

February 12, 2020

Greetings and solidarity -

With this letter, we, over 800 post-secondary educators, demonstrate our willingness and commitment to stand with Ontario's Public school Teachers, Education workers and their Unions as they fight to defend our public education system.

We recognize that that they take this stand to prevent incalculable damage to our public schools.

The Ford government has steadily cut public education at all levels, just as it continues to cut other vital public services. The impact on our public education system to date is well documented. An interactive map prepared by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives illustrates how \$430 million in real cuts to school boards in the 2019-2020 year have been experienced at school boards across the province. Among the effects to date:

- Class sizes are already increasing significantly
- Course offerings in both mandatory and optional courses in high schools have been cut
- Crucial special education funding and funding to support vulnerable students has been cut
- Programs to combat racism at school and to incorporate Indigenous content and perspectives into the Ontario curriculum have been cancelled.
- Staffing losses of Teachers, Guidance Counselors, Speech and Language pathologists, psychologists, and social workers have already occurred
- Exorbitant user fees for programs such as International Baccalaureate (IB) are making it difficult for students to complete their programs.

Such austerity measures disproportionately affect those with the lowest incomes, Indigenous families, newcomers and English language learners, communities of colour, children who are gender diverse, children with disabilities and/or individual learning needs, and others who already face barriers in our education system. These cuts fuel social inequality: the damage done to our children's futures, and to our society broadly, is profound.

Left unchallenged, we believe that the Ford government will continue to cut public education without limits.

Thus, we cannot support the idea that the teachers' unions should "meet the government halfway" or that "both sides" have to compromise.

There must be no capitulation to proposed class sizes of 28 students, leading to the removal of 30,000 classes from the system, and making two online classes mandatory at the high-school level. This would open the door to the Ford government's plans for 35 students per class, 100,000 classes removed, and a majority of online classes. Compromising on already inadequate special education funding means our students with diverse learning needs fall even further behind.

We have seen that this government cannot be taken at its word, even when Unions have attempted to work with them. The Ford government is already backtracking on the commitment secured by CUPE education workers in the fall that provided special education supports and resources.

The support for public-school teachers, their unions, and their bargaining positions at both elementary and secondary levels continues to grow. They fight to maintain the current all-day kindergarten model, ensure that already large class sizes not increase, provide adequate funding for special education, and end pedagogically questionable on-line 'learning' experiments.

We also see the Ford government escalating their attacks:

- Ford and Education Minister Stephen Lecce are stepping up their portrayal of Teachers, Education Workers, and their Unions as self-interested and greedy.
- Wealthy Ford supporters have paid for costly newspaper advertisements from a fake parents group to try to discredit Teachers in the public eye.
- While \$42 million has been cut from the Toronto District School Board, the \$60 that the province promises to reimburse parents for every day of the strike will cost \$48 million each day.

The destruction of the public education system pursued by the Ford government affects all levels of education and sets the stage for the privatization of public education in Ontario.

At the post-secondary level, the Ford government's cut to financial aid for students has already undermined the ability of those without family wealth to attend university. The Ford government's proposed 'performance metrics' could lead to a \$500 million cut to Ontario's universities; the severity of this will rest on an undefined set of indicators likely to favour institutions with the largest corporate endowments.

As educators at the post-secondary level, we believe that universal, free, public education is important for every individual and for the development of society as a whole. We call for adequate funding for kids and schools: Kids should have more time with teachers in smaller classes, better maintained school-buildings, access to more specialized supports, and improved resources for their learning. The children and youth of this province should not be the target of purported cost-saving measures and profit-making experiments.

Just as the Ontario Parent Action Network has mobilized in support of our children to demonstrate that parents will not be pitted against teachers in this fight, we as post-secondary educators stand by our colleagues in ETFO, OSSTF, OECTA and the AEFO. We support teachers who are outside in the cold instead of teaching the students they care about, in order to defend public education for all.

Sincerely,

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