

MEDIA RELEASE

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Ford Government Education Legislation Does Little to Support Students

TORONTO, ON – The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) is responding to the *Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act* tabled today by the Ford government.

“The legislation announced today has very little in terms of supports or resources for students, despite its misleading title,” said OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood. “This legislation seems primarily focused on how school boards operate, and not on how we can better support students and make up for the learning loss experienced during the pandemic.”

“This government likes to put the blame on others and say schools are underperforming, when in reality these schools are being purposely underfunded by the Ford government,” stated President Littlewood. “The province has been shortchanging public education since 2018, delivering underfunded budgets and then underspending against their own subpar budgets. Nothing in yesterday’s announcements or in today’s legislation addresses this government’s years of cuts.”

On Sunday, the Minister of Education announced over \$170 million in funding for early reading and math supports, with a focus on schools deemed to be in the bottom 20 per cent in terms of student performance. Instead of properly funding public education in Ontario, this government continues to play the blame-game, refusing to take responsibility for the fallout from their ongoing underfunding of the system. This legislation focuses on streamlining and “maximizing school capital assets” instead of streamlining access to the supports that students need.

“Yesterday, the Minister said they had been working on their plans for improving literacy and math skills for over a year, yet the Ford government chose not to consult with any education union that represents the teachers and education workers who deliver education every day to Ontario’s two million students. Ministry overreach into the autonomy of education workers, teachers, and school boards continues to be a tactic of this government to undermine the excellent work being done in the public education system. This type of legislation ignores the uniqueness of our learners and our communities,” added President Littlewood.

“Once again, the Ford government is bypassing frontline educators and moving ahead with their own with surprise legislation,” said Littlewood. “Delivering quality education is too important to cut corners when it comes to planning and implementation. There is no reason for this government to not work with the people who will be delivering the updated math and literacy programs in

September. We are literally sitting across the table from them right now in bargaining, but they refuse to work with us to help improve student learning and wellbeing.”

Since the 2018-2019 school year, nearly 2000 teachers have been cut from Ontario’s public education system, based on school board estimates. These job cuts would be even higher without the temporary federal funding from the COVID-19 learning recovery fund, which is set to expire at the end of the 2022-2023 school year. The government has not shared whether that funding will be extended.

School boards across the province have already warned that further staffing cuts are imminent if the COVID-19 funding is cut. This is an all-too-common approach of this government – cut an important service, offer a temporary and much smaller funding reprieve, and then cut again, all in the name of accountability and streamlining.

“The Financial Accountability Office has already shown that the education budget is underfunded by at least 1.4 billion dollars, and we can expect that shortfall to continue over the coming years under this government. This government has refused to invest federal government funding earmarked for helping students recover from COVID-19 setbacks. Students don’t need one-off investments that leave out over 80% of the province’s schools, they don’t need false promises of supports. They need reliable, permanent investments in the public education system,” concluded President Littlewood.

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.

Contact: Caitlin Reid
Media and Communications Advisor
Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation
Caitlin.Reid@osstf.ca
416-576-8346