

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government plan still leaves education workers, families, and students in the dark

In the midst of renewed emergency and stay-at-home measures, families, students, and workers in Ontario's education system are left with more anxiety than answers. Wholly inadequate planning is a pattern with this government and, unsurprisingly, today's government announcement fails to address the challenges faced by families in the province. This flawed plan makes little reference to how stay-at-home measures will impact the education sector and reveals the disconnect between the challenges faced by families with school-aged children and this government.

Enough is enough.

We call on the Ford government to implement a full pause on any students receiving in-person instruction across the entire province until at least the end of the current stay-at-home order. This includes schools throughout Northern Ontario. It also includes situations in the province where special education students are learning in person. COVID-19 knows no boundaries and Ontario's situation is too grave to allow for half measures.

We call on Doug Ford to implement a real plan. The people of Ontario deserve a safe metric to trigger a move back to face-to-face classes. They need to know what the next few months of schooling will look like. The plan must include:

- asymptomatic testing measures for all students and staff before in-person learning resumes in any school;
- a vaccination plan that prioritizes education workers and teachers so that schools have a better chance of staying open to in-person learning;
- increased access to and funding for community supports, including respite support for families in need;
- immediate investments and supports to make current online learning more accessible and more functional for learners;
- access to paid sick leave for workers;
- standard regulations for reduced class sizes and other health protocols to protect school communities.

The government must use this time to establish clear, transparent, public health-supported benchmarks that ensure the safety of our communities. Harvey Bischof, OSSTF/FEESO President said, "The people of Ontario are fed up with Doug Ford's piecemeal COVID response. We deserve better."

OSSTF/FEESO wants students in schools and recognizes the challenges that many families are facing. However, we know that to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to keep our communities

safe, learning face-to-face is not advisable. This aligns with the announced government restrictions aimed at reducing community transmission.

Education workers, teachers, and families have spent much of this pandemic managing the chaos of the government's last-minute decision making. "Schools, students, and educators must be recognized for the role they play in reducing the transmission of COVID-19 in our communities," says Bischof.

Any plan for the return to face-to-face learning must be made in consultation with all stakeholders in education. OSSTF/FEESO and its members remain steadfast in their dedication to publicly-funded education in Ontario.

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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