

REOPENING OF SCHOOLS— REPORT ON MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DISCUSSIONS

June 29, 2020 • ISSUE 1

As members are aware, OSSTF/FEESO has been participating in several Ministry of Education tables to discuss issues of importance during the school closure and in anticipation of the reopening of schools in September. While we have undertaken our participation in good faith with the hope that we would be consulted on important issues, we continue to be disappointed and frustrated by the lack of transparency and true consultation by the government.

We had initially decided to engage in these talks and provide reports to members once decisions were made. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that these tables are not providing OSSTF/FEESO with the opportunity for meaningful dialogue and consultation. We have decided to continue to participate in the hope that the government will start to listen. In the meantime, we will provide updates to the membership on the nature of the conversations and whether or not progress is being made.

OSSTF/FEESO currently participates in five discussion tables. There are several other unions participating on these tables as well. Below you will find a report on each table, along with examples of the ineffective consultation process and lack of answers to the issues we are raising.

Instructional Support Working Group

This table deals with issues surrounding instructional support from DECEs, EA's, CYWs, PSSPs and other job classes.

We have continually asked to no avail that information be shared with the table before it is distributed to school boards or made official. Several commitments were made to share information - **so far, they have not followed through.**

In particular, we questioned the wording of the Ministry's reopening plan, which states,

"To the greatest extent possible, boards are encouraged to assign students, teachers and educational assistants and ECEs to class groupings as they would in a conventional school year, so that class groupings can be maintained despite the form of delivery that is in place at any one time."

We have asked what “encouraged” means exactly and whether or not they will direct the Boards to support the teacher/DECE program – **so far no answer from the Government.**

Learning Resource Working Group

This table deals with issues surrounding IT, clerical and library tech.

OSSTF/FEESO and other unions have continually and since the start shared ideas on how to better support these services during the closure – **so far the Government has not acted on any of the ideas provided.**

In particular, we raised the issue of lack of internet access by both staff and students and we have asked for practical solutions – **so far no answer from the Government.**

Custodial Caretaker COVID-19 Response Working Table

This table deals with custodial, caretaker and cleaners in schools.

Union representatives have been particularly frustrated because we represent members who deal with issues central to the health and safety of students and members.

For example, we have been continually asking for day care services for custodial and cleaning staff that are entering school currently. In other words, that they be deemed essential workers and have access to day care for their children – **so far no answer from the Government.**

We have also asked how the \$4 million of funding recently announced would be allocated to School Boards – **so far no answer from the Government.**

We asked that the retrieval of personal belongings plan be shared with the group before it was made public – **the Government announced the plan without consultation.**

Ministry/Affiliate 2020 Continuous Learning Work Group

This table is supposed to deal with issues related to assessment, professional development, and learning.

There was consultation on the issue of assessment and evaluation and OSSTF/FEESO and the other affiliates were able to provide input into the Memorandum issued by the Ministry. It is a rare case where consultation actually occurred. However, most of our advice was ignored.

It appears that the Ministry wants participants to provide input on general topics (e.g. curriculum) with no context or opportunity to problem solve. The majority of questions or specific concerns are brought forward by the affiliates, and not the Ministry – **so far few answers have been provided.**

We have been asking the Ministry to consult and address the issue of gaps in student learning and how they will be addressed with respect to curriculum expectations – **the Government has not shared any insights or solutions so far on this issue.**

We asked if, and when, the Government would be sending clarifying messages on reopening of schools to add specificity to their announcement – **we have been told that there are currently no formal plans for sending clarifying messages or providing additional details.**

Deputy Minister and Affiliate Working Table

This table is composed of the General Secretaries from the four affiliates, the Deputy Minister and Assistant Deputy Ministers.

The table covers high-level topics of importance to our members and the students they serve.

The table dealt with re-deployment of members. On this issue, there was significant consultation, which led to template documents that the Federations could support.

On many other issues of importance, however, there has not been the same level of consultation.

We raised the issue of T2200's and asked the Ministry to look into this important matter for our members and work with their Federal counterparts to find a solution – **we were told that it was too complex and beyond their scope.**

The General Secretaries recently asked that the formal introduction of the new Math Curriculum be delayed for one year given the complexities and challenges that are upon us with school reopening – **the Ministry staff said they would take our suggestion to the “decision makers” for consideration.**

One of the first topics that the General Secretaries placed on the Agenda in mid-March was school reopening. We urged the Ministry and Government to consult us on this important topic and to do so earlier rather than later. The Ministry representatives acknowledged it as an important issue, but have offered very little, if anything, in terms of consultation. While a few broad strokes were shared at a meeting before the Government's reopening plan was

announced - **no documents were shared nor details provided.** We were also told not to share the limited information that was provided before the announcement was made. We strenuously asked to see the details of the plan and to be able to provide meaningful input – **the “reopening plan” was released without our input.**

In Closing

OSSTF/FEESO will continue to share the results of future Ministry meetings with the members. We sincerely hope that the Government will begin to engage in real consultations during the pandemic and in anticipation of school reopening. We continue to believe that meaningful consultations with the unions that represent frontline workers would be much better for the thousands of students they support than the Government’s current approach of making unilateral pronouncements and announcements of programs, policies and initiatives.