

The Student Blueprint

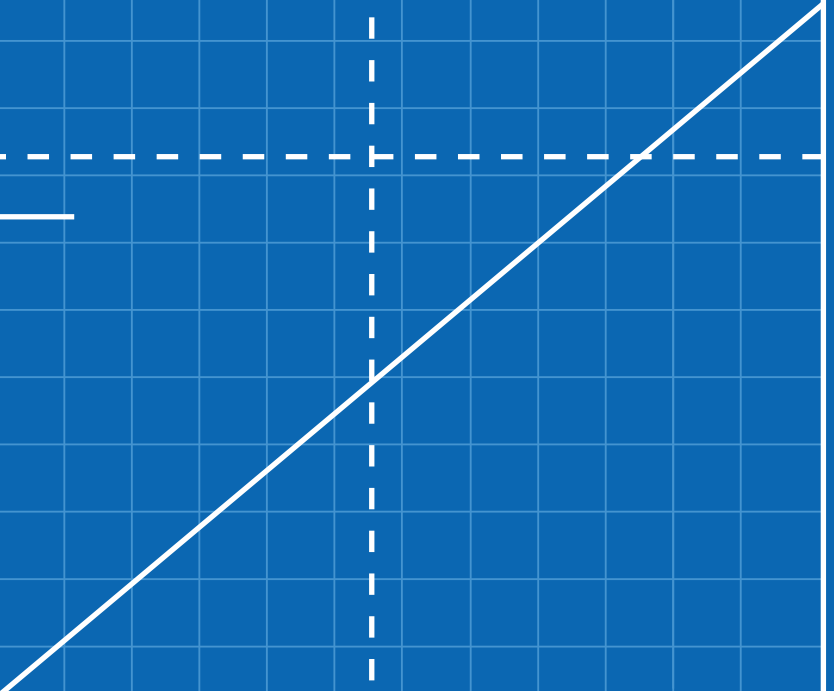
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OSTA AECO
Ontario Student
Trustees' Association l'Association des élèves conseillers
et conseillères de l'Ontario

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Introduction



The integrity of any building depends on its foundation - concrete pillars that are dug into the solid ground. We can say the same for institutions such as Ontario's publicly funded education. It is built on pillars that provide strength and integrity. As with any structure, time takes its toll and improvements must be made as the structural integrity weakens. When we establish what must change, we can move forward with a cohesive and detailed plan: the blueprint for the future of Ontario's education system.

The Ontario Student Trustees' Association-l'Association des élèves conseillères et conseillers de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO) is the largest student stakeholder for education in Ontario, having spent the last 21 years striving to represent and amplify the voices of two million students across the province. In the past five years, OSTA-AECO has published four documents that push for our vision of an education system built by students, for students. The Student Platform, The Students' Vision for Education, eLearning: The Students' Perspective, and most recently, the three-part publication The Volume of Our Voices, all emphasize the values that OSTA-AECO holds as an organization through student experiences, collected data, and specific calls to action. In The Student Blueprint, we've summarized recommendations from these publications and other advocacy of OSTA-AECO and have listed those which have yet to be addressed. The Student Blueprint features specific recommendations and calls to action at the provincial, school board, and school levels under five pillars: Equity, Governance, Student Well-Being, System Modernization, and Funding. As we approach the provincial and municipal elections in Ontario, we want to ensure that the student voice will guide the educational platforms of all publicly elected officials to eliminate barriers for students and strengthen education in this province.

Ontario's education system has a profound impact on students' lives, and the years they spend in school support the development of great minds, ambitious goals, and successful futures of our students. This development would not be possible without the guidance and leadership of school administrators and the day-to-day efforts of hardworking educators.

There's a lot to be proud of regarding Ontario's publicly funded education system. However, to realize our organization's vision of learning environments that meet the needs of every student, it's crucial to include student voice in the development of strategies at the provincial, school board, and school levels.

Equity



As we seek to rebuild the education system in Ontario, we must acknowledge the historical context that has led us to where we are today. Racialized groups, religious minorities, the 2SLGBTQ+ community, as well as First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have been historically underserved and underrepresented. Ontario must work to improve the foundations of publicly funded education so that we can support the intersectional identities of students in this province. Our recommendations fall under two aspects of equity: gender and sexuality, and racial and cultural identity.

The current Kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) curriculum must be extensively reviewed to ensure that students are receiving an education that reflects the histories and experiences of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, racialized communities, and all underserved groups. Culturally relevant curriculum materials and learning methods benefit all students and foster a culture of inclusion and awareness. We recommend that:

1.1 The Ministry of Education engages with educators and additional stakeholders to revise the K-12 curriculum, ensuring the inclusion of topics supporting 2SLGBTQ+ students.

1.2 The Ministry of Education engages with educators and additional stakeholders to integrate diverse racial identities, histories, and perspectives across the K-12 education curriculum. Building an inclusive school environment means ensuring that all students feel safe to express all aspects of their identities.

There must be systemic reform within the education system to best support students with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. We recommend that:

1.3 School boards modify school record-keeping systems to allow all students to specify the name and pronouns that they wish to use in school and ensure said educators respect identifiers and that they reflect this in school records such as class lists, yearbooks, and diplomas.

It is integral to the student experience within Ontario schools that the student-educator relationship is free of barriers to the student's identity. The Ministry of Education must ensure that professional development and training for staff addresses the recommendations we've outlined under the Equity Pillar, particularly regarding students' identities. School boards must also establish effective strategies to create the most inclusive and equitable environment possible. Thus, we recommend:

1.4 School boards establish regular, mandatory professional learning for school and school board staff on anti-oppression and human rights with a specific action plan on how to best support students of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, and

1.5 School boards develop specific strategies to create anti-racist school environments. This includes establishing ways to assess the effectiveness of these strategies by collecting information from students, such as censuses and student forums.

Governance



The role of a student trustee both amplifies the importance of student voice at the board table and improves the accessibility and presence of student concerns, questions, and perspectives in decision-making. Students are the largest stakeholder in education: student advocacy is essential to determine what is best for Ontario's youth. It's critical that the students' voices guides all decision-making at a provincial, school board, and school level.

The student voice must be represented fairly and articulated expressively for the benefit of the school board and to accurately reflect the students' decision-making. To remove barriers faced by student trustees in their efforts to effectively represent their constituents, we recommend:

2.1 That the Ministry of Education allows students to begin discussions surrounding items they feel are most pertinent to their constituency, by allowing student trustees the right to independently move and second motions during board meetings.

In order to gain adequate and accurate student perspective at the school board level, student representatives at the board table must be diverse. We recommend that school boards:

2.2 Seek perspective and feedback from students. Examples include consulting school clubs, hosting roundtable discussions with students, and conducting thought exchange surveys. With specific efforts towards reconciliation on a province-wide level within education, representation of Indigenous students is essential to equitable decision-making at the board level.

2.3 Consult with local Indigenous communities in school boards to establish a role for Indigenous student representatives, such as a student Indigenous Advisory Committee (IAC) or an Indigenous student trustee

Student Well-Being



Ontario's education system should always actively work to prioritize student achievement. To achieve this, it's essential that students' mental and physical health is supported, but in many cases, opportunities for students to seek help with support for their mental and physical well-being are not available outside of school. Under these circumstances, schools become the primary facility to provide the necessary support.

For students to not only succeed, but enjoy and look forward to schooling, their well-being must continue to be supported. Resources must be made available and accessible to students within schools. We recommend:

3.1 The Ministry of Education specifically outlines the role of a guidance counsellor to ensure they can perform their jobs to the best of their abilities, and students recognize who to turn to for assistance in mental well-being and academic success.

Seeking perspective and collaboration from specific organizations is crucial to the success of implementing support in schools. The collaboration of educators, mental health advocacy groups, and other organizations is necessary for establishing strategies to best support students' well-being. We recommend that:

3.2 School boards seek opportunities to collaborate with mental health organizations to increase support for mental health and ensure students are informed of these organizations and resources.

System Modernization



To ensure that our education system is keeping up with the changing world, we must equip students in Ontario with the relevant tools they need to succeed. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed our education system rely more heavily on digital learning tools, therefore these tools must be accessible to all students. We recommend that:

4.1 The government ensures that reliable broadband internet services are accessible to all schools in the province.

With each student having a specific set of needs that are essential to their academic success, the necessary resources must be available to them. Specifically, for students identified as exceptional, accommodations must be accessible. We recommend that:

4.2 School boards review relevant policies to ensure that every student identified as exceptional has access to special education accommodations.

Funding



Properly allocated funds ensure that our education system can sustainably, equitably, and adequately address the concerns and needs of students and families. We recommend that:

5.1 The government updates the current funding formula to reflect school boards' local transportation needs. It must consider factors including but not limited to geographical location, availability of public transportation, and the number of students who require transportation services.

With the cost of post-secondary education being a barrier in many students' lives, grants must increase in size. The Ministry of Education should specifically provide these grants to those of low-income households to aid disadvantaged students in obtaining a post-secondary education. We recommend that:

5.2 The Ministry of Education increases the grants towards middle and low-income families to allow students from more diverse socioeconomic demographics to obtain a post-secondary education.

School board transportation plans require constant research and consultation for the allocation of funds, as they differ across the province. We recommend that:

5.3 School boards continue to thoroughly examine the local transportation needs of students, considering factors such as socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and geography to provide targeted financial support to students' families.

Conclusion



The Student Blueprint is a roadmap for success and a vision for Ontario's publicly funded education system that is cohesive, constructive, and created by students, for students. The recommendations listed must be implemented through consultations with various stakeholders in education, such as educators, school board trustees and, most importantly, students. All candidates in the upcoming provincial and municipal elections must ensure that the well-being, success, and educational experience of students is at the forefront of all election platforms and decisions made.

The Ministry of Education, and school boards across the province, must continue to turn to student leaders for guidance and insight to effectively implement the changes laid out in this document.

Student leaders of Ontario will continue to work towards creating an education system that equitably supports every student by holding the publicly elected officials accountable for implementing the recommendations in The Student Blueprint and with future OSTA-AECO publications. Student trustees will continue to work in partnership with the Ministry of Education, school boards, and other stakeholders to realize our vision for an education system that adapts in response to the changing needs of students. When these recommendations are implemented, we hope students will feel safer, more supported, and eager to engage in the classroom.

The education system in this province will outlast students, politicians, and educators alive today. Therefore, we must act now to protect and support generations of students in Ontario to come.

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