



# **ETFO Submission to the Ministry of Education**

## ***Bill 101, Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026***

April 2026

**Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario**  
**Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario**

136 Isabella Street, Toronto, ON M4Y 0B5  
416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836  
etfo.ca


ETFO represents 84,000 elementary public school teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel, and professional support personnel across the province. Its Building Better Schools education agenda can be viewed at **BuildingBetterSchools.ca**.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) represents more than 84,000 public elementary school teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel, and professional support personnel across Ontario. ETFO is the largest teacher federation in Canada and a key stakeholder in the province's publicly funded education system.

ETFO appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy regarding Bill 101, *Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026*.

The government has framed Bill 101 as legislation intended to improve student achievement, strengthen accountability, and enhance governance within Ontario's public education system. However, despite the breadth and significance of the proposed changes, the legislation was hastily introduced without the necessary consultation with education stakeholders, including educators and their representatives. This approach reflects a continued pattern of centralized, top-down policy development that fails to reflect the lived realities of students, educators, and communities across Ontario.

Public education in Ontario is grounded in principles of democratic accountability, local responsiveness, and professional expertise. Bill 101 undermines each of these foundations. Rather than addressing the systemic challenges facing Ontario's education system—including chronic underfunding, increased student needs, and insufficient supports—the legislation introduces sweeping structural changes that centralize authority, weaken local governance, and interfere with established labour relations processes.

### **Lack of Meaningful Consultation and Misaligned Policy Priorities**

Bill 101 was introduced without meaningful consultation with those most directly impacted by its provisions, including educators, education workers, school boards, and the communities they serve. This

absence of consultation is particularly concerning given the breadth and complexity of the proposed amendments.

Effective public policy—particularly in education—must be informed by the expertise and lived experience of those working within the system. Educators, education workers, and local school boards bring critical knowledge of student needs, community contexts, and system pressures. The failure to engage these perspectives meaningfully prior to tabling legislation increases the risk that policy measures will be disconnected from the realities of Ontario’s classrooms.

This approach undermines confidence in both the legislative process and the resulting policy framework. Public education is a shared responsibility, and decisions of this magnitude should be developed through collaborative, transparent engagement rather than unilateral action.

At the same time, Bill 101 does not address the systemic issues that are consistently identified by educators, families, and education stakeholders as the primary barriers to student success. These include chronic underfunding, increasing class sizes, insufficient special education supports, rising incidents of violence in schools, and growing student mental health needs.

School boards across Ontario are facing sustained financial pressures that are not the result of mismanagement, but rather the cumulative impact of years of underinvestment in public education. Legislative changes that restructure governance or centralize authority do not address these underlying challenges.

By focusing on structural reforms rather than classroom conditions and resource needs, Bill 101 diverts attention away from the real issues affecting student learning and well-being.

## Erosion of Local Democracy and School Board Governance

Democratically elected school boards are a foundational component of Ontario’s public education system. They ensure that local communities have a direct voice in decision-making and that policies reflect the needs and priorities of students and families. Bill 101 significantly weakens this model.

The legislation reduces the authority of elected trustees while transferring decision-making power to unelected officials, including newly empowered chief executive officers (CEOs), and expanding the regulatory authority of the Minister of Education over school board processes.

It is important to recognize that elected trustees remain in place today only because of sustained and widespread opposition to the government’s initial proposal to eliminate them altogether. The Minister of Education repeatedly stated his intention to eliminate the role of elected trustees, and the government only reversed course after significant public pressure from educators, parents, families, and communities across Ontario. While trustees remain, Bill 101 substantially diminishes their role by removing key responsibilities and limiting their ability to exercise meaningful oversight.

This results in a model where trustees retain their formal status but are significantly constrained in their ability to represent their communities effectively.

Bill 101 also enables the Minister to establish, through regulation, the circumstances under which school board decisions or motions require confirmation, and to designate the board official responsible for providing that confirmation, including the Chair, the CEO, or another individual. The legislation does not define the scope or limits of these requirements, thereby conferring broad discretionary authority on the Minister to shape local decision-making processes.

The absence of clear parameters introduces uncertainty and raises concerns regarding the potential for inconsistent or politically influenced oversight.

Collectively, these changes represent a significant departure from established principles of local democratic governance and risk eroding public trust in Ontario's education system.

### **Centralization of Power and Shift to a Corporate Model**

Bill 101 introduces structural changes that reconfigure school board leadership and governance by separating the roles of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Education Officer (CEdO), and assigning significant authority to executive leadership.

This restructuring reflects a shift toward a centralized, management-oriented model of governance.

Public education, however, is not a corporate enterprise. It is a public good rooted in relationships, community engagement, and professional expertise. Effective governance structures must support these principles rather than displace them.

By concentrating authority in executive roles and reducing democratic oversight, Bill 101 risks prioritizing administrative and financial considerations over educational outcomes and student needs.

Furthermore, centralization reduces the system's capacity to respond to the diverse needs of communities across Ontario. Students in urban, rural, northern, and remote communities experience different challenges, and governance structures must retain the flexibility to respond to these local realities.

### **Interference with Collective Bargaining**

Bill 101 introduces significant amendments to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act that alter both the structure and operation of collective bargaining in Ontario's education sector.

At the central bargaining table, the legislation removes the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) as the employer bargaining agency and replaces it with the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE). It further establishes a committee within CODE that is responsible for overseeing and directing bargaining activities. The composition, authority, and governance of this committee are subject to regulation by the Minister, providing the government with substantial indirect influence over the employer side of the bargaining process.

At the same time, the legislation maintains provisions asserting that neither CODE nor its governing structures act as an agent of the Crown and that the Crown is not the employer. This creates a structural inconsistency in which the government exercises significant control over central bargaining processes while distancing itself from the legal responsibilities associated with employer status.

Bill 101 also expands the Minister's authority to replace CODE with another person or body and to establish policies and procedures governing that entity, without a requirement for consultation. These provisions introduce further instability into the central bargaining framework and raise serious concerns regarding the independence, integrity, and good faith nature of collective bargaining.

At the local bargaining level, Bill 101 introduces additional changes that shift authority away from democratically elected trustees and toward administrative leadership. In particular, the legislation provides that the ratification of local agreements is contingent on execution by the Director of Education, now designated as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). This represents a departure from established practice and removes trustees from their long-standing role in local bargaining for English-language public boards.

These changes alter the balance of decision-making authority at the local level and may impact the dynamics of negotiations, particularly where administrative and governance roles are more closely aligned with provincial direction.

In addition, Bill 101 expands the regulation-making authority of the government to include matters related to local bargaining. The breadth of this authority is not clearly defined in the legislation and introduces the potential for further intervention in local bargaining processes through future regulations.

Across both central and local bargaining, Bill 101 relies heavily on broad and undefined regulation-making powers. Key elements of the new framework—including the composition and authority of the CODE committee, the processes for ratification, and the scope of ministerial oversight—are not set out in the legislation itself but are instead left to be determined at a later stage.

This reliance on vague language and future regulations creates a high degree of uncertainty regarding how the new bargaining system will function in practice. Parties to collective bargaining are being asked to operate within a framework whose full scope and implications are not yet known.

Such uncertainty undermines the stability and predictability that are essential to free and fair collective bargaining. It also raises concerns about transparency and accountability, as significant aspects of the system may be determined through regulation without legislative scrutiny.

Stable and fair labour relations depend on clearly defined roles and good faith negotiations. Bill 101 introduces ambiguity and concentrates control in ways that undermine these fundamental principles at both the central and local levels.

## **Undermining Professional Judgement and the Impact on Equity**

Educators rely on their professional judgement to meet the diverse and evolving needs of their students.

This professional judgement is grounded in curriculum knowledge, evidence of student learning, and expertise developed through training and experience.

Bill 101 includes provisions that enable the Ministry to decide what educational materials and instructional practices should be used in the classroom, and to require boards to comply with those directives.

These provisions have significant implications for educators' ability to deliver responsive, inclusive, and effective instruction.

Restricting the range of resources that educators can use to deliver the curriculum limits their ability to reflect the diversity of Ontario's classrooms. Students come from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, and effective teaching requires the flexibility to select resources that are relevant, inclusive, and responsive to those identities and experiences.

Educators must be able to draw on a broad range of materials to support culturally responsive pedagogy, address systemic inequities, and ensure that all students see themselves reflected in their learning.

Limiting access to diverse resources undermines these efforts and will disproportionately impact students from historically marginalized communities.

In addition, restricting instructional resources constrains educators' ability to differentiate instruction.

Classrooms include students with a wide range of learning needs, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students requiring enrichment or additional support. Effective differentiation requires flexibility in instructional approaches, materials, and assessment strategies.

Centralized control over resources imposes a one-size-fits-all approach that does not reflect the wide range of student needs. Rather than supporting student achievement, such constraints will hinder educators' ability to provide equitable and responsive learning environments.

Improving student outcomes requires trusting and supporting educator expertise—not limiting it.

### **Addressing Student Achievement**

If the government's objective is to improve student achievement, policy decisions must focus on the conditions that support learning.

Bill 101 eliminates the requirement for school boards to implement school climate surveys, removing a crucial tool used to assess student well-being, safety, and inclusion within school communities. School climate surveys provide critical data on issues such as bullying, discrimination, student engagement, and sense of belonging—factors that are directly linked to student achievement and overall well-being.

The elimination of this requirement reduces transparency and limits the ability of school boards, educators, and communities to identify and respond to systemic issues affecting students. Without consistent and system-wide data, it becomes more difficult to monitor progress, allocate resources effectively, and ensure that schools are safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for all students.

Students in Ontario require smaller class sizes, increased supports for special education, safe and inclusive learning environments, adequate staffing and resources, and timely access to mental health and well-being supports. These priorities are well documented and consistently identified by educators and education stakeholders, yet despite its title, Bill 101 does not address these priorities.

The challenges facing Ontario's education system are not the result of governance structures, but of sustained underfunding and increasing demands on schools. Structural changes that centralize authority do not improve classroom conditions and will not lead to better outcomes for students.

## **CONCLUSION**

Bill 101 represents a significant restructuring of Ontario's public education system.

By weakening local democracy, centralizing authority, interfering with collective bargaining, and limiting professional judgement, the legislation risks undermining the conditions necessary for student success.

Public education is most effective when it is locally responsive, democratically accountable, and grounded in professional expertise.

ETFO urges the government to reconsider the direction of Bill 101 and to engage in meaningful consultation with education stakeholders to develop policies that address the real challenges facing Ontario's students and schools.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. Withdraw Bill 101 and engage in a meaningful consultation process with education stakeholders, including ETFO, to develop evidence-based policy measures that support student achievement and strengthen Ontario's public education system.



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