

Submission on Bill 100 (An Act to Implement Budget Measures and to Enact, Amend and Repeal Various Statutes), 2019

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation was founded in 1919. OSSTF/FEESO represents over 60,000 public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, instructors, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, and many other educational workers from junior kindergarten to university.

OSSTF/FEESO is pleased to make a submission on Bill 100 with respect to its impact on the public education and the university and colleges sectors.

Ontario's education system, without doubt or political spin, is one of the world's best. This is verified by a multitude of international tests and measures. The Ontario government claims, in Bill 100, to be taking steps to strengthen education, however, the cuts outlined in both the budget and the Grants for Student Needs (GSNs) are going to do just the opposite. We fear that the cuts outlined in the Bill, and further detailed in the GSNs, are going to not only weaken the education system but in turn weaken Ontario's workforce and ultimately our economy.

School Board Sector Proposed Changes:

Funded Average Class Size

In Bill 100, the government has outlined a plan to change the funded average class size from 22:1 to 28:1 for grades 9 through 12. This will not bring us in line with other Canadian jurisdictions, but in fact will put us behind. Ontario's 22:1 funded average includes all class types and levels. It is disingenuous to state that our funded average is the highest because data is not collected in all provinces; it is higher in some provinces and lower in others, like British Columbia and Alberta. We are already witnessing program cuts, which eliminate student choice, as school boards struggle to implement the class size average of 28:1. Students will not be able to continue studying certain subjects and might have to resort to outside sources to be able to finish their OSSD requirements. Despite the claim of no current teacher being eliminated through this cut, at the end of four years, there will be one in four teaching positions eliminated. Every lost teaching position also results in the loss of six classes that teacher would otherwise have taught. This will not improve student success and the damage done to student choice will be amplified with the removal of Secondary Programming Grant and the Local Priorities Grant (LPG). Removal of this many adults from our schools is going to have a negative impact on supervision and safety in our schools. In order to maintain any smaller programs, such as those for students with special needs or, for example, technology classes that have equipment and machinery that creates safety considerations, some classes will balloon to forty or more students. We recommend that the government listen to parents, students, and all the other stakeholders who know how devastating this will be to our students.

Impact on Support Staff Unknown

Without the release of the technical paper to accompany the GSNs, it is impossible for OSSTF/FEESO to make a full submission. There are too many details missing to be able to determine the full impact of the government's proposed funding changes to K-12 education. There are going to be changes to the Operations Grant based on the change in the funded average class size that are believed to cause a reduction in maintenance, clerical and custodial staff that will make our secondary schools less safe. The removal of support staff from our schools will exacerbate the supervision and safety concerns already mentioned. The cancelation of the Local Priorities Grant, the Human Resources Transition Grant, the base funding from the Cost Adjustment, and Qualifications & Experience Grant alone will require school boards to remove support staff from high schools.

Hiring Practices

Regulation 274 was born from a system that left the hiring of teachers solely in the hands of principals. In the absence of a transparent and fair hiring system, nepotism, racism, homophobia, sexism, and other biases ran rampant and unchecked. While claiming they wanted to hire the "best" teachers—a term most frequently left undefined by school board employers—teachers newly graduated from a faculty were consistently over-represented in hiring, even though substantial evidence exists to demonstrate that experience leads to improved practice, especially in the first years of teaching. We believe that returning to a system where the principal is free to hire whomever they like will bring us right back to a system fraught with bias and a teaching force that does not reflect our communities.

Parents' Bill of Rights

Developing a Parents' Bill of Rights for rights that parents already possess seems to be a tool to add to division and conflict. A Parents' Bill of Rights is simply not required. Parent voice is already received, engaged with, and respected through our School Community Councils and conversations with teachers and trustees. Sadly, sometimes a narrative that counters what is taught in the home is healthy and productive in the life of a child. Our other concern is that many participants to the consultation expressed concern that education decisions would be put in the hands of people that do not have any background knowledge or expertise in education. Our students deserve the best we can deliver with available unbiased evidence.

Curriculum Reform

Curriculum Reform should be an ongoing and natural part of any education system that is continually evaluating what it does well and where it needs to improve. As any educator can tell you, there is more than one way to teach a class, and each set of students comes with its own set of circumstances. Each different class may require a unique set of teaching methods or a different emphasis of certain parts of the curriculum that only a trained educator can diagnose and provide. What works in downtown Toronto might not work in Fort Francis. Using proven methods of teaching is an excellent idea, as long as the ultimate decisions are left to the trained educators working

in the classrooms, the professionals who know their students' needs best. OSSTF/FEESO questions disbanding the Curriculum Council, in favour of simply asking the public what it thinks. The general public is not trained in teaching and learning. The Federations, and the frontline workers they represent, are highly trained, experienced experts in curriculum, and they should be the voice of curriculum reform.

Changes to Math Curriculum

Developing a Mathematics Strategy Built for Success – OSSTF/FEESO questions spending precious funding to have secondary teacher candidates, with university level degrees in math, taking a test in basic mathematics. In the same vein, why would a teacher of drama, English or French need to be able to pass a math test, a subject that they will not teach? Secondary school teachers are not generalists; we teach very specific disciplines, in which we have received years of highly specialised training. We believe that this blanket approach will weed out excellent teachers of subjects other than mathematics. Also concerning is the funneling of public funds into third party tutoring companies that will not be required to hire educators with a high degree of training. OSSTF/FEESO does not support the siphoning of taxpayers dollars into massive, for-profit education companies with no value provided for the investments, as witnessed throughout the U.S.

Modernizing the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)

EQAO testing has not proven itself to provide any value for money. It fails to test student achievement, but instead tells us which students are best at learning how to take a test. It tells us that if you spend thousands of hours teaching students how to write a test, they do well on the test. Many alternative methods of testing (e.g. randomized) would save millions of taxpayer dollars that could be better invested in staffing schools with caring adults to support students in their education and help in their supervision. It is time to eliminate EQAO or, at the very least, scale it back to provide a better return on investment.

Open For Business

If Ontario were truly open for business, why would the government take steps to make cuts that will negatively impact the education of our future workforce? Removing choice from students and removing teachers and support staff from our schools will not improve our workforce. The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario reported in 2019 that Ontario's 2017 per capita spending was very close to the Canadian average, far from the highest. With the proposed cuts to education announced on March 15, 2019, Ontario is going to move well under the Canadian average, in a race to the bottom. This will not benefit our students, our workforce or our economy. OSSTF/FEESO made a detailed submission, during the education consultation, providing various ways in which the government could enhance education. Our suggestions were ignored in favour of cutting funding from the system and targeting our high school students with particular aggression. We are calling on the government to reverse these cuts, support student choice, and our education system for the betterment of our economy and our province's children.

Post-Secondary Education

Tuition Cut of 10%

OSSTF/FEESO has always advocated for lower tuition fees for students to make post-secondary education affordable and available to everyone. The previous Liberal government also understood that concept when they implemented the new OSAP and student Grant and Loan Program. OSSTF/FEESO supported that endeavour but warned that this does not go far enough, as post-secondary education must be affordable, equitable, and comprehensive as a public service. Provincial funding for post-secondary education accounts for less than 50% of an institution's revenue, forcing these institutions to find revenue elsewhere, usually to the disadvantage of students, faculty, and non-academic staff.

The current government's intention to lower tuition rates by 10% starting in the 2019–20 school year for students enrolled in a publicly funded college or university in the province would normally mean good news for Ontario post-secondary students. However, with no corresponding funding adjustment in the block grants, it will mean a cut of 10% to the funding of universities and colleges or \$440 million provincially. This cut will have a direct impact on the very students who this government is claiming to assist, in that there will be fewer services for post-secondary students, as institutions will cut services, with non-academic staff being the most vulnerable. The government has given with one hand and taken with the other.

Compounding this cruel twist is that the government is cancelling the grant and loan program under OSAP and eliminating free tuition for low income Ontarians. The government has said that the program was being utilized by those who did not need it, but that assertion was based upon little data. These changes to the ratio of grant and loans would now mean that Ontario post-secondary students and families would have a higher loan burden than previously. On average, an Ontario university student would be taking on a further \$800 in debt per academic year, thereby negating the effect of the 10% tuition decrease. The only thing that the government has done is to shift the burden of post-secondary education onto the students and families that need the program the most.

Students Choice Initiative

As a further attack on the post-secondary sector, the government has announced a change to ancillary fees students pay through the Student Choice Initiative, by allowing students to opt-out of certain fees through regulation. These ancillary fees fund programs such as health and counselling, transit passes, student associations and clubs, career development, student directed contributions to fundraising campaigns, on-campus food banks, safety programs, and campus news. By allowing students to choose which ancillary student fees they pay, funding for these programs would not only endanger student health and well-being, but also create more job precarity, as the professional non-academic staff who support these programs will disappear with the funding.

Outcomes Based Funding for Universities and Colleges

The government announced its intention to increase the portion of funding for universities and colleges that will be outcome-based to 60% from 1.2% by the 2024–2025 academic year, despite no announcement of what the actual metrics used will be. This form of funding was introduced by the previous Liberal government after review and consultation. The consultation raised concerns regarding this type of funding, which resulted in a small portion of funding (1.2%) to become outcome-based, only for Special Purpose Funding for universities.

The arm's length agency of the Ontario government, HEQCO (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario), studied outcome-based funding and found that this type of funding in higher education has shown little evidence of improved student outcomes. Further, research from the United States is much the same - that it has no discernable effects on retention or degree completions.

Funding that is outcome-based will favour the creation of a system that advantages institutions in large urban areas, disadvantages those in the North, stifles equity and access for students, and will demolish the culture of universities as an incubator of free thought and of academic liberty.

So far, there has been no proof presented that outcome-based funding will improve Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

Limiting Compensation on Post-secondary Employees Post Retirement

The government's proposed regulations under the *Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act*, that would have the effect of limiting compensation for those in the sector that are receiving a pension and continue to work, is senseless, discriminatory, and unwise. Pension plans in many post-secondary institutions are a result of good faith discussions between the individual institution and their employees. In many cases, they are collectively bargained. Government over-reach into the operation of an independent pension plan violates the Charter rights of individual freedom to bargain, despite the minimal savings that may be recovered by effecting such change. This proposal is more mean-spirited than conceptual.

Maximizing Commercialization Opportunities

The creation of an expert panel for delivering an action plan maximizing commercialization opportunity related to the post-secondary education sector is alarming. Education should not be a vehicle to be sold to the highest bidder. Currently, in Ontario, many post-secondary institutions are being overrun with corporate interests. Whether it is the specially named college, faculty, athletic centre, or corporate seats on boards of governors – post-secondary institutions are becoming less of an incubator of independent thought and more of an institution of corporate interests. While it is true that high academic research and support benefits business and society, it must be the government's duty to balance the needs of Ontario citizens and taxpayers and not the needs of private corporations when it comes to taxpayer funded post-secondary school education.