

MEDIA RELEASE

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FAO REPORT OUTLINES ONTARIO'S \$21.7 BILLION SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE CRISIS CAUSED BY FORD GOVERNMENT NEGLIGENCE

TORONTO, ON — The Financial Accountability Office's (FAO) report released today on school disrepair paints a grim picture of neglect and underfunding for Ontario's schools. The report estimates that over the next 10 years, it will cost \$21.7 billion to address the school repair backlog and to keep schools in a state of good repair. Currently, schools are dealing with crumbling infrastructure and outdated and unsafe facilities, making it increasingly difficult for students to learn and for staff to work safely.

"The Ford government's failure to address the school repair backlog is atrocious," said Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) President Karen Littlewood.

"Students are trying to learn in environments where ceilings are leaking, and facilities are falling apart. Educational staff, already overburdened and burnt out, now face the added stress of unsafe and precarious working conditions. This is no way to foster education, opportunity, or community."

The Toronto District School Board has the highest share of school buildings in disrepair, with over 84 per cent graded below a state of good repair. The Thames Valley District School Board ranked second worst with more than 45 per cent of school buildings graded below a state of good repair. For Toronto alone, it is estimated that \$6.8 billion is needed over ten years to address the repair backlog and keep school buildings in a state of good repair.

On top of the egregious school repair backlog, many school boards are dealing with overcrowding. Nearly 70 per cent of schools in Durham District School Board are overcapacity. In the Thames Valley District School Board, over 40 per cent of schools are overcapacity. But every school board has been impacted by underfunding in different ways. Across Ontario, it is estimated that more than 112,000 students are not in appropriate learning spaces, such as grossly overcrowded classrooms, makeshift temporary learning spaces, and portables that are not meant to be used permanently.

"This report confirms what we've been saying all along: the Ford government is failing our schools, our kids, and our future," stated Littlewood. "They've tried to hide these immense failures, deliberately withholding this data from families. Finally, today, we have the truth, but we shouldn't have had to wait this long. We should have a Ministry of Education that prioritizes transparency instead of hiding the truth from students and staff."

The FAO estimates that given the current levels of underfunding by the Ford government, the percentage of school buildings that are not in a state of good repair will almost double in the next 10 years, going from 38 per cent this year to nearly 75 per cent by the 2033-2034 school year.

“Every day this government delays, the situation worsens. I have presented to the government numerous times on this issue as have my colleagues at other education unions,” Littlewood added. “We have repeatedly called on the Ford government to provide funding to address the multi-billion-dollar school repair backlog and fix overcrowding in Ontario’s public schools. Every time our concerns have been summarily dismissed.”

OSSTF/FEESO will continue to push for proper funding for public education, including addressing the billion-dollar school repair backlog. We call on everyone to write to their MPP, to the Minister of Education, and to Premier Ford directly to call on them to prioritize education funding in the next budget.

Littlewood concluded, saying “Their highly misleading claims of “historic” investments in education are clearly fictional. But it’s time to face the facts and make legitimate investments in Ontario’s public education system. Our students deserve no less.”

OSSTF/FEESO, founded in 1919, has over 60,000 members across Ontario. They include public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, early childhood educators, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, university support staff, and many others in education.

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