Since the Ford government was sworn in almost a year ago, the attacks on Ontario’s public education system have been relentless. These cuts will be devastating for children, youth, and families across the province. We know, however, that these impacts will harm some communities more than others. **Public education is a racial justice issue.**

- One of Ford’s first moves was to cancel planned revisions to the Ontario curriculum that were being made in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations.

- In December, his government axed educational programming aimed at supporting marginalized students, including a peer mentorship program for teenagers in low income neighbourhoods, and supports for racialized youth. Harmony Movement, an organization that has offered students equity and anti-racism training for 25 years, has lost all funding and is shutting down in June.

- The province’s gutting of Toronto Public Health’s budget could devastate the school nutrition programs that feed 200,000 low income children in the city, and the cancellation of the $100 million school repair fund means that deteriorating infrastructure will continue to worsen, which will particularly impact communities whose schools are already neglected and underfunded.

Beyond these targeted cuts, the increase in class sizes and loss of teachers, social workers, early childhood educators, educational assistants, and more will have a disproportionate impact on children and youth of colour. Black students are already unfairly targeted for disciplinary interventions and receive insufficient supports — reductions in staffing and resources will only exacerbate this problem. There is also concern that cuts to support staff will be used to rationalize bringing police officers back into schools, a program which resulted in the criminalization and harassment of Black, Brown, and Indigenous young people in Toronto. And the elimination of Ontario’s Child and Youth Advocate means that youth in care are more vulnerable than ever, making it even more important to have teachers with the capacity and space to listen and help students in need.

We see these cuts as part of a dangerous long game: underfunding the public education system and then using the resulting chaos and discontent to justify subsidies for private schools and the development of a two-tier education system. We’ve seen the disastrous impact that charter schools are having across the United States: the Movement for Black Lives’ policy platform calls for a moratorium on charter schools, and points to how the model evades democratic oversight, contributes to systemic privatization, facilitates the neglect and closures of public schools, fails to address racial and socioeconomic disparities, and leaves countless students behind. We reject the path of privatization and demand instead a robust, well-funded, equitable public education system that works for everyone!

*Thank you to Rania El Mugammar for this framing.*
We should be scared.
We should be angry.
We need to fight back.

HAVE YOUR SAY:
Although they failed to meaningfully publicize these consultations, Ontario's Ministry of Education is currently soliciting input from the public on their proposed class size increases: you have until May 31 to email edulabfinance@ontario.ca with your comments. You can also send a letter to your MPP to express your concerns. Feel free to share how you feel about the whole suite of attacks on our public education system!

ORGANIZE YOUR SCHOOL:
West End Parents for Public Education has compiled an incredible action toolkit with instructions on how to organize at the school level to fight Ford’s cuts, including letter templates for School Advisory Councils, and a petition to make demands of Queen’s Park while building a grassroots base. Connect with other concerned parents, students, and educators in your school community and get creative about more ways to resist!

SUPPORT YOUTH-LED RESISTANCE:
Across the province, students are organizing. Learn more about Students Say No and the work of inspiring young people, particularly students of colour whose schools were underfunded even before this latest round of attacks. Youth are at the forefront of resistance against Ford’s agenda in this province, and we must amplify their voices and support their demands!

SHOW UP FOR OUR TEACHERS:
Ontario teacher unions, with contracts set to expire in August, are beginning negotiations with their employer. We must remember that collective bargaining remains an important tool for protecting and advancing quality public education. Throughout the process, and especially in the event of a labour action, parent mobilization in support of teachers and support staff will be crucial: educators' working conditions are our kids' learning conditions! Together, we have the power to demand better!

KEEP RACIAL JUSTICE DEMANDS FRONT AND CENTRE:
Keeping in mind the ways that our school system has never met the needs of racialized communities, particularly Black and Indigenous students, we need to be demanding MORE resources, MORE equitable distribution of funding, MORE supports for students and families, MORE respect for young people, MORE inclusive curriculum, MORE community involvement, and MORE investment in the learning, leadership, and brilliance of youth of colour! We must defeat these cuts, and then keep fighting for a public education system that works for everyone.

This resource was compiled by the Kids and Families Team of Showing Up for Racial Justice – Toronto.

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