

LET'S MAKE OUR SCHOOLS SAFE

Violent Incidents Are Increasing



Almost 80% of public elementary teachers report that violent incidents in schools are increasing. This is the result of decreased funding and fewer front-line workers providing supports to students. As parents and educators, we share a common goal. We want students to receive the supports they need to learn in a safe environment.

Since the 1980s, school boards have been required to provide special education programs and services for exceptional students. Yet, funding for inclusive classrooms has never met the actual needs of students.

Students with special needs, mental health issues or high-risk behaviours are not getting the front-line supports and services they need in a timely manner.

The Ontario government needs to provide the adequate resources, services and supports for all students in need. It must improve the education funding formula, particularly Special Education funding, which is based on a mathematical model rather than actual student needs.

What Students and Schools Need

Timely Assessments. Students with special needs, mental health issues and high-risk behaviours, particularly in Kindergarten and primary grades, are waiting too long for assessments in schools and communities. Lack of early assessment negatively impacts these students when it comes to their emotional and academic well-being, health, social interaction and speech language development.

More supports for students with special needs. There are not enough front-line supports in classrooms and schools like educational assistants, psychologists and others to make sure that students have the supports and resources they need to do well.

More mental health supports for students. One in five children and youth in Ontario have a mental health challenge. Parents are struggling to get referrals and specialist appointments for their children. The government needs to provide more children's mental health services in schools and communities.

More front-line support workers for all students in need. Students with special needs, mental health issues and high-risk, disruptive behaviors arising from other circumstances need earlier and better access to timely, sustained and direct supports in schools. That includes educational assistants, school board psychologists, behavioural therapists, support counselors, social workers, child and youth workers and speech-language pathologists to meet the rising number of these students in classrooms.

Training for school administrators and staff. More and better training is needed on procedures for school administrators and staff to report and deal effectively with violent incidents.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) continues to advocate for these changes with parents and community groups such as the Ontario Autism Coalition and Children's Mental Health Ontario.



Parent Checklist: If a Violent Incident Affects Your Child

School boards, principals, educators and other board employees have legal responsibilities when it comes to reporting and dealing with violent incidents or serious student incidents. Serious student incidents include activities such as bullying, harm to physical or mental well-being or threats to inflict serious bodily harm. Here's a checklist of what to expect, and to ask for, from your school principal.

Principal's responsibilities:

- ✓ The principal has investigated the incident when a Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form is received from a school board employee.
- ✓ The principal has dealt with the incident to protect students from physical or mental harm. This might include: a risk assessment; appropriate supports for all students involved in the incident; and possible progressive discipline.
- ✓ The principal must notify parents/guardians of students involved in the incident and provide information on: the nature of the activity that resulted in harm; the harm that resulted; steps taken to protect a student's safety; any disciplinary measures taken in response to the incident; and the supports to be provided to any student who was harmed in the incident as well as the student who engaged in the incident.

Here's How You Can Take Action!

The Ontario government has made significant budget cuts to education instead of increasing funding needed to address violent incidents in schools and other issues.

- If a violent incident harms your child, make sure your school principal is following the checklist in this leaflet.
- Share the information in this leaflet with other parents/guardians, school councils and trustees. Ask to have the issue of violence in schools put on school council agendas.
- Contact your MPP to advocate for more front-line support staff in our schools.
- Send a letter to your MPP to stop further government cuts to education. You'll find a draft letter at BuildingBetterSchools.ca/funding.
- Sign up to receive further campaign updates and calls to action at BuildingBetterSchools.ca.

Ontario's public education system and its students need investment, not cuts. It's time the education funding formula was fixed.

