

Question 4: Education reform has been a constant on the PC government's agenda. However, this focus has resulted in unhealthy tension between a variety of stakeholders in the education realm. Is this tension a concern for you and how do you propose to diffuse this situation?

TC: Our government's reforms to public education - including a new curriculum, standardized tests and clear report cards - promote excellence and accountability. I believe that the system must now be given time and stability to enable these positive changes to take root. At the post-secondary level, I want to take aggressive action to attract and retain the best and brightest students and researchers in Ontario.

To that end, I have put forward the following policy proposals:

- Fix the school funding formula. Despite honest efforts, there remain some things we have not yet got right. It's clear that the funding formula is not working properly for some schools in some communities. I will work with school boards to make the necessary reforms, so the formula is fair to all schools;
- Stability through long-term collective bargaining agreements. I will work with public and separate school boards to encourage long-term contracts with teachers - to further promote much-needed stability within Ontario's school system; and
- Renew the Ontario Research & Development Challenge Fund. Keeping world-class researchers in Ontario is fundamental to building a skills culture. It's time to renew the government's commitment to the Challenge Fund, which invests in research projects that feature collaboration between Ontario-based research institutions and the private sector. My government will invest \$500 million in Ontario's research capacity over five years, extending the mandate of the Challenge Fund.

EE: I believe that having the best education for our young people is a priority for all Ontarians. In the last 7 years, we have made positive changes to the curriculum, standardize report cards, and teacher testing. I want to build on the changes that we made, and continue to focus on providing quality education, but at the same time I want to take steps to create a more conciliatory environment.

I have said that we cannot solve the challenges confronting Ontario parents, teachers and students without bringing those people to the table who are on the front lines with our young people every day - teachers. As we all know, you cannot mandate good will.

As I have said throughout the campaign and as I reiterated in my recent education announcement, I support maintaining the principles of quality, accountability, choice and fairness in Ontario's education system. I have proposed a six-year plan designed to do three things: - put more resources into Ontario classrooms to help both students and teachers, ensure that every student gets the education they need to build their future and give school boards the ability and the tools to plan for the future.

Our education system must be flexible enough and strong enough to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow in Ontario and indeed around the globe. I am proposing to ensure every student has a textbook by allocating an additional \$65 million for new textbooks in Ontario's classrooms and resources for training for the new curriculum so both teachers and students can maximize the value of the recent enhancements made in Ontario.

I have also proposed to establish a three-year base funding commitment for school boards so that planning and budgeting at the local level is more effective, and I have committed to ensuring

the formula is responsive to the needs of communities and schools across the province through an annual review of the funding formula and a new Minister's Quality in the Classroom Initiative - a minimum of \$50 million so that any in-year adjustments required to meet classroom and transportation needs of students can be made.

Even with the changes we've made, too many students face waiting lists for special needs assessments and parents face too much red tape in obtaining the services their special needs children require. We need to do more in this area to help students achieve. We will fix the waiting list problem and increase access for special needs children and their families.

I have proposed the expansion of the Early Reading Strategy and the introduction of an Early Math program to help our young learners get a head start in mastering the basics of mathematics. Building on the commitment I made in a previous Budget, I am proposing a second phase of Ontario Student Opportunities Trust Fund.

This extension of this Fund would bring to more than 400,000 the total number of students helped to access post-secondary education over the decade. I also believe that special provisions must be and will be made to make sure that there is a space for every willing and qualified student who wants to pursue higher learning and that as discussed with parents across the province he would work with the post-secondary sector to address the double-cohort issue.

Every student deserves the same high quality education, whether in a private or public system. As I have said throughout the campaign, I support the education tax credit and strongly support parental choice in education and I believe we can ensure our young people achieve high standards of education.

JF: Tension and disruption jeopardizes the education of our children. If elected Premier, I will introduce legislation that would make education an essential service. This would provide much needed stability to parents, students and teachers.

Parents tell me they are concerned about the disruptions teacher strikes cause to their children's education and to family life. Parents want certainty. They want to know their children are getting the best education possible.

Teachers tell me that they are concerned that, as a result of strikes, students are missing out on important parts of the curriculum. Rendering it illegal for teachers to strike will make sure that teachers are allowed, without interruption, to do what they do best - teaching our children.

Our prosperity depends on educational excellence. That's why education is the second-highest public expenditure in Ontario today.

We should not forget, however, parents are the first educators of their children. Parental choice must be kept - and strengthened - as a foundational plank to our system of education. Education works best when parents are involved. It is the Crown's responsibility to assist parents, not replace them.

The Equality on Education Tax Credit was developed for parents and their children. The tax credit supports:

- educational choice by giving the tax credit directly to parents and not to schools;
- parents who want their children to be educated in their culture and religion; and
- educational equality.

The real issue is how different visions of education can be accommodated in a diverse, democratic society like Ontario. Our answer is to support educational choice for parents. Real and legitimate diversity exists in this province. If elected Premier, I have promise to recognize and support it.

CS: Yes, obviously it's a concern due to its effects on students and parents. Children should not be used as pawns in educational wars, period. I agree with everything our government did in the sphere of education over the past seven years, it was necessary and worthwhile. But one of the critical factors in governing successfully is knowing when to make changes and knowing when to manage changes: now is the time to manage change.

I propose a two-year moratorium on major changes or new government initiatives in the sphere of education. We need to turn down the temperature and address the present fatigue factor when it comes to educational reform.

EW: Parents and students want stability in the education system. I am committed to building bridges with our teachers to ensure that our students can achieve their full potential. Within 90 days of assuming the office of Premier, I would conduct a review of the funding formula to ensure that it is meeting the needs of our students. I would also expand the capacity at teacher's colleges to deal with the looming teacher shortage and create a master teacher designation to ensure that our veteran teachers are better able to pass on their skills and knowledge to those new to the profession. To achieve these goals successfully, I am committed to including educators in these changes and in future policy decision-making.



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