

Calandra's bargaining bluster falls flat against dire challenges in publicly funded education

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TORONTO, ON – L'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), Ontario School Board Council of Unions (CUPE-OSBCU), Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) presidents issued the following statement:

"Despite Minister of Education Paul Calandra's many assurances that we would have collective agreements in place before Labour Day, teachers and education workers across Ontario will be welcoming students back next week without new contracts.

In March, we urged the government to allow bargaining to begin early. Instead of engaging in negotiations in early spring and showing a real commitment to stability and improving student success and well-being, Minister Calandra dismissed our call and confidently announced he was 'optimistic' deals could be reached before Labour Day. He was wrong. His repeated misplaced optimism makes painfully clear just how out of touch he is with the state of Ontario's publicly funded education system and the complexity of the bargaining process.

The Ford Conservatives' push to centralize decision-making at the provincial level during this round of bargaining is not surprising. Alongside the employer bargaining agencies, the government has attempted to push long-standing local bargaining items into central negotiations, despite our clear opposition. These include core working conditions, such as: staffing timelines related to transfer, surplus, and redundancy; and local professional development funding.

Moving these items to the central table would: strip local autonomy; weaken the ability of our locals to address the specific needs and circumstances of our members, students, and school communities; and further concentrate power at Queen's Park at a time when publicly funded education is already under immense strain.

Minister Calandra has claimed that one of the hallmarks of the Ford government's time in office is 'relative peace' with teachers' unions and unions representing education workers. He's wrong, again. The last round of bargaining was drawn out, contentious, and forced CUPE-OSBCU members to defend their rights in a province-wide strike. Hardly the 'relative peace' he described.

Ontario's more than 275,000 teachers and education workers deserve a government that respects our expertise and experience, as well as the bargaining process, not one that undervalues our work or wastes public dollars on attack ads. We deserve an education minister who understands the dire realities of publicly funded education and is willing to engage in good-faith negotiations to address them."

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