

February 12, 2020

A Message to OSSTF/FEESO Members from the Provincial Executive

From the day the Ford government was elected, we have positioned ourselves as the rational voice in defence of our students and the publicly funded education system. Since the first announcement of education cuts on March 15, 2019, OSSTF/FEESO's strategy has been measured, reasonable, and responsive. Just weeks after that announcement, on April 6, 2019, thousands of OSSTF/FEESO members joined with thousands more from community groups and labour organizations, and with other concerned Ontarians at the Rally for Education to demand the Provincial Government reverse the devastating cuts to publicly funded education. In the months since then, we have seen an even greater groundswell of public support.

We continue to fight back on behalf of our students. Our efforts have not gone unnoticed. Our withdrawals of service, which began with a province-wide one-day strike on December 4, 2019, are having the desired impact on the public's understanding of, and support for, public education workers. As poll after poll demonstrates, the people of this province stand with education workers and teachers in defence of the quality of our education system.

We have said that no bargaining strategy will be sufficient on its own to overcome the cuts the Ford government has already begun implementing and wants to unilaterally deepen. Therefore, walking the fine line of taking action while maintaining public support has been crucial to efforts and, so far at least, more successful than we may have hoped for.

Unfortunately, the Ford government continues to ignore Ontarians, and clings to its mistruths, rhetoric, and spin. Their attempts to discredit Ontario's education sector, vilifying us as "greedy" and "self-serving," are not ringing true with the public. They are trying to divide us, but members overwhelmingly voted to oppose cuts to education. We voted to take a stand and to protect the services and supports our students need to succeed. Our members know what is at stake and are willing to continue to make sacrifices for our students. Efforts by local leaders and grass-roots members have been the driving force of our pushback.

The Doug Ford Conservatives are moving ahead with increases in class sizes, cuts to staffing levels for teachers and education workers, reduced course options for students, reductions in much-needed services for our most vulnerable learners, and mandated e-learning without any grasp of its efficacy.

For all of us who care about the quality of public education, this is simply not acceptable. It signals the most egregious assault on the youth of our province that we have ever

witnessed. These reckless cuts will have long-term negative impacts on our students and on the Province's economic future. In short, it is the dismantling of one of our greatest assets.

We are focused not only on our efforts within OSSTF/FEESO, but also on maintaining communication and solidarity with our brothers, sisters, and comrades across the education sector. On Friday, February 21, 2020, all four education affiliates will unite in solidarity and engage in a one-day, province-wide full withdrawal of services. The message we are sending is clear – no cuts to education are acceptable. No erosion of our publicly funded education system is OK. Together, nearly 200,000 education workers and teachers will stand united against the Conservative cuts to education. Members, parents, students, and the public all agree – this government is entirely on the wrong track with its education agenda.

In the coming days, local leaders will provide details and specifics about your local withdrawal actions. Our strategy so far has been effective but that does not mean we will stick with it blindly if a change in course is warranted. Through all of this, we must remember, solidarity is our strength. And while we cannot predict the outcome, it is the resolve of the membership in this struggle that will be remembered by generations to come. They will know that we stood together for the future of public education in this province.

Yours in Federation



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