

MEDIA RELEASE

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OSSTF/FEESO tells Ontario government students can't wait any longer at pre-budget consultation

NIAGARA, ON — The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) appeared today before the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs as part of the provincial government's pre-budget consultations.

Speaking to the committee, OSSTF/FEESO President Martha Hradowy delivered a clear message. Students cannot wait any longer, and neither can the workers in education who support them every day.

"We come before this committee year after year, alongside parents, community partners, and other education unions," said Hradowy. "And year after year, the reality in Ontario's schools and campuses becomes harder. Students can't wait any longer. And neither can the caring professionals who support them."

OSSTF/FEESO highlighted that since 2018, \$6.3 billion has been removed from kindergarten to grade 12 education funding. This erosion in funding has resulted in larger class sizes, fewer supports, and more unmet student needs across the province.

"Education is not a cost. It is a core economic benefit," said Hradowy. "Ontario is facing real economic uncertainty. Trade disruption, tariff threats, and supply chain volatility mean we need a skilled and adaptable workforce. That workforce is built through strong, stable public education from kindergarten through post-secondary."

Hradowy outlined three key priorities it is calling on the government to address in Budget 2026.

First, OSSTF/FEESO is calling for student supports and special education to be funded based on actual student need. This includes meaningful access to education assistants, child and youth workers, social workers, speech language supports, in-school mental health professionals, and timely assessments and early intervention.

"When those supports are missing, the outcomes are predictable," Hradowy said. "Students fall further behind, violence and crisis increase, staff burnout accelerates, and families lose confidence in the system. These are not extras. They are the conditions students need to learn."

Hradowy also emphasized that de-streaming must be properly resourced if it is to succeed.

“De-streaming was introduced to improve equity, but it requires smaller class sizes, dedicated education workers, proper training, adequate planning time, and diverse learning resources,” said Hradowy. “The current rollout has not delivered this. It is okay to say we got this wrong. Teachers will thank you.”

Second, OSSTF/FEESO called for an increase in the number of qualified, caring adults in schools and on campuses. Hradowy noted that 70,000 qualified teachers are not currently teaching in Ontario, while many more are approaching retirement.

“When staffing is inadequate, students do not get the attention they need, violent incidents escalate, and staff spend more time managing crises than supporting learning,” she said. “Seventy five percent of our members report that violence has increased since they began working in schools. This is the direct result of choices about funding, staffing, and supports.”

Third, the union urged the government to treat school safety and infrastructure as essential. Citing the Financial Accountability Office, Hradowy noted that \$31.4 billion is needed to address the school repair backlog, maintain schools in good repair, and build new spaces in growing communities.

“Students should not be learning in buildings with failing ventilation, extreme heat, or unsafe conditions,” she said. “Every school should be a source of community pride.”

OSSTF/FEESO also raised concerns about the chronic underfunding of post-secondary education, noting that Ontario ranks last in Canada for per student funding.

“Colleges and universities are essential to Ontario’s future workforce,” said Hradowy. “They cannot function when pushed to the brink by chronic underfunding.”

In closing, OSSTF/FEESO stressed that budgets are more than financial documents.

“They reveal what a government truly values,” said Hradowy. “What we are asking for is clear. Prioritize publicly funded education, fund classrooms and student supports based on real need, fix de-streaming, eliminate mandatory e-learning, and give students and workers in education the conditions they need to succeed.”

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.