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Written Brief to the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Finance
Pre-budget Consultations in Advance of the 2026 Budget

Submitted by the Canadian Teachers' Federation

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About the Canadian Teachers' Federation

The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE) is a national alliance of provincial and territorial teachers' organizations that collectively represent over 370,000 public school teachers and education workers across Canada. The CTF/FCE promotes inclusive and high-quality public education. We uphold teaching as a profession and advocate for adequate resourcing, labour rights, and social justice across Canada and around the world.

Public education is the cornerstone of both a strong economy and a thriving democracy. A well-funded and equitable public education system ensures that all young people, regardless of background, are equipped with the skills and critical thinking required to participate fully in civic life and the modern economy. The actions of the federal government have wide-ranging impact and influence on both the public good and public education. Investing in public education yields long-term economic benefits, including higher employment rates, increased productivity, and scientific and social innovation. Additionally, education fosters engaged and informed citizens who can meaningfully participate in the democratic process and contribute to social cohesion.

The public good, including healthy communities, safe societies, and shared prosperity, relies on equitable access to quality public education. Strengthening Canada's public education system must be a top priority for any government seeking to build a more resilient, inclusive, and forward-thinking nation.

- **Recommendation 1:** Invest in transformative mental health support for Canadians with a particular focus on school-based resources.
- **Recommendation 2:** Support a national artificial intelligence literacy plan for K-12 and made-in-Canada education technologies.
- **Recommendation 3:** Invest in climate-resilient school infrastructure and heat relief.
- **Recommendation 4:** Increase funding to support both on- and off-reserve Indigenous students.

Recommendation 1: Invest in transformative mental health support for Canadians with a particular focus on school-based resources.

Schools are a microcosm of society, and mental health continues to be a defining challenge in Canada's education systems. Artificial Intelligence adds a new layer to Mental Health considerations for children and youth in this country. Students, teachers, and education workers are experiencing elevated levels of burnout, stress, and trauma, fuelled by pandemic aftershocks, rising workloads, inadequate supports, and broader social crises such as homelessness, addictions, and poverty.

In a study of over 5,000 education professionals across Canada, 72% of educators describe their workload demands as unmanageable and 80% reported they are somewhat-to-barely coping with the stresses of daily teaching. At the same time, youth are facing deteriorating mental health at unprecedented rates. Statistics Canada and the Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth reported that "among the 88% of youth who rated their mental health as 'good', 'very good', or 'excellent' in 2019, about one in five (21%) reported a decline to 'fair' or 'poor' by 2023". These challenges faced in school communities are reflective of challenges faced by Canadians writ large.

The CTF/FCE supports the Government of Canada's creation of the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. However, urgent investment is needed to move from intent to impact.

We call on the federal government to:

- introduce dedicated funding of $4.5 billion over five years through the Canada Mental Health Transfer to provinces and territories, with accountability mechanisms to ensure funding reaches schools and communities, where educators and children can access resources directly;

- specify funding allocation within the Canada Mental Health Transfer as funding for school-based mental health services, including access to psychologists, social workers, and mental health programming; and

- recognize the mental health needs of teachers and education workers, with supports tailored to the realities within these professions.

Addressing mental health is foundational to improving the well-being of Canadians, bolstering the health of our education system, and ensuring students and teachers can thrive in their learning and working environments. Depriving students and educators access to mental health supports will lead to poorer educational outcomes which will ultimately be a detriment to the academic, social, and economic viability of the nation.

Recommendation 2: Support a national artificial intelligence literacy plan for K-12 and made-in-Canada education technologies.

In 2023, representatives across the Canadian Teachers' Federation's (CTF/FCE) 18 Member and Associate Organizations (representing over 370,000 educators) called for action to address concerns about the deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) in public schools. Since then, the CTF/FCE has undertaken a multi-jurisdictional, multi-stakeholder research and advocacy strategy focused on ensuring the safe, responsible use of AI in K-12 education.

Young people fear that AI is stunting their intelligence (Brookings, 2026). Emerging evidence suggests these anxieties are well-placed. Dependence on generative AI without guardrails can lead to a decline in critical thinking, creativity (Kosmyna et al., 2025), and math acquisition (Bastani et al., 2025). Beyond harming cognitive capacities, the use of AI in K-12 raises risks to young people's safety; privacy; and mental and physical health (Brookings, 2026). Despite these threats, AI tools are surging in K-12 public schools.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts the right to an education "directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms". An overreliance on AI in schools undermines the social and human core of learning and, consequently, Canada's ability to fulfill the right to a quality, public education for all. Left unregulated and untested, the widespread deployment of AI-enabled EdTech in K-12 threatens prosperity for future generations, our collective digital sovereignty, and the very foundations of our democratic public institutions.

The rapid rise of AI in schools has outpaced governance, and Canada must catch up to other jurisdictions, such as the European Union and Australia, in protecting young learners and their educators. Existing legislation lacks adequate safeguards for children's data gathered by AI systems. There are no safety-by-design standards for AI products used in K-12 schools, nor policies to address risks to cognitive development and mental health when AI tools flow through classrooms without guardrails.

The scale of those affected in K-12 public education is significant. Over 90% of young people in Canada attend public schools. There are more than 420,000 public educators across the country. AI's reach into the Canadian population through K-12 public schools is enormous, and largely unregulated. For the public to trust in the potential of AI to improve lives, young people's right to education must be protected from an uncontained, profit-driven EdTech market.

We call on the federal government to:

- establish a national independent oversight body to oversee and enforce AI safety standards with the explicit mandate to monitor the compliance of high-risk AI providers in relation to safety standards;

- prioritize sovereign digital infrastructure as an essential stage in protecting young people's sensitive data, such as information gathered on students in K-12 schools. This data must be stored and protected in Canada, rather than offshored to largely US-based data centres;

- invest in national AI literacy as a distinct federal priority. Literacy is essential for educators and students including: how AI works, possible cognitive and emotional impacts, how to critically evaluate AI content, and how to discern manipulative design. In coordination with provinces and territories, the federal government should fund the development and delivery of AI literacy programs for educators, building on existing professional learning infrastructure and working closely with teachers' organizations as well as researchers and technical experts;

- invest in independent, longitudinal research on the effects of AI on cognitive development, mental health, and equity and inclusion in schools;

- invest in purpose-built, made-in-Canada education technologies. AI tools designed through meaningful collaboration with educators, students, and communities are more pedagogically grounded, more trusted by teachers, and better aligned with actual classroom needs. NOLAI in the Netherlands offers a promising model for teacher-tech co-design hubs that promote responsible innovation for public benefit. NOLAI's model could be replicated by Canada's AI institutes – Mila, Vector, and Amii; and,

- establish targeted programs to mitigate AI-driven education inequities. Programs should ensure that underfunded school districts/boards are not forced to rely on inaccurate free-tier AI tools; that rural, remote, and Indigenous communities have meaningful connectivity and device access; and that multilingual and Indigenous-language AI tools are developed and implemented.

Recommendation 3: Invest in climate-resilient school infrastructure and heat relief.

Climate change and its effects continue to impact all Canadians in various ways. As the Earth continues to warm and regular weather patterns that regions and communities have been accustomed to for decades rapidly change, infrastructure must adapt to deal with the health, safety, and comfort of Canadians. The CTF/FCE is hearing from Member and Associate Organizations from coast to coast to coast that school infrastructure has not kept pace with the rapidly changing climate. Classrooms are sweltering in the spring and summer, windows need to be propped open in the middle of January, and the risk of flooding and fire remain omnipresent in some regions of the country.

The Government of Canada has placed capital investment at the core of many of its long-term economic stimulus plans – education infrastructure should be part of this plan with a clear focus on climate-resilient K-12 school infrastructure and heat stress-management strategies. All children have a right to safe, conducive, and comfortable learning environments.

Previously, there was a program that directly supported Municipalities, Universities, Schools, and Hospitals (MUSH) that invested in green retrofits, we believe this initiative should be resurrected with the creation of a similar program.

We call on the federal government to:

- replicate the Municipalities, Universities, Schools, and Hospitals (MUSH) stream of the Climate Action Incentive Fund and expand the list of expenses eligible for reimbursement to support both energy efficiency as well as climate change resilience.

Recommendation 4: Increase funding to support both on- and off-reserve Indigenous students.

The CTF/FCE believes strongly that Indigenous students in Canada need stronger support both on- and off-reserve in whichever community they call home. As one of the youngest populations in Canada, Indigenous peoples will continue to play an essential role in the future of the country. National Indigenous organizations and local Indigenous communities should be supported in closing the gap between educational outcomes experienced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous children living within Canada.

With recent reports that programs such as Jordan's Principle are no longer substantially supporting First Nations students in ways that were previously experienced, the CTF/FCE Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education (ACIE) and our Board of Directors believe that calling for increased supports for all Indigenous students – regardless of province, territory, or community – is a vital step towards educational and economic reconciliation.

While the CTF/FCE is not an Indigenous organization, we do regularly consult with the ACIE to guide our work related to Indigenous education. The ACIE group is comprised of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis educators from across Canada. As always, we encourage the Government of Canada to listen directly to Indigenous peoples and their organizations regarding the supports they need to close the gap.

We fully support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, notably Calls to Action 7, 8, 9, and 10 and their direct relevance on K-12 education.

We call on the federal government to:

- work with national Indigenous organizations, local Indigenous communities, and non-Indigenous education stakeholders to close the gap between educational outcomes experienced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous children living in Canada.

Conclusion

Investing in public education is a nation-building act. It is central to economic growth, community development, public health, and the health of our democracy. The Canadian Teachers' Federation urges the federal government to make Budget 2026 a budget for education, equity, and the public good. These recommendations are not simply expenditures – they are long-term investments in Canada's future.

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate further on these proposals and thank the government for its continued dialogue and partnership with educators across the country.

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