



FEDERATION OF CANADIAN SECONDARY STUDENTS  
FÉDÉRATION DES ÉLÈVES DU SECONDAIRE AU CANADA

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# 2023 ONTARIO PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS SUBMISSION

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

February 2023

Federation of Canadian Secondary Students / Fédération des élèves du secondaire au Canada

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Registered charity in Canada  
No. 818506784 RR 0001

14 February 2023

Legislative Assembly of Ontario  
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs  
99 Wellesley St W  
Room 1405, Whitney Block  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs:

Please see attached our submission to the Ontario 2023 Pre-Budget Consultations. Our recommendations are underpinned by the belief that every student deserves to have a fulsome educational experience aligned with their interests and skills that prepares them well for their post-secondary endeavours, whether that be the workplace, university or college.

We also ask the Government of Ontario to consider in policymaking the social-emotional impacts of COVID-19 on young people. While students have indeed incurred substantial learning loss through the pandemic, they have also lost out on significant developmental milestones.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Yu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Bruce Yu**  
Executive Director / Directeur général  
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## About FCSS-FESC

Founded in 2012, the Federation of Canadian Secondary Students / Fédération des élèves du secondaire au Canada (FCSS-FESC) is an entirely non-partisan youth-led charity that aims to inform, educate, and ultimately empower high school students to foster social justice initiatives in their schools and local communities. Over our 10+ year history, we have advocated for the interests of Canadian secondary students, simultaneously developing programming enriching the educational experience.

## Recommendations

- 1) That the Government of Ontario increase class size funding for specialised programs.
- 2) That the Government of Ontario increase funding for standalone virtual schools operated by district school boards.
- 3) That the Government of Ontario invest \$30 million in school breakfast programs and healthy snacks.

# Detailed Recommendations

## (1) That the Government of Ontario increase class size funding for specialised programs

Specialised programs such as the International Baccalaureate® (IB) and Advanced Placement® (AP) provide students in Ontario high schools with the opportunity to go beyond the curriculums and challenge themselves academically. However, as students also work towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma and are enrolled in publicly funded Ontario schools, these classes are funded at the standard average of 23 students per class.<sup>1</sup>

While some school boards have adequate interest to maintain full classes, this is not the case across the province. For instance, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) has made a proposal to close the IB Programme at one of only two high schools in its jurisdiction that offers said programme.<sup>2</sup> Given that IB class sizes fluctuate far below the funded average of 23 students/class, continuing to operate IB presents the HWDSB with financial difficulties. This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that the coterminous English Catholic district school board (HWCDSB) does not offer the IB Programme. The proposed change, if implemented, means that the entirety of the Hamilton region will have a single school offering the IB Programme. In contrast, both the Toronto English public (TDSB) and Toronto English Catholic school boards (TCDSB) offer the IB Programme at several secondary schools.

To ensure that students across Ontario can benefit from challenging and rigorous curricula, we ask the Government of Ontario to adapt class size funding for specialised programs to ensure that all students, not just those in the most urban areas have access to specialised programs.

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<sup>1</sup> “Education Funding Technical Paper 2022–23”, (March 2022), online: <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-2022-23-technical-paper-en-2022-03-15.pdf> at 14.

<sup>2</sup> Students of Ancaster High School, “Save IB Program at Ancaster High School”, (19 January 2022), online: *Change.org* <https://www.change.org/p/save-ib-program-at-ancaster-high-school>.

## (2) That the Government of Ontario increase funding for standalone virtual schools operated by district school boards

Hybrid learning - whereby a classroom includes both in-person and virtual learners presents challenges for educators and students alike. It is difficult for teachers to manage, from a technical standpoint, a virtual learning environment while also teaching in person. The need to adapt each lesson for both virtual and in-person formats also places additional burdens on teachers. Perhaps most concerning, in hybrid learning, neither online learners nor in-person students receive the full attention of their teachers.

Virtual schools (operating synchronously with qualified OCT teachers) place students in fully virtual classrooms where all of their peers are learning in the same environment. These schools provide families with the option to choose the learning model that best fits the needs of students. Course offerings are dictated by student interest and enrolment in these schools is often low. This means many schools are unable to offer a breadth of course programming options, in light of the fact that the funded average class size for online learning is 30 students vs. 23 students for in-person learning.<sup>3</sup> It is imperative that students can access course options that align with their interests and post-secondary endeavours.

We therefore ask the Government of Ontario to continue to provide district school boards with funds to support the operations of dedicated virtual elementary and secondary schools and increase funding for online learning to 25 students per class to allow for increased course offerings.

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<sup>3</sup> *Supra* note 1.

### (3) That the Government of Ontario invest \$30 million in school breakfast programs and healthy snacks

Rampant inflation has caused soaring food prices, exasperating food insecurity. Indeed, a recent study determined that in 2021, one in six Ontario households struggle with putting food on the table.<sup>4</sup> Hunger affects students academically and can have further detrimental impacts on graduation rates and other key indicators.<sup>5</sup>

In response, school boards and some individual schools have partnered with charitable organisations (e.g., Breakfast Club of Canada) and corporate sponsors (e.g., grocery stores). While this is commendable, the government has an opportunity to provide more stable and sustainable funding to ensure that no student goes hungry.

The Grand Erie District School Board estimated the cost of a breakfast program at \$191/student per year<sup>6</sup> (each school year has approximately 194 school days), or approximately \$1 per meal. An investment of \$30 million would provide approximately 30 million breakfast meals for students.

We therefore ask the Government of Ontario to invest \$30 million for breakfast and snack programs through the Mental Health and Well-Being Grant as part of the Grants for Students Needs (GSN).

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<sup>4</sup> CBC News, “Nearly 6 million people in Canada experienced food insecurity in 2021, U of T study says”, (17 August 2022), online: *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* <<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/university-of-toronto-study-food-insecurity-canada-problem-persisting-1.6554604>>.

<sup>5</sup> Seaton, Jaimie, “Reading, writing and hunger: More than 13 million kids in this country go to school hungry”, (9 March 2017), online: *Washington Post* <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/03/09/reading-writing-and-hunger-more-than-13-million-kids-in-this-country-go-to-school-hungry/>>.

<sup>6</sup>“Breakfast Program”, online: Grand Erie District School Board <<https://granderie.ca/schools/agnes-g-hodge/more/breakfast-program>>.