don't need a free licence plate. I need for those kids to have the help that they need. I need for them to have a smaller class size.

The government is missing the boat on the things that are important and focusing on, “Look at these folks over here”—pointing the finger—“they're the problem; they're the problem; they're the problem.” The government makes 85% of the decisions in education; trustees have like this much. I'm not going defend the stupid things that some of them do, but there are a whole bunch of good ones out there too. People do stupid things in here all the time. The Premier is not pointing the finger at them, like the Minister of Labour and the Skills Development Fund. But we won't go into that.

But here's the thing: What's the Premier's priority this week? Not education and kids. No—not even close. He wants donation rates to go up by 47%—raising the limits. I guess they're not getting enough money in the Skills Development Fund.

While kids in schools are not getting what they need, when there's a mental health crisis in our schools—and there is. Everybody, you might want to pooh-pooh it and say, “No, you're exaggerating”—there's a problem. While we have that, the Premier's priority is, “Let's change election dates and raise the donation limits.” I'll tell you what: With all this stuff going on, that one thing that I just said, what the Premier is doing, is all you need to know about him. He's not worried about the kids in school, he's not worried about the 700,000 people out of jobs, he's not worried about the hundreds and hundreds of thousands of kids who have to rely on a food bank. He's worried about his party, he's worried about his donors, he's worried about his friends. What the heck is that all about? Honestly.

Our kids are not getting what they need. We built this province on education. We had a great education system. This government has allowed it to wither. You know one of the builders of that great education system? Bill Davis—Progressive Conservative. Again, I haven't seen one in a while—well, I've seen a couple. I've got to be fair; I've seen a couple over there. I can spot them. They're good people—they're all good people.

Educating people, investing in our kids, investing in our young people is the smartest thing we can do. It's not just the right, moral thing to do—it's smart. Because the most valuable thing in a global economy—it's not minerals, it's not water, it's not oil. It's us. It's people. We're the most valuable thing. Our kids, our children: They're the most valuable thing. What that is is that the most highly educated, highly trained workers are where people want to go.

Now that we're in the midst of this trade war, the government is allowing, and actually encouraging, the diminishing of our systems of education by—quite openly, with the Skills

Development Fund—sending \$27 million to bars and restaurants and night clubs, giving it to a law firm, giving it to a dental clinic, giving it to harness racing.

You've got a college system—and an elementary and secondary system—that was amongst the best in the world. You've allowed it to wither because the government is just happy to hand out money willy-nilly to whoever hires Kory Teneycke or Michael Diamond or Nico Fidani-Diker or—I mean, the list goes on. I don't have time to list them all.

I'd like to encourage my colleagues to spend a morning in a school. Go into an elementary school and talk to elementary teachers, talk to SSLs, talk to principals. Talk about what happens in our schools. If you take the time to do it, you'll be shocked.

We don't actually have the context because when we were in school, the things that are happening in our schools right now didn't happen. It's not because the kids are any different. They're kids; they just have different pressures. When they're not getting what they need, and they have an exceptional need, it makes it really hard for them. When they're suffering and having mental health problems—because it's pervasive; it's throughout our society—we somehow try to believe that it's not happening in our schools because it didn't look that way when we went to school.

Go into a school. Talk to a teacher; talk to SSLs. When they say that there's stuff happening in schools where people are getting injured and hurt—whether they're an SSL, an EA, a teacher or a principal—they are. There's a problem in our schools. The biggest problem is—it's not the boards of trustees; it's safe schools. They aren't safe places to work. They aren't safe places to learn.

The minister and the government are missing the point. While they try to have us focused over here on governance, all this other stuff is happening. This part's easy and political. You don't have to do a lot of work; you just need to make a lot of noise. That's what the government is doing and that's what the minister is doing: just making a lot of noise.

The hard work is, how do we actually make sure that every child is getting what they need? Or almost what they need, which they would be happy with right now, because some of them are getting nothing. The harder part is, how do we actually get back to smaller class sizes? It costs money. It requires thought and effort.

The mental health problem that we have in our schools, which is just reflective of what's going on in the broader society, and is maybe a bit more acute because of that cohort of kids that have gone through the pandemic and their learning being messed up—figuring that out is hard. But it's easy to point the finger. It's easy to make a lot of noise. It's easy to stand, puff yourself up, point the finger at somebody else and go, "You're the problem." No. The problem is bigger than that, folks. It's way bigger than that. And our kids are hurting.

The hard stuff that needs to be done is that we need to fund special education properly. Like I said, Speaker: I don't know about you or anybody else in this room—well, I do know about a few; I'm hoping everybody feels the same way—I can pay for a licence plate if that child that needs the EA for half a day is going to get that EA. I'm happy to pay for my licence plate if my grandkids' kids', my grandkids' or any child's class is smaller and better. I'm glad to pay for that if the mental health needs that are in our schools are being met—that we're investing in people there, that we're investing in people like mental health workers, youth workers, social workers.

I'm getting close to the end of my time.

**Interjection:** Yay.

**Mr. John Fraser:** Yay. There we go.

There are three things I want you to remember, okay? Number one: Our schools are not safe to work or learn in, and that's because class sizes are growing, special education needs are not being met—that's the government's responsibility—and we have a mental health crisis in our schools that's reflective of what's going on in broader society, but may also be more acute because of the impact the pandemic had on a cohort of kids.

What I would strongly suggest to all of you, if you haven't done it—I know some of you have done it, and I know some of you have probably seen what I've seen, and you realize that it's a big problem, and you realize that it's going to take a lot of work: Get into a school. Spend half a day there. Go and talk to people. Talk to educators, SSLs, EAs, principals, vice-principals, teachers. They know what's going on. They're not the enemy. Talk to kids, because the paradigm of schools that we have in our heads isn't matching what's going on today. We have no context.

I'll leave seventeen seconds on the clock.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Questions?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** My question is for the member from Ottawa–Vanier. As Ontario students and families across the region of Durham navigate through times of economic uncertainty, they deserve to know exactly where their post-secondary fees are going. Last year, the government took action to make the cost of textbooks and other learning experiences and resources more transparent, to give students a better idea for their post-secondary planning. With members from both the NDP and the Liberal Party voting against Bill 166, it's evident that they stood against the idea of fee transparency, in addition to policy supporting student mental health and combatting hate on campus.

But as we take fee transparency one step further this time, the opposition, third party and independent members—they're going to get another chance to demonstrate their commitment to hard-working Ontario students.

Will the member opposite, Speaker, through you, support Ontario students by voting to enhance fee transparency and student choice?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Thank you for the question. I'm all for transparency. I think transparency should apply to everybody, including the members of the government that are doing shady deals on the backs of Ontarians and abusing public funds.

Do I want transparency? I do. But, through you, Speaker, what you need to do is really trust our institutions. My colleague said, "We built our province on education." We've created those institutions, those school boards, those colleges and universities. Well, give them trust, and give them the resources that they need to accomplish their mission. That's how we're going to have a better system.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Questions?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I'll address my question, in this case, to the member from Ottawa South.

The persistent underfunding of schools is having a devastating effect on all students, but especially students with special needs. Disability advocate David Lepofsky has pointed out that every board has a special education advisory committee for students with disabilities that advocates for reforms, hears from parents with gut-wrenching stories, and has active engagements with senior board officials.

But now that livestreaming is forbidden, parents of children with disabilities are being blocked from accessing critical information about their school, their children and the work of the advisory committee. In your view, is there any justification for the Ford government's decision to cancel the livestreaming of school board meetings in Toronto or anywhere else?

**Mr. John Fraser:** I don't think there is a justification but there is a reason. And the reason is, they don't want people to see. They don't want people to watch. They don't want people to know what's going on in schools. They don't want to know that children with exceptional needs—their needs aren't being met. They're afraid of criticism. It's actually quite shocking. The most vulnerable children in school, whose parents are there and they have a life of advocacy—they've got to do it every single day for their kids—this government is shutting them down, shutting them out, trying to put them under a bushel basket and keep them in the shadows. It's despicable.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member for Beaches–East York.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Good morning, everyone. It's great to see all of you.

This is to either of my colleagues from the Ottawa area, so they can arm wrestle over it. This government is messing around with things like bike lanes, road safety, speed cameras and things that are not broken when they should be focused on fixing things that are broken. What do you think this government should be focused on right now for Ontarians?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Ottawa South.

**Mr. John Fraser:** I'm glad you brought up automated speed enforcement cameras. I talked about safe schools, and the thing that's kind of shocking to me, at least in my city: Those cameras keep the schools safe, the streets safe in front of the schools. Smyth Road: two high schools, one elementary school. Alta Vista: one elementary school and two high schools. Walkley Road: French elementary school. Heron Road: French elementary school. They're there to keep our kids safe, keep our roads safe. Instead of throwing the baby out with the bath water, why didn't the Premier just get it right? Why does he want to make the streets less safe for all our kids?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions? The member for Whitby.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Thank you, Speaker. And through you, please, to the member from Ottawa South.

As the government continues to make strategic investments in our world-class institutions, we're also ensuring that the most qualified students will be fuelling the workforce of tomorrow. Through Bill 33, we're going to be consulting with the sector to understand all of their current admission policies and how we can provide better transparency for prospective students looking to study in Ontario.

We've heard from the students and their families that the current process is still unclear to them. And students applying to our post-secondary institutions, like Ontario Tech and Trent Durham, deserve to know the objective evaluation criteria that is directly related to their academic achievements and potential for success at an institution.

For the member opposite, support Ontario's most qualified students by voting in favour of a more transparent admission process to colleges and universities.

**Mr. John Fraser:** What they deserve first is a college to go to, a program to have. That strategic investment? That meant 10,000 people are out of jobs in colleges—10,000 people. Where does that go? Is that the Premier's job creation plan? They deserve a place to go to school and they deserve the course. Yes, you wave your hand. Wave your hand all you want, but that's what's happening. Those are the facts. You know it; I know it.

Algonquin College, first cut: 37 programs—37 programs, 10,000 people. If that's your strategic investment, you can take your strategy and—thank you very much, Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member for Spadina–Fort York.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I want to give the member from Ottawa South an opportunity to complete his sentence, but he ran out of time, I guess.

From 2010 to 2018, I was a TDSB trustee, and every year, the TDSB trustees were forced to make cuts because of a funding shortfall.

Since then, the Conservative government has taken over and they've cut another \$6 billion out of our education system. You mentioned an \$850-million shortfall in special-ed services. That's just based on what the school boards are using, what they're paying for those services, versus what they're getting. But it doesn't actually meet the needs of the special-needs students.

I look at Bill 33 and the takeover of the school board trustees in four different boards. I think this government is trying to privatize our education system. I think that's the goal. The students who are suffering in our schools right now are just pawns in this privatization scheme. Do you agree?

**Mr. John Fraser:** I don't give them that much credit for thinking, because it's rather obvious.

I think what it is, is they've got themselves in a bind. They've spent money on things that aren't important. They've foregone revenue on things that aren't important like licence plates.

And so, what ends up happening is now they're—who are the four supervisors? What are the most distinguishing things about the four supervisors? Well, they're all Conservatives pretty deeply, and they're all CPAs—nothing against CPAs for all of you folks over there who are CPAs, or over here. CPAs are good people. But if you're going to send somebody in to fix something, you wouldn't go to General Motors and send a CPA in who didn't know anything about building cars.

So it's obvious what the government is doing. They see our school system as an accounting problem, not a people problem. That's what the problem is with this government. They've got to figure that out. It's about people. It's not about the ledger sheet.

And you know what's going to happen? Here's what's going to happen: The supervisors are going to go in, because I've seen it before—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

Interjection.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** You ran out of time.

I recognize the member from Mississauga–Malton.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you, Speaker. I was waiting for the temperature to cool down a little bit. Thank you, sir.

It's always a pleasure to be here and to continue presenting on another key component of the Supporting Children and Students Act.

Before I start, I want to tell you: I still remember the journey when I became an MPP in 2018. We walked into those doors knowing almost nothing. And then slowly and steadily we read it, we understood it, and today we can proudly say, after seven years, we have a system which we are so proud of.

Let's look at the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. Within Ontario, we have 23 publicly assisted universities, 24 publicly assisted colleges and over 600 private career colleges. And there we have over 524,000 students in publicly assisted universities, over 350,000 students in publicly assisted colleges and over 100,000 students in private career colleges. And it doesn't stop here. We have over 75,000 STEM graduates.

Speaker, this data which I just gave you is not just data, it is the future of our province. When you know you have a strong future, a bright future, you want to make sure that you're investing into that future.

Thank you to Premier Ford and our Minister of Colleges and Universities, who's been working tirelessly this summer meeting all the colleges and universities. We can give him a round of applause if you think he's doing a good job.

We made notable investments of \$750 million over five years to fund 20,000-plus STEM seats annually, and it doesn't stop here. All the time we hear from the other side, "Are we making investments?" Yes. We have a debt, yes. We know the value for the money. We want to make sure, at the same time, that we make strategic investments. That's why we invested \$1.3 billion to stabilize and modernize the post-secondary sector. And we didn't stop here: over \$5 billion annually to publicly assisted colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes through operating and capital grants.

So, Speaker, this bill—I will be talking primarily on what is the impact on the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, and if I do have time, I'll briefly touch education as well.

Over the last seven years, if you look at the post-secondary institutions, research institutes, hospitals, they have generated substantial research output. More than ever, our government needs to keep this momentum to protect Ontario.

We hear it all the time about the investments. Are we making enough investments? I'll share the data and you can make that opinion.

Since 2018, we have invested over \$2 billion into the research sector, supporting 1,600 research projects. If you look at the data, and it's very simple: There are 5,000 universities in

world, but when it comes to health research, we have University of Toronto, who is ranked seventh and ninth in two different sectors. That is the strength of the education sector that we have in our province.

With the investments that we've made, we are successfully leveraging an additional \$1.5 billion in federal and private sector funding. With all this money coming together, we're able to support world-class research. This funding is attracting and developing top talent, supporting state-of-the-art facilities and enabling the discoveries that will drive our economy forward and make a real difference—not just to the people of Ontario, but to the people across the globe.

I had the opportunity to visit some of these places with the minister. I do remember we went together to the University of Toronto. We met organizations like HDAX Therapeutics—wonderful work they're doing—along with SpinUp, the program that they have.

These are the things which we are doing helping support these organizations. What happens is a virtuous cycle. We hold their hand, we give a little bit of funding, they take that money, they invest into the research, they come up with a great idea. When they take this great idea and commercialize it, we're increasing the revenue—not only for the students but for our province.

We're making sure all these technologies, all these discoveries, are helping support not just Ontario but across the globe. That's why our investment has driven more than 120,000 training opportunities for research and students across the province, supported 406 patents, resulted in more than 70 start-up companies and created multiple jobs. These are the results—that our research sector is not just a key driver of innovation; it is actually helping support commercialization and the economy. We are contributing to protect Ontario's long-term economic growth.

Let's talk about the research institutes that we have. We are protecting Ontario's global competitiveness productivity through our support for research institutes and by investing \$117 million to support eight leading research institutes in our province. We have a unique mandate to support the centres of excellence.

A great example I can talk about is the Ontario Institute of Cancer Research—something which, again, the minister and I had the opportunity to visit, and to see first-hand how they were supporting the discoveries of new medicine. For example, OICR, in partnership with University of Toronto, recently launched OncoGAN, a new AI tool that generates synthetic cancer genomes to aid researchers in testing and improving algorithms without using real patient data. What does that mean? It helps to do things faster with less destruction, making sure we achieve those results at a speed, resulting in faster innovation, early cancer detection and more effective cancer treatment for the people of Ontario.

I recently was at UHN and I was looking at—they have seven Tesla MRIs. I do remember when Dr. Andrew Smith talked to me with a passion about how it is important. He said, "Typically, we have two to three Tesla MRIs. But with this, it's not increasing the wavelength or frequency to twice, but it actually gives five times better results." I stood up, I thanked them and I said, "It's not five times better results; it's actually five times better hope that you give me."

I'll give you a small example, Speaker. My own father-in-law was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. By the time we found out, we only had four and a half months before he passed away. Think about these things with the innovations and discoveries our wonderful youth, our students in the



universities, are doing. Even if we were able to increase that by a month, this is a second life, 25% more than what we got. Every second counts at that point of time.

Speaker, our investment in research does not end here. We have recently announced \$18 million to support the expansion of the McMaster nuclear reactor. Thanks to this investment, the reactor will be able to expand its operation to 24 hours, seven days. Many of my colleagues were there. We all went together to see first-hand the impact it creates to address the growing demand for affordable, patient-specific cancer treatment.

The reason I'm saying all this is to convey to the people of Ontario that we have a colleges and universities system which is designed to give back, to support the world—not just Ontario—making a difference in the lives of nearly a quarter of a million Canadians who are diagnosed with cancer each year.

That's why, at its core, Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act is about ensuring the safety, integrity and accountability of Ontario's education and research systems. The legislation focuses specifically on research security, recognizing that while collaboration and innovation remain the backbone of our progress, they must be protected from interference, misuse or theft. You understand, Speaker: When we know interference, somebody having their own interest can result into something which could mean somebody is going to take away that research, demoralizing the researchers, who are not able to come back and are not able to build something to support.

That's why, through this bill, our government is proposing to require all publicly assisted colleges and universities to develop and maintain institutional research security plans. These plans will outline how institutions assess risk, safeguard sensitive information, and train researchers to identify and manage potential security concerns.

We're not doing it alone. We're doing it with collaboration. We're doing it with transparency. The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security will work closely with these institutions, security experts—somebody I actually met at the University of Guelph—and research organizations to develop clear guidance and share best practices.

I think about a situation when—I remember I was talking to the VP of research at the University of Guelph. You have your researchers doing the research. All of a sudden, your data is hacked, your data is manipulated or your data is removed. Either you have to start again or you just shelve it. It's not shelving the project; it is shelving the hope. It is shelving those not able to bring the technologies to the world, to serve the communities. That's why regular updates and reviews will help ensure that these measures evolve alongside global research trends, emerging technologies and new security challenges.

Simply put, Bill 33 strengthens our ability to support open, world-class research while protecting the intellectual property, discoveries and data Ontarian researchers work so hard to create. We're here to support that.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Sorry to interrupt the member, but that has completed our time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

### **Remembrance Day Observance Act, 2025**

Mrs. Stevens moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Remembrance Day and Veterans' Week Act, 2024 with respect to schools and workplaces / Projet de loi 65, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2024 sur la Semaine du jour du Souvenir et des anciens combattants au sujet des écoles et des lieux de travail.

**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?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** Yes. Thank you for the opportunity, Speaker.

The bill amends the Remembrance Day and Veterans' Week Act, 2024, to provide that every school shall hold a dedicated service for Remembrance Day for students, and that the Ministry of Education shall develop an elementary school curriculum and secondary school curriculum regarding the purpose and the importance of Remembrance Day. The act is also amending to provide that, subject to regulations made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, no workplace shall operate from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Remembrance Day.

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

Mr. Blais moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 66, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Kids' Online Safety and Privacy Month / Projet de loi 66, Loi proclamant le mois d'octobre Mois de la sécurité et de la protection de la vie privée des enfants en ligne.

**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):** Would the member like to explain the bill?

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** This bill is co-sponsored and largely the work of my colleague Madame Collard from Ottawa–Vanier. The bill proclaims the month of October in each year as kids' online safety and privacy month.

By proclaiming October kids' online safety and privacy month, we prioritize the need to raise awareness about online safety and privacy for children. And by acknowledging the significance of online safety and privacy for children, we aim to ensure that children can navigate the digital world confidently and safely.

### **Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025**

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 28, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to child, youth and family services, education, and colleges and universities / Projet de loi 33, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives aux services à l'enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille, à l'éducation et aux collèges et universités.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Mississauga–Malton.

Interjection.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you, House leader. Thank you for that kind compliment. I hope you keep doing it.

In the previous time when I was talking about my remarks, I talked mostly about the colleges and universities. I quickly want to touch base in this session about what we are doing in Bill 33 subject to the Ministry of Education. The number one thing in this bill is about school board accountability. As you know, Speaker, parents deserve confidence that school boards are making decisions in the best interests of their children's education. When we look at the schools, school boards and their education, the key component of the whole thing is our kids, our students, and absolutely, the caregivers who are taking care of those students are important. The educators, the staff, the administrators who are taking care of those students are absolutely important as well. So that's why we are strengthening accountability and transparency across Ontario's education system, to ensure that every dollar invested delivers real results for students.

I'll give you a small example. I do remember, when my son was in grade 7, he went to the University of Toronto Schools, UTS, and had his camp. We actually paid about \$2,000. Parents and teacher conversation—we went there and we had a couple of other parents there. One of the parents asked his kid, "How was it? How was the camp?" Before the student could even answer, the teacher jumped in and said, "Oh, it's not about anything, but didn't you have fun?" The caregiver didn't say anything at that moment in front of the teacher, but as soon as the teacher left, he looked at me and he goes, "I make \$20 an hour. I paid \$2,000. I didn't send my kid to have fun, because I worked over 100 hours," and if you consider the income tax, it probably was 150 hours. Yes, when we send our children, our parents, our caregivers, even our educators, they want a little bit of fun, but at the same time, they want them to be educated.

So Speaker, it is very important to understand that the measures build on previous actions to improve governance, enforce compliance and focus school boards on what matters most: supporting students, parents and the educators. We are making it clear that the school boards must put students first—not politics, not bureaucracy—and that we will act decisively when they fall short of their responsibility. That's what we're doing through this bill.

Another thing, Speaker, the wedge issue, especially in the region of Peel—I'm talking about student resource officers. I got calls from both sides. We had some of the advocacy groups saying, "Well, some of our children do not like the police officers coming to the school." On the other side, there were a lot of parents saying, "We want those police officers coming to the school." In a greater good, I feel that the issue here is those who wanted the police officers were concerned about the safety and the security and what's going on with the violence in the school, and they wanted their children to be safe. At the same time, those who didn't want it, they had no bad intentions, but it's just that they were more concerned about the impact these children sometimes might have when these police officers come to the school. I think this is where this government comes in and says, "Let's work together." Let's work together with the police

services through the student resource officers. That will help build relationships between youth and police, actively promoting positive behaviour and creating a culture of mutual respect that will help keep our students safe. That's what we're doing through this bill.

It's not just the ministry saying it. There was a survey done at Toronto District School Board. I just want to share a few of those outcomes, Speaker:

—94% of students either felt SROs in their school are trustworthy, or didn't have an opinion;

—95% of the students either felt SROs are helpful, or didn't have an opinion, but they were not against it;

—90% of the students felt SROs in their school made them safer, or didn't have an opinion, or in other words, they were not against it; and

—93% of the students either wanted the SRO program to continue, or didn't have an opinion, which means they were not against it.

This data actually shows, as well, that this program is something which they're not against and it will be nice to have it back. Yes, there was some objection, and if we can work together collaboratively, we can solve those issues.

Another thing in this bill we have, which is extremely important—I really like it—is volunteerism and Ontario Day. When I see a lot of the rewards and awards—think about it. It's not that the people want those awards. They don't do things to get the award, but when they do good things, they get awarded. Many times, the benefit of those awards is that other people watching them look at them and get the feeling that it's a great idea, and they tend to work hard and give back and get awarded as well.

So through this bill, the minister is going to recognize all the children who are going to do more than 50 hours; they will give a certificate of recognition. And that, Speaker, will help them when they are applying for the universities. They can showcase the hard work they've done. They've given back to society.

To conclude, Speaker, I want to emphasize that this bill—whether it's research, security, whether it is working in the universities or supporting our education, we are here to make a record-setting investment in our post-secondary research sectors and support our education system.

As our province continues to grow and prosper, our government is doing whatever it takes to protect Ontario, whatever it takes to support our students. This is a bill that is good news for all. I urge all my members on both sides: Let's come together, support and build a better, stronger Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Questions?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I heard the member from Mississauga–Malton say that he considers our kids important and our teachers and education workers important, which I fundamentally agree with and I was glad to hear that from the member.

But the member did not acknowledge that our kids are suffering right now from more than \$6 billion taken out of our education system, large class sizes, staff shortages, the lack of mental health professionals, a violence crisis, crumbling schools. And the member also didn't

acknowledge that the supervisors that his government has appointed are already harming our kids and our education workers, increasing class sizes for the most vulnerable kids, eliminating programs, telling workers that they are coming for negotiated benefits instead of actually respecting the fact that that's how we negotiate compensation in this province.

So how can the member support this legislation and support attacking the rights of communities to have a say if he supports our kids and the best interest of our kids and our education workers?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Speaker, I have two children, and I know children are our future, so that's why it is very important to invest in our students.

The member opposite talked about education funding. This is something which we actually hear about all the time—as usual, the opposition is completely ignoring the facts. Every year, for example—I'm just going to give the data—our government has been in office, we have increased education funding each year, year by year.

Let's take an example: We have increased per-pupil funding by more than 23%. We have increased special education funding by 36%. And you don't have to take my words, you can take the words from the C.D. Howe Institute, which talks about this.

Speaker, while the opposition is focused on playing games, this side of the government is going to continue to work, to serve and support our students.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Next question?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** You'll know that we're currently in the midst of an affordability crisis. While this has had a profound impact on the majority of Ontarians, the burden may fall even greater on our students and their families as they plan for the future in post-secondary education.

Now, under the previous Liberal government, Ontario had the highest university tuition fees in Canada for undergraduate students, which created significant financial barriers to accessing world-class post-secondary institutions. Under the leadership of Premier Ford and the government, we've held that tuition cost. This has resulted in greater accessibility, cost savings and better planning for students and families in the region of Durham. However, when students are planning for post-secondary, they deserve to know where their fees are going.

I'd like to ask the member for Mississauga–Malton, how will greater fee transparency and student choice benefit students in Ontario and their families?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** First of all, I want to say thank you to the member from Whitby for the great work he's doing as a parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

The member said it so well. That's right: Fee transparency is very important. I meet a lot of parents, and especially with the tough time that we are going through, whether the students are paying themselves or they're using OSAP or their parents are supporting them, hard-working students and families deserve to know where their fees are going. So that is why, if passed, this bill will ensure that the fees students and families pay are clear, transparent and in support of receiving an excellent education.

Last year we took action to make sure that the cost of textbooks and other material was accessible for and transparent for students and their families. Our government was elected because we—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Questions?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I listened carefully, but I didn't hear the member from Mississauga–Malton talk at all about the fact that this government has cut funding for post-secondary institutions, and they have not provided support for our students who are facing not only the incredibly challenging costs of tuition, but also of housing and the increasing cost of groceries all the time.

We know that there are many students who are struggling just to make ends meet. And instead of actually making investments into post-secondary education that would allow them to reduce tuition and turn loans into grants, or to actually make housing affordable to young people at reasonable rates—and especially decent housing—what this government is doing is actually attacking the food banks and other services that are provided by students.

Why on earth does the member think it's okay to take away student-provided food banks from students who are suffering because of this government's policies?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Again, a big contrast—I mean, we're so thankful to our students. I talked about them in my previous remarks as well. There are over 500,000 students out there in the colleges and universities, and they're the leaders; they're the future of our province.

And we're actually making more funding than last year. We're making historic investments—\$5 billion. We have recently invested close to \$750 million on research.

Speaker, I have to share with you: I had the opportunity to visit Velocity, I had the opportunity to visit McMaster, and everywhere I went, I noticed and I felt we have such wonderful students doing amazing research and building a better, stronger Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**MPP Tyler Watt:** Let's talk about this government's record on post-secondary. It's part of the reason why I'm here today, actually. In 2018, I was a part of those hundreds of millions of dollars of cuts that was made to OSAP, the cancelling of the free tuition program for low-income and mature students. When I was going back to nursing school to become a nurse and help out our patient population, this government came in and cut post-secondary education like we've never seen before.

How can we trust this government to actually deal with our post-secondary education system while scapegoating students and continuing to severely underfund our colleges and universities?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I would say again that I love to share the data, and thankfully, on November 6, there's a fall economic statement that's going to come and it's going to give you the current data as well.

But until that time—we don't have the data—let's look at the data which we have. This government has spent over \$5 billion annually to publicly assisted colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes through operating and capital grants, which is the highest so far. In

February 2024, the ministry invested \$1.3 billion to stabilize and modernize the post-secondary sector. We've spent \$750 million over five years to fund approximately 20,500 STEM seats annually.

Speaker, our youth are our future, and this government will not take any chance, and will invest and keep investing in our future, our youth, our students. I'm so proud of this.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Whitby.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** As the government is making strategic investments into the post-secondary education sector to power Ontario's future workforce, we must also continue to ensure that our publicly assisted institutions, whether it's Ontario Tech or Trent Durham in my riding, are getting the most qualified students. Ontario's students and families sacrifice money, time and emotional stress when applying to post-secondary institutions. When they make that commitment to studying at one of the world-class institutions like Ontario Tech, they should be provided better clarity on the admissions process.

Speaker, through you, how will schools publishing their merit-based admissions policy improve our post-secondary education system—to the great member from Mississauga–Malton.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you to the member from Whitby for the wonderful question, and something which you know as a parent, as a student, all we're concerned is always about—going to the university or college is not just taking an education; it is a tool to be successful and give back to the society in the future.

Speaker, that's why this government believes that merit-based admission is important and every prospective student in Ontario looking to better themselves through education deserves to understand what they are being evaluated against.

This bill will ensure students and their families have a clear understanding for the admittance criteria and we'll be consulting on the best path forward for expectations around transparency as to why and why not they were admitted. We have a government who is working for the people of Ontario to build a stronger Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** Before I start my debate, I would like to express that I'm going to share my time with the member from Oshawa.

Speaker, I rise today to speak on Bill 33, a bill that claims to support children and students, but when you look at it closely, it does neither. For Ontario's post-secondary students, this bill is not about support; it's about control—political control over our universities and colleges, over student voices, and over academic freedoms itself.

We've seen this story before. When things get tough, this government doesn't invest; it interferes. They centralize power, they silence dissent and they try to manage by decree. Now, they are extending the same playbook to our post-secondary system, a system that's already stretched to the breaking point.

Schedule 3 of this bill might be one of the most heavy-handed power grabs we have ever seen in Ontario's post-secondary education. It gives the government the power to dictate how

universities admit students, what fees they can collect and how they manage their own research programs.

Speaker, Ontario's university is supposed to be independent, and that isn't trivial. It's a principle. Autonomy protects academic freedom, it protects fairness and it protects students from political interference.

Every stakeholder in the sector has said the same thing: The problem isn't governance; it's funding. And let's state the facts, Speaker. Ontario has the lowest per-student funding in the country. For decades, governments have let our colleges and universities fall further and further behind. Today, Ontario funds only about half of what other provinces spend per student. That chronic underfunding means institutions are cutting programs, laying off staff and hiking tuition just to keep the lights on. Some smaller campuses are facing closure. And instead of fixing that, what does this government do? It introduces a bill that gives it sweeping powers to regulate fees, admissions, and even research as though micromanagement was somehow going to fill a \$1.2-billion funding gap.

Speaker, you can't fix a crisis of underfunding by tightening the leash. One of the most dangerous parts of Bill 33 is the section giving the minister the power to decide which student fees are allowed and which are not. These aren't random fees. They fund the programs that keep students fed, safe and connected: food banks, mental health supports, legal clinics, club campuses, newspapers, sexual violence prevention programs. At the University of Guelph, those fees support student-run food banks that feed hundreds of students every month. At other campuses, they keep safe walking programs and peer-support networks alive.

These are not luxuries; they are lifelines. But this bill would let governments decide which ones survive. It's not about giving students choice; it's about silencing the organizations that advocate for students. This government tried the same scheme in 2019 with the Students Choice Initiative which the courts struck down for violating university autonomy. Speaker, if something was not constitutional in 2019, it doesn't magically become constitutional in 2025. The Ford government is setting itself up for yet another lawsuit that will cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

Ontario's universities and colleges have always operated on the principle of autonomy—that academic and administrative decision should be made by experts and committees, not politicians. That independence protects research, teaching and student life from political whims. Bill 33 tears a hole in that wall and hands the government the power to define which student fees are permissible, to relegate admissions criteria and to demand compliance with whatever directives the minister sees fit. This isn't just bureaucratic meddling, it's a direct attack on the ability of post-secondary institutions—and the students who run services on those campuses—to govern themselves.

And then there is the new requirement for so-called merit-based admissions. Speaker, Ontario's universities already admit students based on merit. Grades, portfolios, interviews, experience are all used to judge admissions—that's the system we already have and use. So what is the point of this new clause? It is a political signal. It is a signal to roll back the equity-based admissions, the very programs that help open doors for Indigenous, Black, racialized, disabled and first-generation students.



The bill gives the minister power to define “merit” by regulation, without saying what that means. That’s dangerous because when you start redefining merit narrowly—when you strip out lived experience, community leadership or other barriers people face—you turn equity into exclusion.

Speaker, fairness doesn’t mean pretending everyone begins at the starting line. Fairness means making sure everyone has a fair chance to reach the finish line. Experts have warned that vague language like this is a backdoor attack on inclusion—and it’s unnecessary. Our admissions systems already combine academic standards with fairness and transparency. This isn’t reform; it’s rhetoric—imported from the United States where merit has become a political weapon. We don’t need that in Ontario.

Bill 33 also gives the minister new powers over university and college research security plans. Of course, research security is important—no one disputes that—but this bill goes far beyond ensuring safety. It allows the minister to dictate what those plans must include, when they must be updated and what topics must be addressed.

That means that the government could effectively decide what kinds of research are prioritized or restricted. Giving the minister sweeping powers to decide what kinds of research plans are acceptable could easily spill into deciding what kinds of research are allowed. That’s not how academic freedom works. We already have federal systems in place to ensure research integrity and security. The last thing our universities need is political micromanagement of what ideas are worth studying.

When governments start controlling research, we lose innovation, we lose credibility and we lose trust. Speaker, academic freedom isn’t just a nice idea—it’s the foundation of credible scholarship. Once politicians start setting the boundaries of acceptable research, we risk losing the creativity and the independence that make our institutions world-class.

All of this might sound abstract—admissions, criteria, free regulations, research plans—but the human cost is very real. Students are already choosing between rent and groceries. They are lining up at campus food banks that are now at risk. They are trying to learn while working two, sometimes three, jobs because tuition keeps rising and wages don’t. Now they are being told that the supports they built for themselves—by students, for students—could disappear at the stroke of the minister’s pen. That’s what is at stake.

So when this government claims it’s supporting students, let’s remember what support actually looks like: stable public funding, affordable tuition, mental health resources, safe and inclusive campuses. And none of that is in this bill.

It’s not lost on anyone that this bill also expands the minister’s power over school boards. It’s part of a larger pattern of a government obsessed with control. This is a government that doesn’t trust local democracy, academic expertise or community voices. And every time someone pushes back—students, parents, trustees, professors—the answer is the same: “We know best.” That’s not leadership. That is arrogance.

If this government truly wanted to support students, it would:

- reverse the cuts and invest in stable, predictable post-secondary funding;
- protect, not politicize, student services;
- strengthen equity-based admissions, not undermine them;

- support mental health and housing programs that keep students in school; and
- above all, trust students and educators to run their own institutions.

What students need isn't more control from Queen's Park. They need access, affordability and respect.

Speaker, our schools and universities are not enemies to be managed. They are communities to be nurtured. Bill 33 isn't about transparency or accountability. It's about replacing care with control—control over institutions, over students, and over the spaces where innovation and ideas take root.

The Ontario NDP will always stand with students—the ones who organize, who advocate, who feed each other, and who fight for fairness. We will stand with our professors, our researchers and our campus workers who keep the institutions running under this impossible strain. And we will oppose this bill, because education should be about opportunity, not obedience.

Ontario's students deserve better than this bill. I hope this government will take a second look and decide on what actually needs to be done to allow the school systems to thrive.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Oshawa.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I am glad to be able to add my voice on the debate on Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act—if only that had anything to do with this piece of legislation. This is an attack on trustees and the rights of parents to access their elected local representatives when it comes to their children and their education. This bill from this Premier remains a dangerous power grab that threatens our schools, campuses and communities. It centralizes control in the Premier's office, it undermines local democracy, and it risks cutting the very student services and classroom supports that keep young people safe and supported.

Speaker, I will say that, drawing from the many years I spent as a classroom teacher, I know that at that time, we were on a downward trend in terms of having the resources that were needed, and it has only gotten worse. All of us in this room, regardless of party, have inboxes that are full and overflowing from communities that are very concerned about this piece of legislation.

This bill gives the minister ultimate authority over school boards, which are democratically elected in their local communities. I would like to know why the minister is seeking to remove those local voices.

This government has cut funding by \$1,500 per student, leading to many school boards reporting deficits or cutting programming. Are there any measures in this bill to provide adequate funding to our schools? No, there are not.

The Minister of Education seems to resent that there are layers of democracy that he can't control. Actually, I don't know what is driving him, but that's how it appears. It's another weird government vendetta bill, and it's getting tired, but it's also getting worse.

This is not helping students. This is not helping communities. There's nothing in this bill about fixing our crumbling schools or putting more caring adults in classrooms or making sure that our kids have what they need to succeed. Instead, they're focused on locking parents out of being able to have a say about their kids' education.

The government's recommendations ignore the real concerns raised by students, parents and local communities, and destroy the ability of our school boards to listen to their communities and prioritize safety through care.

This bill does nothing to fix the \$6.35-billion funding gap created by this government. The bill tries to mask chronic underfunding with control, interference and political spin, where post-secondary students are paying the price. I'll tell you, what students need is not more control from Queen's Park.

This is not about fairness. This is about distraction. It gives the Minister of Education the power to appoint whoever he wants wherever he wants in our education system. It takes the voice of parents and local communities away and does nothing to address the funding shortfalls in our schools.

I want to say, as an MPP, like all of my colleagues, we have built relationships with local trustees. When we can't solve a problem, chances are it's because of the chronic underfunding and those trustees are not able to solve the problem, because it is bigger than the trustees. So pointing fingers at trustees is nonsense.

Speaker, I would like to share from the Durham Region Labour Council. They've been very active. Lord knows I've been getting a whole bunch of emails. Thank you so much for your activism. But from them, they have said, "Bill 33 isn't limited to K-12 schools. It also extends the government's control over universities and colleges—from student fees to admissions and even research oversight. It threatens campus services, academic freedom, and equity in higher education.

"Across all levels, this bill is part of a broader agenda to silence local voices and centralize power. It's about control, not improvement." Yes. So many folks are concerned about this.

We've already talked about, in post-secondary education—we're at the bottom of the barrel in terms of per-student funding. In this fine country that everybody is excited about talking about how strong we are, we are putting all of our students at a disadvantage. It used to be that health care and education helped to build our country and strengthen our workforce, but this government is so glad to keep the funding so low that we are at the bottom of all of the provinces in the country by a long shot. I think there are two North American jurisdictions that are lower than we are in per-student funding. It's like Alabama and—anybody? Anyway, I'll get back to you. But Alabama, suffice it to say—no offence to Alabama, but we would like to be at the top in North America, at the top of the country—even halfway up the pile. But no, here we are at the bottom. But I digress.

Speaker, so many folks have been writing in, demanding that this government reverse course and stop the attack on trustees. I want to read here from Joel Smith, who wrote in: "I'm writing with concerns about Bill 33 and the Minister of Education's comments about eliminating elected school boards....

"We recognize that school boards are struggling after years of chronic provincial underfunding, and that every dollar should go to supporting students.... Replacing elected trustees with hand-picked, government-appointed supervisors who lack education experience is alarming. Such action also lays the path for further cuts to student supports and services that will negatively impact learning and well-being.... Decisions regarding police involvement in schools should be

made in consultation with all local voices, including parents, students, community members, and organizations led by local school boards, not mandated by the provincial government.

“Trustees must be free to do their jobs without interference. School boards need adequate and stable funding to support students and educators. Ontario’s local school board governance model must be upheld.

“Trustees are elected to represent our communities. They know our local needs and are best positioned to advocate for students and public education, and they are accountable to the communities they serve.”

Thank you, Joel, for your thoughtful letter.

Lisa Bowman writes in—and by the way, we’re all getting letters, Speaker. It’s not just me.

Lisa says, “Everything we’re proud of—as Ontarians and as Canadians—starts in our classrooms. But Bill 33 puts that at risk. Instead of addressing what students really need to succeed, this legislation hands the government sweeping powers to override school boards and seize control under vague ‘public interest’ claims.

“Stripping locally elected trustees of their role silences parents and communities—the very people who keep our schools strong—making it harder for people like me to voice my opinion and ask for help....

“Our students don’t need more centralized control in the backrooms at Queen’s Park in downtown Toronto. They need smaller class sizes, more one-on-one time with their teachers, and real and sustained investment in our publicly funded schools.”

Hear, hear. Thank you, Lisa.

Durham District School Board and the DCDSB have put out statements in support of their very hard-working trustees. They value the work that they do. Everybody in the community knows that they need more access, not less.

If this government goes through with getting rid of the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association, or OPSBA, then they’re mucking with bargaining: “Bill 33 would ... reshape how Ontario’s education workers negotiate and enforce their rights.”

As the Durham Region Labour Council pointed out, rightly, “If trustees are eliminated, OPSBA disappears—and with it, the voice of local boards at the bargaining table. Centralized bargaining could replace local negotiations entirely, with Queen’s Park imposing one-size-fits-all decisions.” This is not okay. This is not how we make things better.

Speaker, here from [durhamregion.com](http://durhamregion.com), an article: “‘A Direct Threat’: Durham Teachers Slam Ontario Government’s Bill 33, Warning It Could Lower Education Quality, End Local Representation.”

I was a proud ETFO member for a very long time before I was elected, or up until I was elected. This is from new President David Mastin of ETFO: “There is widespread concern about the erosion of local representation. Eliminating elected trustees is not just a bureaucratic shift—it’s a direct attack on democratic governance. It centralizes power, undermines equity, silences

marginalized voices, harms students and strips communities of their right to shape public education. This is a dismantling of democracy in real time.” Yes, it is.

Mr. Mastin goes on to say, “The elimination of local trustees is a direct threat to Ontario’s public education system. As the impact of the Ford government’s cuts to public education continues to be felt by students across the province, without elected trustees, parents and families will be left with nobody to turn to.”

This doesn’t make things better. This doesn’t even make sense. Ontario schools have been struggling in terms of class sizes, in terms of an increase in classroom violence. The NDP has put forward a thoughtful plan, the emergency safe schools plan, to help keep kids safe, and that is created in coordination with workers in the sector.

Speaker, I remember 10 years ago—I’ve been here 11 years, but it was early on, a decade or so ago—when I was raising in committee about Kevlar in schools and how much the government was spending, and what we were doing to support teachers. The government of the day at that time—I think it was not this government—had no idea what was going on. This government, even less do they realize what is going on in the schools. But this bill? It’s not making things better; it’s making things worse. Shame on you.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Questions?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** The members opposite called Bill 33 an overreach, yet it simply allows investigations where there’s a matter of public interest. It lets the minister issue directions, or if necessary, assume control when boards won’t fix problems.

We’ve seen what happens without that oversight. Some boards have spent tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars on luxury trips abroad or bought seats to Blue Jays games. Others have burned millions of dollars on lawsuits and internal investigations over trustee misconduct—money that should have gone to classrooms, not courtrooms.

What does the member from Oshawa believe? That school board trustees should be above basic accountability?

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** It is so interesting to have a government member ask about accountability or talk about expensive tickets or misuse of public funds, when we have been standing here for the past week and a half talking about the Minister of Labour and what this government feels is appropriate use of funds. But anyway, this is a bill that is trying to mask chronic underfunding with political spin and interference.

The member’s question about trustees—I’ll answer that. Trustees ought to be accountable, which means they have to be accessible. Right now, they are elected by their neighbours. They are findable. If this government gets rid of them, then people will have to track down the illustrious Minister of Education, or whoever replaces him, in order to have their questions answered. That is not accountability. That is a weird vendetta that is not going to make things better.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Questions?

**MPP Jamie West:** Thank you to both my colleagues for their speech. I have a question for the member for Oshawa, who talked about the chronic underfunding of our schools.

This bill seems to be a distraction from that, pointing out a handful of individuals with expenses, which is ironic because we had the Minister of Labour go to Paris for a wedding; we had one of the members opposite go to Vegas for a massage. We've had the Minister of Labour get floor seats to a Leafs game and raise a record number of money by people who were rewarded with skills development funding. So if you want to hold people accountable, you might want to buy yourself a mirror.

But Speaker, I'm trying to understand: What does adequate funding for our school boards mean for the students? To the member for Oshawa, who was a teacher and would understand, first-hand.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Though I don't know that I can speak to it first-hand anymore—it's been 11 years—I still listen and know how bad it was at the time. I know that class sizes have not gotten smaller. I know that there are not more caring adults in the classroom. I know that there are a number of students who have been told that they have to stay home because there aren't supports at the school for them, that this government is allowing that to happen, that it's gotten so much worse.

This government needs to fund education appropriately and not rely on teachers and education workers to spend their own personal money to offset these cuts. I feel sick to my stomach when they talk about how much they're investing in education. It isn't enough, and it's not keeping up with the cost, whether it's capital investment that's needed—the crumbling infrastructure—whether it's—yes, the cost of providing services like education goes up year over year. So do groceries, right? They're not investing enough. They need to invest in education, invest in our kids, and invest in this province's future.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**MPP Paul Vickers:** I find it interesting that the member from Oshawa talks about letting the constituents decide who's going to be the new trustees, or that is going to be re-elected as trustees, when most of the time I would declare that there are no elections for board trustees. There's very little interest in the board trustees.

So I think it's important that students and parents and teachers deserve to know that money being invested into the classroom is actually going to support students. Bill 33 adds ministry auditors and strengthens internal audit requirements for boards.

Mr. Speaker, which part of more auditing of public dollars does member opposite oppose?

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** The beginning of the member's question about his concerns with letting constituents vote for local trustees makes me feel really nervous. If that is an indicator of how this government sees a layer of democracy: duly elected trustees.

Is it a perfect system? No. Do we in Oshawa have really active and accessible trustees? Yes, we do. And if that's an anomaly, or if that's not what he has in his riding, then we should all be encouraging people to seek out their trustees. We should be funding education so that those trustees actually can reach for tools to improve our schools.

But he's asked about auditing. We all want to make sure that dollars go where they're supposed to, but how about you actually spend the dollars in the first place to meet the needs that

everyone interested in education, except for this government, has flagged as being priorities. Spend the money.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Mr. Tom Rakocovic:** That was a very confusing government question. I just want to remind the government member that there are these things called municipal elections and trustees get elected at that time. And I don't know if it's different in different parts of the province or—anyway, I don't want to even go there. I already did.

Since they've now appointed someone to take over, for instance, the TDSB, we are seeing classrooms with three grades in one class. And then we hear from the government about financial accountability—a government that's put Ontario at \$150 billion in debt and counting; a government that has sold Ontario Place, but actually it's spent \$2 billion to get back \$1 billion over 95 years.

Anyway, why do they have two sets of standards when it comes to this? I don't understand.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I can't be expected to answer for them. I have no idea what they're doing. I feel like this bill is a perfect example of something that is not solving a problem that has been identified by experts in the field.

This whole concept of a supervisor of a board that we're seeing in a few of the boards—let's just think about the workload of that one individual versus the trustees. I've been asked earlier about an audit. The audit committee or parent involvement committee, special education advisory committee, the supervised alternative learning committee, suspension appeal committee, expulsion appeal committee: These are things that are in addition to the meetings that people can go and attend, right? This is in addition to the trustees answering their phones and doing the work in the community.

The government has not solved a problem. They've created new layers of problem in this province for education. I can't speak to why—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions, please.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Okay. But I will in the next question.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Whitby.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Well, thank you, Speaker. My question is to the member from Oshawa. When it comes to keeping our schools safe, early intervention is key, and we've learned that. That's why youth engagement and any gang initiatives delivered by school resource officers are so critical. These programs aren't about policing students; they're about building trust, preventing violence and ensuring that law enforcement can form positive relationships with young people before problems even arise. Bill 33 strengthens that partnership—it does.

It's not about turning schools into prisons. It's about making sure every student and teacher feels safe, supported and, yes, respected. Does the member opposite support the important, proactive work that police officers like the Durham Regional Police Service do every day to keep our schools safe?

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I hope nobody is talking about turning our schools into prisons. That felt weird.

I'm going to read part of that letter that I already read from Mr. Smith: "Decisions regarding police involvement in schools should be made in consultation with all local voices, including parents, students, community members and organizations led by local school boards, not mandated by the provincial government."

That was from a letter that came in, and I think that it's part of that broader conversation around policing in our schools. But if he's going to talk about best outcomes and early interventions, then let's talk about therapies in school and the children with special needs who are not getting anything that they need to support them. Let's invest in them. That's an early intervention.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Ms. Lee Fairclough:** I'm very pleased to be here today to debate Bill 33. This bill is not about students, it's not about parents and it's not about governance. This government offers no lessons on governance, Speaker.

A reminder of what the Auditor General has had to say about the practices of this government: On the \$8-billion secret Greenbelt land giveaway, she said, "The exercise to change the Greenbelt boundaries in Fall 2022 cannot be described as a standard or defensible process." They gave preferential treatment to certain developers with direct access to the chief of staff to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

On the \$2.5 billion spent on Ontario Place, where a 99-year lease was handed to a foreign-owned spa with a murky financial background—this is what the AG said about that: The process and decisions were "not fair, transparent or accountable," and further concluded that there were many instances where the rules and guidelines outlined in the call for development document were not followed.

And of course, there's the latest, greatest hit that we've been discussing this morning, the Skills Development Fund, where once again the Auditor General cited a process that was neither fair, transparent nor accountable, as her office found over half the funds went to lower-ranked applicants hand-picked by the minister's office, many with connections to the PC government.

So here we are with Bill 33. The idea here is that we're going to give the minister extraordinary powers to override local parents and local decision-making. To me, it feels like putting the fox in charge of the proverbial henhouse.

This is not about education. We know this by looking at the sad education record of this government, Speaker. According to the FAO's report last week, the real per-student provincial funding to school boards, when adjusted for inflation, was \$14,504 in 2025—the lowest level in a decade—and it will drop even further by 2027, to an estimated \$14,111 per student. The backlog of capital repairs at schools is now over \$21 billion. So when you reduce funding by an average of \$1,500 per student and you tell the school board that they cannot consolidate or close schools to raise revenues, deficits are inevitable. We've seen this story before. These are public schools that require public funding.

I know that in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore—which is next to the 2.5 billion sinkholed public dollars of Ontario Place, by the way—they don't understand the priorities of this



government. I have heard from so many parents and constituents concerned about Bill 33. Here's an example of a letter that I got from Judy: "As parents, we turn to our trustees on several occasions—for support with transportation issues, special education needs, arts awards programs, bullying and even ensuring child safety. These are real, urgent concerns that families like mine face every day.

"They were democratically elected. This sweeping removal of officials makes us look very much like the new regime to the south of our border. This is not how our Canadian, our Ontarian democracy works." We need to make sure that we preserve the local perspective in these decisions.

"The government's decisions to suspend our trustees, block their access to communication and impose strict oversight has created significant disruption"—I thought maybe some of the members opposite might want to know what those disruptions were. "These actions are not just harming trustees—they are harming the children, families and communities they serve."

They're feeling left in the dark. They can't get answers. There's no leadership, support or a clear way forward. So I respectfully urge the government to reconsider its approach, and I thank Judy for sending her email to me. Speaker, I received so many more that were similar to Judy's message.

I have to concur with constituents, as a legislator and as a parent. I've seen the impacts of these cuts in my own children's school. My son is in grade 11 right now at a publicly funded high school. Do you know that there's not enough books to go around? They actually have to share novels. Sometimes they don't even make it all the way through a novel, because they can't take them home, because they have to make sure everything stays in the classroom so they don't lose any of them. The classrooms are crowded, and those who are there who might need a little bit of extra attention are really at a very high risk of not getting any of that attention.

The kids are not okay, and as unemployment rises, with 700,000 out of work in this province, I know many high school and post-secondary students are struggling to find summer jobs, with youth unemployment at almost 18% in Ontario.

Financial stress on families is taking its toll, and schools should be a gateway to mental health support. The 2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health found some pretty shocking statistics, actually. Over 37% of students report experiencing an elevated level of stress or pressure in their lives. The percentage of those students with stress has increased since 2015 from 29% to 37%; 51% have moderate to serious levels of psychological distress, and that has only been increasing.

We're not doing enough to provide the mental health supports for our kids. I can tell you, we have an amazing person who works in our school who serves well over a thousand kids every day, but his time is split between two schools and he can barely manage. The teachers are looking for more support, as well, to support our kids. The classrooms are overcrowded. Yet this is what we're debating in Bill 33 today. We're not debating all of those important things and what we're actually doing in our schools for kids; we're just talking about centralizing power.

Some schools have nothing. Like many other MPPs, I met with the Ontario Autism Coalition this week, and they cite the irreplaceable role that trustees play in ensuring that their kids are getting the special supports that they might need to realize their full potential.

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The Premier likes to say that people can call him directly and he'll get to the bottom of their problem. Is the minister planning to field parents' requests to help in our public schools with this change? Is that how it will work? The minister answers them all and makes sure that we actually address them? I thought—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I hate to interrupt, but the time is now for private members' public business.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.