

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release: Thursday, January 23, 2024

ONTARIO'S EDUCATION LEADERS UNITE TO END VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS: OSSTF/FEESO CALLS FOR SAFE SCHOOL ACTION TABLE

TORONTO, ON — Yesterday, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) hosted a groundbreaking **Safe at School Summit**, bringing together educators, unions, researchers, children's mental health experts, disability advocates, principals' organizations, school board directors, civil society and community leaders, and political decision makers to address the growing crisis of violence in Ontario schools. This event marks a critical turning point in the collective effort to ensure safe and supportive learning environments for every student, teacher, and education worker across the province.

"Violence in Ontario's schools cannot be normalized," said OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood. "Right now, we are failing students and staff in schools across Ontario as the number of violence incidents continues to increase. We convened the summit because this crisis requires swift and effective solutions to end the violence, yet the Ford government has so far failed to act. They've left us with no choice but to act without them."

The Summit featured in-depth discussions on the systemic issues fueling school violence, including chronic underfunding of public education, which has resulted in insufficient supports and services for students and a growing strain on classrooms due to severe staffing shortages.

Dawn Hoffman, Principal Researcher at Strategic Communications, Inc. stated, "Multiple research studies conducted in the past several years by us and others on behalf of several education unions, have demonstrated alarming levels of violence aimed at educators and education workers in Ontario's schools. Our [research](#) shows that upwards of three in ten OSSTF members alone had physical force used against them in the 2022-2023 school year. Compounded with [data from a survey](#) conducted by Stratcom for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) during the same period, and studies released at the University of Ottawa among education workers, we are seeing what could reasonably be called an epidemic in Ontario schools."

Participants worked collaboratively to develop actionable solutions, building on recommendations outlined in OSSTF/FEESO's newly released white paper, [Safe at School: OSSTF/FEESO White Paper on Building Safer School Communities](#). Some of the most important solutions include:

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- The Minister of Education should create a multi-stakeholder Safe at School Action Table mandated to develop a comprehensive Safe at School Action Plan.
- The Minister of Education should expand funding and eligibility for safe school grants to allow school boards to hire additional qualified staff such as professional student support personnel, educational assistants, and other education workers into the public education system.
- The Minister of Labour should create a sector-specific regulation for the education sector under the Occupational Health and Safety Act that considers and addresses the unique nature of education workplaces. The regulation should include the requirement that school board workplace violence and prevention plans and programs must be developed in consultation with a multi-site Joint Health and Safety Committee.
- The Government of Ontario should implement a dedicated tuition waiver to attract students into education programs for education occupations experiencing shortages.
- Unions, school boards, and administrators should develop joint campaigns on building non-violent cultures in schools.

OSSTF/FEESO is urging the Ford government to take immediate action and commit to working collaboratively with Summit participants to make Ontario's schools safer. A top priority must be the creation of a multi-stakeholder Safe at School Action Table with a mandate to develop a comprehensive Safe at School Action Plan. OSSTF/FEESO and other stakeholders at the Summit, including other education unions, have committed to creating a Safe at School Action table forward, with or without the government's involvement.

The summit's participants collectively call on all stakeholders—including political parties, school boards, and community organizations—to endorse and implement the Summit's recommendations.

"This is not just about ending violence; it's about building schools where every student feels supported and every staff member feels safe," concluded Littlewood. "We're calling on everyone—from policymakers to parents—to join us in making this vision a reality."

OSSTF/FEESO is committed to holding all stakeholders accountable and will work tirelessly to ensure the recommendations from the summit are actioned. The union remains open to collaboration with the Ford government to achieve these goals.

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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