

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Ford government cuts putting education of students who are Deaf, Blind, and DeafBlind at risk**

Toronto, ON - Today, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) held a press conference to highlight growing concerns about the Ford government's funding cuts to Provincial Schools, which offer specialized programming for students who are Deaf, hard of hearing, blind, low vision, DeafBlind, and students who have learning disabilities.

"The pleas of students with disabilities attending Ontario's specialized Provincial Schools continue to be ignored by the Ford government," said OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood. "These publicly funded schools, their students, and the families they serve are being pushed to the brink by underfunding, lack of resources, and cuts to staffing. Premier Ford and Minister Lecce have left families grappling with the uncertainty of their students' well-being and future."

Staff, local advocates, and OSSTF/FEESO have lobbied the provincial government for years to stop neglecting Provincial Schools. The Ford government has so far ignored these serious calls, allowing these schools to fall into disrepair and leaving students to suffer.

Tamara Witcher, local OSSTF/FEESO District 30 Provincial Schools Authority Teachers (PSAT) President, highlighted the need for increased course options, the need for more American Sign Language (ASL) proficient staff and teachers with DeafBlind qualifications, an increase in mental health supports and resources, and a commitment to fund renovations for the dilapidated school buildings.

"It is clear that Premier Ford does not live up to his word. When he says he is committed to funding and supporting students, that he wants to make sure students are ready to take on the jobs of the future, that they are prepared to find rewarding careers, his word clearly doesn't apply to these students, our students," said Witcher. "Failure to acknowledge these important needs only cements a grim future for the students and families accessing these specialized programs."

Local PSAT and OSSTF/FEESO District 30 Officer, David Sykes asked, "Why do teachers have to come begging to get the support we need to provide the programs and services to which the students are entitled? Why does the government continue to look at these schools through a deficit and not an asset lens?"

Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) Chandra Pasma, Education Critic for the New Democratic Party of Ontario (NDP), called for the Auditor General to investigate Ontario's Provincial Schools and the Ford government's educational neglect of the hundreds of Deaf, hard of hearing, blind, low vision, DeafBlind, and students with learning disabilities who depend on the specialized programs.

Concluded Littlewood, "Every single student in Ontario deserves a high-quality education in Ontario. It's time for Doug Ford to live up to his promises and stop shortchanging the students that attend Ontario's Provincial Schools."

OSSTF/FEESO represents approximately 170 PSAT teachers at four school sites across the province and works with education and parent partners to advocate for better working and learning conditions.

*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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