

MEDIA RELEASE

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BUDGET SMOKE AND MIRRORS COVERS UP EDUCATION CRISIS: OSSTF/FEESO RESPONDS TO 2024 ONTARIO BUDGET

TORONTO, ON — The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) calls out the Ford government's 2024 provincial budget for distracting away from the retention and recruitment crisis in education.

"This is the Ford government's sixth budget since taking office, which makes six budgets that have intentionally underfunded public education and deliberately shortchanged Ontario students," said OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood. "The Progressive Conservatives claim to care about student needs, yet they have allowed a retention and recruitment crisis to take hold across Ontario, negatively impacting schools and students in every district in the province. Principals, teachers, and education workers are calling out for something to be done, yet their calls continue to be ignored."

Despite the government's repeated claims of historic education investments, the 2024 budget only provides a 2.7 per cent projected increase to the education budget compared to last year's spending, which is lower than inflation and does not account for rising enrollment. What they portray as an increase is actually a cut. The province also ignored all 33 of our pre-budget recommendations and have not included anything that would address the staffing crisis in education.

The increases are even more miniscule when it comes to post-secondary education funding. This budget is a mere 0.1 per cent higher than last year's budget and will not even begin to resolve the severe financial concerns of Ontario's universities and colleges. Ontario is currently last among all provinces in per pupil funding at the post-secondary level. The government's own blue-ribbon panel called for more investments in the sector, calls that the Progressive Conservative government has for the most part ignored.

"Politics is all about choices," added Littlewood. "The Premier and his government continue to choose to put students last, and this budget is no different. They've ignored the severe underfunding of elementary and secondary schools as well as in post-secondary education, which has contributed to an acute staffing crisis, rising violence in classrooms, and significant cuts to special education programming across the province. And it's Ontario's most vulnerable students who pay the highest price for this government's faulty choices."

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Earlier this week, a report titled 'Staff shortages a daily issue for many Ontario schools' was released. The report surveyed Ontario principals and found that more than a quarter of Ontario's schools experience teacher shortages every single day, and almost half experience daily shortages for education assistants.

Recruitment and retention were found to be even more serious in secondary schools, with 35 per cent of secondary schools reporting that they face daily shortages of teaching staff and 46 per cent facing daily shortages of education workers. Principals identified a lack of investment in public education plus low wages as root causes of the recruitment and retention crisis.

"Today was a critical opportunity for this government to address the very serious issues that the Progressive Conservatives have either created or allowed to worsen in Ontario schools," concluded Littlewood. "Every day, schools are forced to operate in an environment where staffing is insufficient, violent incidents are more likely to happen, and many special needs students are unable to receive the supports they need to learn successfully. Every student in Ontario deserves full and equitable access to a high-quality education. My question for the Premier is, what are you going to do to stop failing the students of Ontario?"

OSSTF/FEESO, founded in 1919, has over 60,000 members across Ontario. They 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 education.

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