

OSSTF Submission to Planning for Prosperity September 2018

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) welcomes the opportunity to submit our recommendations to Ontario's "Planning for Prosperity" consultation. OSSTF/FEESO is a trade union that represents 60,000 members across the Province of Ontario. The union works to protect our diverse membership in over 150 bargaining units in elementary and secondary schools, private schools, and universities. Our members include public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, early childhood educators, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, university support staff, and many others in Ontario's education system.

In submitting our proposals, we emphasize that Ontario's schools and students face numerous challenges relating to program funding, individual supports, and infrastructure. A fully funded public education system is essential for providing students with the knowledge, skills and sense of community they need to find success and meaningfully contribute to Ontario's social and economic fabric. Our education system should be a focus of investment, not austerity. The potential savings we identify below should be understood to be opportunities for re-investment, not cuts.

Review the Education Funding Formula

The funding formula used to allocate resources to Ontario's school boards is now over 20 years old and the most recent review of the formula was completed in 2002. This means that two decades' worth of experience has improved our understanding of the complex challenges facing our students, education funding remains stuck in an out-dated one-size-fits-all approach.

OSSTF/FEESO recommends a formal review of Ontario's education funding formula, led by recognized experts in education and supported by thorough consultation with education stakeholders. The review should be tasked with developing a formula that best aligns with students' needs, particularly in respect to special education, equitable access to a full range of education supports, and the diverse needs of Ontario's communities.

Amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act (SBCBA)

The SBCBA was intended to reduce the costs associated with collective bargaining in Ontario's education sector. The primary mechanism for these savings was to be a restriction on what is negotiated at the central tables to matters requiring provincial funding – primarily salaries and benefits. However, the Act currently allows school boards to bring administrative issues and issues related to working conditions to the central tables. As a result, school board participation in the last round of central bargaining stalled progress and added costly months to the bargaining process. Working conditions and administrative issues should be dealt with between the school boards and the unions, but at local bargaining tables rather than at the central table.

OSSTF/FEESO recommends the government work with OSSTF/FEESO, ETFO, OECTA and AEFO to streamline central bargaining. A more efficient bargaining process will focus bargaining, will have unions bargaining directly with the government, giving school board associations a consultative role rather than a decision-making one, focusing central bargaining on salaries, benefits and other funding-related matters.

Reduce School Board Reliance on Arbitration

A fair, effective, and timely grievance procedure is an essential component of effective labour relations. Our collective agreements contain grievance procedures that allow for speedy resolution of disputes. Unfortunately, school boards have shown an increasing tendency to rely on the longest and most expensive mechanism in our procedures: arbitration. Between 2011 and 2016, the incidence of arbitration (where costs were incurred) nearly tripled from 1.53 arbitrations per 1,000 members to 4.34 arbitrations per 1,000 members. Unsurprisingly, most school boards have been unwilling to disclose how much they spend in legal and other fees associated with arbitration, but preliminary accounts show that a number of individual school boards are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. These costs are unnecessary and defaulting to arbitration creates needless delays and stress for front-line education workers.

OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the province review school board expenditures on arbitration to identify overall trends and specific problem areas. We further recommend that the Minister of Education intervene to discourage school boards from relying on arbitration as a default strategy when resolving grievances.

Eliminate the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)

The Premier has already indicated he understands the shortcomings of the EQAO. As educational workers, OSSTF/FEESO and our members have never been opposed to testing. However, testing should support learning and be interpreted in relation to other forms of evaluation. The current standardized testing regime creates high-stakes, high-stress, low utility evaluations. Moreover, regular publication of standardized test results from the EQAO creates a politically-charged environment where schools, portrayed as competing with one another, receive questionable ratings based on narrow criteria. We are deeply invested in high quality education and eager to support strategies that will improve education outcomes. The Ministry of Education spends approximately \$35 million per year to operate EQAO. This money would be better invested in other education priorities.

OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the EQAO and its testing programs be discontinued. We further recommend that savings be re-invested into student learning.

One Public Education System in Each Official Language

Ontario is a multi-cultural, multi-faith society. Our public education system brings together students from diverse backgrounds to build a shared sense of community. Singling out one religion for separate education funding runs contrary to public education's commitments to universality and equity. In 2012, the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods in Ontario estimated that the province could save between \$1.2 and \$1.6 billion annually by moving to a single public education system in each official language. In six years, the potential for savings has surely grown. Additionally, school boards are currently wasting valuable education dollars through advertising campaigns designed to attract students from the public and Catholic systems. These dollars would be better spent in our schools and on our students.

OSSTF/FEESO recommends involving all education stakeholders in a discussion about moving toward one public education system in each official language. The savings achieved should be re-invested in Ontario's public education system.



OSSTF/FEESO would be happy to provide further details on any of the above recommendations.