

Susan Fletcher and Heather Mitchell
Co-chairs
SPACE Coalition
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Dear Susan Fletcher and Heather Mitchell.

Thank you for giving the Ontario Greens an opportunity to speak to the issues that matter to community members across Ontario. I am happy to respond on behalf of Mike and the party..

Will the Green Party of Ontario implement the following recommendations? When and how?

As soon as possible to support physical and mental health issues arising from the pandemic and, moving forward, ensure schools remain at the heart of their communities:

A. Restore community use of schools funding provided to local school boards to the 2018-19 budget level of \$50.9 million increased by 10% for 2022-2023 to total \$56 million, to:

i. offset increased labour and utilities costs.

ii. provide free and low-cost community programming in high-needs neighbourhoods including but not limited to covering costs for free evening, weekend, March break, and summer permits (similar to the prior Priority School Initiative).

iii. support permits and student employment for summer and after-school programming (similar to Focus on Youth).

iv. fund Board-directed outreach to support community programming (similar to the Community Outreach Coordinators program).

Safe and strong communities are fostered through the interactions of community members in educational, recreational, and cultural activities. Ontario Greens support restoring community use of schools funding to a level that ensures schools can be actively promoted and used as community centres during the evenings, weekends and school holidays, particularly in high-needs neighbourhoods.

B. Apply an equity lens to community use of schools permits, policies and procedures. This means, for example, taking equity issues into account when deciding which geographic areas within school boards will resume permits first, how resources are allocated, etc., in order to address pre-existing hardships that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

We believe that the government should empower people to develop programs that promote physical and mental well-being within their own neighbourhoods. The Ontario Greens are committed to engaging community members in the decision-making processes for public space creation, design, and use. With this approach, fair decisions can be made in terms of granting access and determining where space availability should be increased based on community need.

In the longer term, to maintain an equitable system for community use of schools, the SPACE Coalition further recommends:

C. Confirm funding for summer permits and student employment annually, no later than February, to allow for adequate planning, advertising programs, and hiring.

We agree that funding for summer permits and student employment should be confirmed annually at a time that allows for adequate planning, advertising programs, and hiring.

D. Undertake the necessary changes to legislation and regulations to:

i. add Community Use of Schools (grounds and facilities), on an incremental cost recovery basis, into the Purpose clause of the Education Act, entrenching the benefits of community use for people of all ages in Ontario.

ii. explore methods of lowering weekend permit costs, such as a mechanism to provide weekend caretaking coverage at regular rates.

iii. expand the authority of the Provincial Ombudsman to the oversight of the Community Use of Schools program.

iv. mandate Community Use of Schools Advisory Committees in every school board.

Government needs to work hand-in-hand with school boards to remove barriers that make it difficult for community groups to access public space due to high costs and logistical barriers. Access to affordable and easily accessible public spaces encourages healthy and active communities and should be protected under the Education Act.

We commit to exploring methods of lowering weekend permit costs, and we support expanding the authority of the Provincial Ombudsman to the oversight of the Community Use of Schools program. Ontario Greens also support mandating Community Use of Schools Advisory Committees in every school board.

Sincerely,

Madeleine Crist
Administrative Officer
Green Party of Ontario