

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Underfunded haphazard February 1<sup>st</sup> school re-opening plan**

Today's announcement by the Ministry of Education that a number of schools will return to face-to-face learning comes with insufficient funding and a lack of detail of the benchmarks this government is using when planning for school re-openings. Last week, a Freedom of Information request corroborated the public's suspicions that the Ford Government discarded medical advice and made political decisions around school safety plans and the return to in-person learning. This reckless act further erodes the public's confidence and trust in the government's ability to effectively lead the province during this unprecedented state of emergency.

OSSTF/FEESO members, students, and families are tired of hearing about the new safety measures that have been put in place without specific examples of where and how these safety protocols have been implemented in Ontario's schools. The benchmarks that have been used by this government to reopen schools in one region but not in others, while a provincial declaration of emergency is in effect, continue to be Minister of Education Stephen Lecce's best-kept secret.

There continues to be no consultation with education workers and teachers who prioritize the academic and mental health needs of the students and families that they service and support. With the threat of new COVID-19 variants and the unknown factors of this pandemic, it is unreasonable and irresponsible not to have transparent metrics and benchmarks communicated to the public. Last-minute pivots and announcements by this government are unsafe and debilitating to the province of Ontario.

Safety for all requires concrete actions and funding, not watered-down plans and sporadic announcements. The government must do more to protect students, education workers, and teachers. The health and safety of our communities remains at risk because of the ineffective efforts by the Ford government.

*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: Jennifer Seif  
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation  
[Jennifer.Seif@osstf.ca](mailto:Jennifer.Seif@osstf.ca)  
416-751-8300 x 221

