

ETFO calls for government to address mental health crisis in schools

For Immediate Release – February 27, 2023

TORONTO, ON – In new data released today by [People for Education](#), principals report that students and school staff are under “severe stress,” and that mental health and well-being are their top priorities. The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) continues to call on the province to provide adequate mental health resources and funding, and on school boards to deliver the comprehensive supports educators and students need.

“Educators and students need an education budget that prioritizes their mental health, well-being, and academic success,” says ETFO President Karen Brown. “The government must expand school-based resources, supports, and services to meet the growing mental health and well-being needs of students and educators in every region across Ontario. Those who live in rural communities deserve the same access to services as those who live in Toronto.”

The government must fund the supports in schools and in the community that are necessary to ensure students’ developmental, emotional, and behavioural needs are met so that ETFO members can focus on supporting students’ learning needs. School boards also play a role. System coordination, a focus on equity, and early identification should be prioritized, as well as mental health promotion.

“School boards should also avoid confusing, performative messages related to health, wellness, and mental health. Although they say they support well-being, their focus seems to be on academic achievement alone, instead of a holistic approach to learning that supports student growth, wellness, and healthy, active living,” notes Brown.

In a recent [submission](#) to the provincial Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, ETFO made the following recommendations related to mental health:

- provide additional funding to improve access to in-school supports, including guidance counsellors, social workers, psychologists, and child and youth workers, especially in underserved areas;
- allocate funding for additional in-school and community supports necessary to ensure students’ developmental and behavioural needs are met;
- Develop and deliver long-term, fully funded, comprehensive, culturally responsive mental health supports for students, in consultation with mental health experts, teachers, education workers, unions and other education stakeholders; and
- allocate ongoing, sustainable funding for high-quality professional learning for educators in the area of student mental health, to take place within the instructional day.

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-2-

ETFO members report feeling overwhelmed and concerned about the volume of support that is expected from them: curriculum implementation; closing learning gaps; and addressing increased mental health needs. Although educators are strongly committed to supporting student mental health, they are not mental health professionals. They do not possess the specific skills required to address complex mental health needs, some of which can lead to [violence in schools](#). When mental health needs go unaddressed, violence increases.

Adds Brown, “Students rely on educators and other education workers to support their academic, physical, and socio-emotional needs. Without access to the critical supports and resources they need, many students, including those who are disproportionately impacted (e.g., students who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ and/or racialized) will continue to be underserved and at risk. At its core, this is a human rights issue that impacts student and member safety and well-being.”

Supporting the social and emotional development of young people is a shared responsibility. The province and school boards must continue to engage in meaningful consultation with education unions, mental health experts, and other partners.

[ETFO](#) represents approximately 83,000 members, including public elementary teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel, and professional support personnel. Visit [BuildingBetterSchools.ca](#).

-30-

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