

POLICY PRIORITIES FOR ONTARIO'S 2022 ELECTION

April 2022

APPROACH

Cardus believes that governments have an important but limited function that includes enabling other civil-society institutions to thrive. As a non-partisan think tank, we do not advocate for any political party or candidate. In the lead-up to Ontario's 2022 election, we are sharing our existing research with everyone equally and seek to collaborate with all people of goodwill. In this spirit and based on our existing research, we have identified several policy priorities for legislators and voters to consider in this election.

EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Recommendation: Ensure all kids with special needs get equal funding for their needs

Special education funding unfairly disadvantages students who attend independent schools. Changes should be made to ensure that all students with special needs get the support they require.

- Students with special needs only receive special education funding if they attend a public school. Unlike health funding which is based on a student's needs and follows them regardless of the school type, special education funding is limited based on the type of school the student attends.
- **Why it matters:** The current approach unfairly penalizes the most vulnerable children in our communities.
- **Details:** Special education funding for independent schools should be set at 75 or 50 percent of the per-student allocation for public schools. If funding were at 75 percent, the cost would be between \$78 million and \$195 million, depending on the share of students in the schools that require the funding. If the funding were at 50 percent, the cost would be between \$52 million and \$130 million. The highest level of funding (\$195 million) represents 0.001% of the province's \$173 billion budget for program expenses in 2021–22. This change would greatly benefit vulnerable Ontario students who are currently falling through the cracks.

For more details read Cardus's report [Funding Fairness for Students in Ontario with Special Education Needs](#).

Policy Recommendation: Give parents direct funding for tutoring

Pandemic school closures and disruptions resulted in learning gaps for students who now need tutoring to catch up academically. The government has taken some steps to address this issue through the Tutoring Supports Program.

- Cardus's initial analysis has found that the Tutoring Supports Program is underfunded at approximately \$90 per student. Challenges around staffing in public schools and the inflexibility of public-school boards raise questions of whether the program will help with learning gaps.
- **Why it matters:** The pandemic revealed cracks in the public-school system. Low-income families and students with special needs faced additional challenges in responding to school closures and online learning. Given the gaps in the system and the resulting gaps in student learning, funds should be routed directly to parents to help their kids catch up academically.
- **Details:** In 2020, the federal government provided a one-time top-up of the Canada Child Benefit. This direct transfer of \$300 per child could be used for discretionary expenses including online tutoring. That same year, the provincial government provided a one-time payment to parents of \$200 per child aged 0 to 12 and \$250 for children with special needs. An expanded tutoring supports program should build on these models by providing direct funds to parents, regardless of the type of school their child attends.

For more details read Cardus's [Policy Reaction: Ontario's Tutoring Supports Program and Flexible Education in an Age of Disruption: Embracing Innovation and Diversity in Ontario K-12 Education](#).

Policy Recommendation: Modernize the regulation of independent schools

Ontario's independent school landscape is diverse in the pedagogical orientations, religious perspectives, and specialties offered. The province should improve the governance of the independent schools by modernizing the sector's regulatory environment and eliminating inefficiencies.

- Independent schools are regulated by the Private Schools Policy and Procedure Manual. The rules that apply to the Notice of Intention to Operate and the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) are inefficient and should be updated.

- **Why it matters:** Research shows that graduates of independent schools in Ontario go on to make significant contributions to the common good. Despite the positive contributions made by independent schools, the sector operates within an inequitable policy environment.
- **Details:** Remove burdensome fees, including the one-time Notice of Intention to Operate fee, inspection fees for schools that grant the OSSD, and per-student fees for participating in Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing.

For more details read Cardus's reports [Ontario Curriculum Consultation Submission](#) and [Cardus Education Survey 2018: Ontario Bulletin](#).

ABOUT CARDUS

CARDUS is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.

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