

# MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release: Wednesday, September 27, 2023

## **OSSTF/FEESO Members approve pathway to resolve school board bargaining**

TORONTO, ON – Members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) covered under the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act* have voted overwhelmingly to approve the proposal to resolve bargaining with the Ontario government through a process that could include binding interest arbitration.

"We are proud to announce that after a three-week long vote, open to all Members in the school board sector, OSSTF/FEESO members have voted to approve a proposal that will put all unresolved items before an independent, third-party arbitrator," said OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood. "Premier Ford can't be trusted. For over 14 months, we have tried to engage the Ford government in good faith bargaining but we haven't had a partner at the table that cares about safeguarding our public education system. Now we have the opportunity to bypass traditional bargaining pathways to secure a fair collective agreement."

The bargaining proposal was adopted with 78.4 per cent support.

Bargaining at the two OSSTF/FEESO central tables, Teacher/Occasional Teacher and Education Workers, will continue until October 27<sup>th</sup>, at which time any matters that have not yet been settled will be put before an arbitrator. Local bargaining across the province will continue until March 28, 2024, at which time all remaining items that have not been settled may be sent to arbitration.

"After 5 years of underfunding and underspending under the Ford administration, our top priority is to get the best possible deal for OSSTF/FEESO Members while working to protect public education in Ontario," said President Littlewood. "Learning and working conditions across the province have deteriorated under the Ford government, staffing and retention have languished, and students are unable to access the supports and resources they need to succeed as a result of this government's deliberate underfunding of education and shortchanging of students. We cannot allow this to continue."

The approved proposal provides there will be no strikes or lockouts during this round of bargaining between the government and OSSTF/FEESO as any items that cannot be agreed to at the central and local bargaining tables will be sent to arbitration.

The proposal also creates a pathway forward for OSSTF/FEESO Members in the school board sector to receive a remedy for wages lost under the Ford government's unconstitutional wage suppression legislation, known as Bill 124. OSSTF/FEESO will continue to ensure that our

university sector and school board transportation consortia Members receive wages unfairly taken from them.

“I want to thank all OSSTF/FEESO Members who participated in the membership vote, those who shared information with their colleagues, and the thousands who attended one of our 30 informational meetings held all across the province. Together, we are striving for the best possible outcome for our Federation,” concluded President Littlewood.

### **Key Facts:**

- OSSTF/FEESO membership has voted to approve a proposal to resolve bargaining in the school board sector through a process that could involve binding interest arbitration.
- Bargaining at OSSTF/FEESO's two central tables (Teacher/Occasional Teacher and Education Worker) will continue until October 27<sup>th</sup>, at which time any items that have not been settled may be resolved by binding interest arbitration.
- Local bargaining across the province will continue until March 28, 2024, at which time any items that have not been settled may be resolved by binding interest arbitration.
- The proposal also includes a remedy for wages that were unfairly lost under Bill 124.
- There will be no job action taken by OSSTF/FEESO and no lockouts by school boards during this round of bargaining.
- This proposal creates a pathway towards securing real investments in public education following years of chronic underfunding and underspending by the Ford government.
- Research by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has shown that school funding through the annual Grants for Student Needs (GSNs) has fallen by \$1,200 per student when adjusted for inflation since the Ford government took power in 2018.
- Years of suppressed wages and deteriorating learning and working conditions has led to serious staffing and retention issues. School boards across the province are struggling to find qualified people to fill education worker and teacher positions.
- Without a fair collective agreement for education workers and teachers, school boards will be forced to continue to make cuts to the supports and programs that students in Ontario rely on.
- The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario has reported that there will be an education spending shortfall in the billions of dollars if current spending levels continue.

*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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