

2020 Pre-budget Consultation Submission – OSSTF/FEESO

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) was founded over one hundred years ago, in 1919. OSSTF/FEESO represents almost 60,000 public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, instructors, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, and many other educational workers, including those in the university sector.

OSSTF/FEESO is pleased to make a 2020 pre-budget submission in advance of the 2020 budget.

Ontario's public education system, as evidenced by the 2018 PISA results, is one of the world's best. However, that standing is under severe threat due to the unilateral funding cuts to the K-12 system, as well as changes to funding for Ontario universities. The future status of Ontario's education system is clearly in jeopardy and the government must act quickly before more damage is done to our students and our economy. On June 19, 2019, the Conference Board of Canada released their report titled *The Economic Case for Investing in Education*. The research demonstrates that with every dollar cut from education, a \$1.30 of economic benefit is lost. The reverse is also true, when the government invests a dollar in education, there is an increase of \$1.30 to the economy. When more is invested in education, there is a drop in the demand for social services such as health care, welfare and the judicial system. This alone should prompt the government to reverse recent cuts and instead make real investments in Ontario's education system.

The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) released a report on September 26, 2019, detailing the alarming fact that the projected growth in Ministry of Education spending was well below education cost drivers (school-age population and inflation) over the next four years. This means that compared to the 2018-2019 school year, despite an overall increase in funding available to school boards, there will be significantly less per pupil funding, compared to previous years, to provide a high quality education to the growing population. In fact, according to the government memo (2019: B14), per pupil funding is already down \$54 per student in the first year of a multiyear plan of significant cuts. There have also been additions to the education envelope, incorporating at least \$390 million in estimated funding of the new childcare tax credit. This additional funding gives the illusion that the education budget is growing, when in fact it is being spread thinner.

Beyond education, overall program spending in Ontario is already dead last in Canada. In their December 9, 2019 report, the FAO calculated that program spending will be cut a further 10% over the next five years to pay for tax cuts that have yet to be announced. At the same time, the Ontario government collects the lowest total revenue per person. This combination is placing a severe strain on programs in Ontario and will no doubt have a negative impact on education outcomes for students, in turn weakening Ontario's workforce and, ultimately, our economy.

This pre-budget consultation submission contains two parts, first the Kindergarten to Grade 12 sector, followed by the Post-secondary sector with recommendations for both.

Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education:

1. Restore the funding to match the level of teaching staff in the 2018-2019 school year. On March 15, 2019, the Minister of Education made several announcements that slashed the funding for classroom teachers at the secondary level. These included changing the funded average class size from 22:1 to 28:1, elimination of the Secondary Programming Grant and the removal of Local Priorities Funding (LPF). The cumulative affect of these changes will result in the elimination of over 10,000 secondary teachers from the system by the end of the 2022-2023 school year, as confirmed by the FAO in their Ministry of Education Expenditure Estimates 2019-2020 report. This will result in over 60,000 course sections being removed, drastically reducing student choice in programs. We are already witnessing programs cut, as school boards struggle to implement the increased class size average. Students will be unable to continue studying certain subjects in their home schools and will have to resort to outside sources to finish their OSSD requirements. These cuts will not improve student success. We recommend that the government listen to the overwhelming majority of Ontario's students, parents and teachers and restore the teaching staff to the level of the 2018-2019 school year.
2. Restore lost education worker positions to the system and fund these positions based on need. The cumulative effects of cutting the base amount in the Cost Adjustment and Qualifications & Experience Grant, reductions in the Supplementary Area Factor (SAF) resulting from increasing the class size average, as well as the removal of the Local Priorities Fund, and the reduction of the funded level of Early Childhood Educators has forced school boards to cut education workers from our schools. The numbers of education workers lost to the system will only increase as the class size average increases continue to reduce funding. The vast majority of education workers work directly with our most vulnerable students. These students have benefited in recent years from having more educational assistants and professional support staff personnel in our schools, assisting students with their learning. We recommend that the government restore funding to school boards so that education workers are rehired and to fund these positions based on the needs of the students.
3. Eliminate mandatory e-learning for secondary students. E-learning is of value to only some students. However, mandatory e-learning is detrimental to many students, particularly students at risk. Part of the government's proposal for mandatory e-learning is a further increase in the funded average class size from 28:1 to 35:1. If every student in Ontario is forced to take two mandatory e-learning credits to graduate, this will eliminate even more teachers and, as a result, more education workers from the system. Further, the Operations Grant will be reduced through additional changes to the SAF. Parents, students, teachers and education experts have been unequivocal in their opposition to mandatory e-learning. E-learning is acceptable on a voluntary basis only. The very few secondary students who possess the self-discipline and have access to the necessary technology should be free to choose these courses on their own volition. Forcing all students to take e-learning courses will lead to higher failure and dropout rates, more anxiety for students, and yield little educational value to students. We recommend that the government reverse this cut and maintain voluntary e-learning credits as an option for those students who may benefit from them.

4. Increase funding for adult non-credit continuing education. In school boards that offer LINC, LBS, Adult ESL, and other non-credit programs for adults, the funding is from different ministries: Children and Community Social Services and Colleges and Universities, as well as Federal LINC funding. These streams of funding do not provide for appropriate administration and preparation time needed by Adult Education Instructors to ensure the program requirements are met. Also, Portfolio Based Learning Assessment methodologies have been mandated as the method of assessment, but the workload and time required to adequately operationalize the program is non-existent, creating tremendous pressure on Adult Education Instructors and frustration for students. The GSN funding for Adult Non-Credit Instruction must be increased to address these pressures and ensure that instructors receive the appropriate preparation time and compensation to fulfil their duties and ensure a successful program. Improving language skills in adults, including those new to Canada, has significant impact on the economy, as these adults seek employment within Ontario.
5. Increase funding for Adult Credit Day School. Adult Day School teachers teach the same curriculum as regular day school teachers to students 21 years and over, yet they do so in conditions that are more difficult. Adult Day School teachers have little to no preparation time, no class size protection, and fewer teaching materials compared to their regular day school colleagues. Although some Adult Day School teachers have finally reached parity in salary with regular day school teachers, this parity is not based on the same workload. In addition, Adult Day School students do not have the same services available to them such, as guidance and special education assistance. The primary reason is that the funding grant for these programs, Continuing Education and Other Programs Grant, uses a per average daily enrolment benchmark well below that of regular day school students. We recommend increasing this benchmark to match that of secondary school students.
6. Increase funding to repair schools. As of November 2019, the cost to repair Ontario's public schools has risen to \$16.3 billion and must be addressed at a greater rate than previously planned. This disrepair is not only dangerous for staff and students, it impacts the learning environment and student success. The government has pledged to spend \$13 billion over 10 years but this rate of funding will not keep pace with what is needed now. The government must address the repair backlog with additional funding.
7. Remove or reduce the Education Quality and Accountability Office. EQAO testing has not proven itself to provide any value for money. It fails to test student achievement, and instead tells us which students are best at learning how to take a test. Many alternative methods of testing (e.g. randomized) would save millions of taxpayer dollars that could be better invested in staffing schools with caring adults to support students in their education and well-being. It is time to eliminate EQAO or, at the very least, scale it back to provide a better return on investment.

Post-Secondary Education

1. Increase the block funding for colleges and universities. The government's announcement to lower tuition rates by 10% starting in the 2019-2020 school year for students enrolled in a publicly funded college or university in the province would normally mean good news for Ontario post-secondary students. However, with no corresponding funding adjustment in the block grants, it will mean a reduction in funding to universities and colleges of \$440 million provincially. This cut will have a direct impact on the very students this government is claiming to assist. There will be fewer services for post-secondary students, as institutions cut services, with non-academic staff most vulnerable. In fact, the cut has been much deeper than this with the FAO reporting a reduction of 5.1% (\$615 million) in funding over last year to universities and colleges. Provincial funding for post secondary education accounts for less than 50% of an institution's revenue, forcing these institutions to find revenue elsewhere, usually to the disadvantage of students, faculty, and non-academic staff. We recommend that the government restore this funding.
2. Compounding this cruel twist for students is the government's cancellation of the grant and loan program under OSAP and elimination of free tuition for low income Ontarians. The government has claimed that students who did not need it were utilizing the program. However, that assertion was based on little data. The changes to the ratio of grants and loans would now mean that Ontario post-secondary students and families have a higher loan burden than previously. On average, an Ontario university student will take on a further \$800 in debt per academic year, thereby negating the effect of the 10% tuition decrease. The government has simply shifted the burden of post-secondary education onto the students and families that need the program the most. We recommend that the government reverse the changes to OSAP.
3. Abandon the court challenge to the unanimous ruling by Ontario's Divisional Court on the "Student Choice Initiative". On November 21, 2019, the government lost a court challenge to their "Student Choice Initiative" plan, which would have allowed students to opt-out of certain ancillary fees through regulation. The court ruled that, "There is no statutory authority authorizing Cabinet or the Minister to interfere in the internal affairs of these student associations". There is no merit in spending taxpayers' money to pursue a court challenge, especially when the government claims drastic cuts to program spending are required.
4. Reverse the plan to increase outcomes-based funding for universities and colleges. The government announced its intention to increase the portion of funding for universities and colleges that will be outcomes-based to 60% from 1.2% by the 2024-2025 academic year. This change flies in the face of research that counters outcomes-based funding and the fact that there are no actual metrics to assess the outcomes. The previous Liberal government introduced this form of funding after review and consultation. However, the consultation raised concerns regarding this type of funding, which resulted in only a small portion of funding (1.2%) to become outcomes-based and only for special purpose funding for universities. The arm's length agency of the Ontario government, HEQCO (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario), studied outcomes-based funding and found that this type of funding in higher education has shown little evidence of improved student outcomes. Further, research from the United States found that it has no discernable effects on retention or degree completions. Funding that is outcome-based will favour the creation of a system that advantages institutions in large urban areas, disadvantages those in the north, stifles equity and access for students, and will demolish the culture of universities as an incubator of free thought and academic liberty. So far, there has been no proof presented that outcomes-based funding will improve Ontario's post secondary institutions, and we recommend that its use be stopped.