

April 16, 2019

The Honourable Lisa M. Thompson
Minister of Education
Mowat Block
900 Bay St, 22nd Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Thompson

Re: Releasing Technical Information on the Grants for Students Needs

On March 15, 2019, OSSTF/FEESO and other education stakeholders attended meetings in which you announced changes to the funding mechanism for Ontario's publicly funded school system. These changes include moving the average class size benchmark used to fund classroom teachers from 22:1 to 28:1, changing the requirement for the average class size in a school board from 22 to 28 students, removing the Secondary Programming Amount from the Pupil Foundation Grant, cancelling the Local Priorities Funding, requiring students to take one credit per year via e-learning funded at 35:1, and reducing other grants designed to provide support staff in schools.

These changes will have a profound and devastating impact on the quality of Ontario's world class education system as they will result in thousands of teachers and many education workers in Ontario's secondary schools being removed from the system, causing larger class sizes, fewer course choices, and reduced opportunities for students in need. These drastic changes will weaken high school students' currently strong academic foundation and result in increased dropout rates, which will in turn cause Ontario's standard of living and competitiveness to decline. Companies locate in Ontario because we have a pool of skilled workers that they can draw upon. A key criterion for businesses contemplating relocation to this province is the availability of high skilled workers. If Ontario is "Open for Business" as the Premier claims, then your proposed cuts to education will only serve to discourage those very businesses that you are hoping to attract.

At that meeting on March 15, OSSTF/FEESO asked pointed questions to the Ministry staff regarding the assumptions, calculations and what the projected effects would be for Ontario's education system. We asked:

- What is the projected reduction in teachers and education workers?
- What was the methodology used by the Ministry to calculate these reductions?
- What program(s) is the Ministry intending to reduce or remove?
- What analysis was relied upon to support these proposals?

These questions were not answered and it was apparent that Ministry staff either did not know, were unwilling, or were instructed not to answer. Education stakeholders were left to predict for themselves, in the absence of any substantial technical details, the impact these funding changes would have on individual school boards and schools. The lack of meaningful information created chaos, as stakeholders tried desperately to grapple with such profound changes. Through the chaos of this announcement, the Premier and you would only provide rhetorical rather than substantive answers – hardly the answers that are necessary when Ontario’s education system has been turned on its head.

On April 3, 2019, the Ministry released a memo to school boards to provide instruction on planning for teacher staffing in the light of reductions to classroom teacher positions. Once again, these sample calculations did not include any explanation of how the funding reduction would be implemented. There was no technical information to allow stakeholders to model appropriately for the upcoming school year. The memo did provide details of predicted teacher reductions and savings, but the number provided by the Ministry was essentially useless as the assumptions used to calculate these numbers remain a mystery.

Minister Thompson, Ontario’s parents, students, education workers, school boards, and citizens deserve to know the actual details of your funding reductions. OSSTF/FEESO expects and demands that the Ministry release the technical details of these funding reductions immediately so that the true impact of these cuts can be known.

Yours truly



Harvey Bischof
President, OSSTF/FEESO

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