

## **Startling OSSTF/FEESO school violence survey results reveal need for emergency funding**

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TORONTO, ON — Survey results released today by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) show that an overwhelming majority of OSSTF/FEESO members, 75 per cent, report that 'there are more incidents of violence' since they began working in Ontario schools, and one in three members, 31 per cent, report having personally had physical force used against them. The survey research involving teachers and education workers examined experiences with workplace violence in Ontario schools during the 2022-2023 school year and at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

"The alarming results of our survey highlight a disturbing reality: violence in Ontario schools is not just a rare occurrence, but a growing threat to the safety and well-being of staff and students alike," said Karen Littlewood, President of OSSTF/FEESO. "Every instance of violence in our schools represents a failure by the Ford government to provide a safe learning environment for students and a failure to support the caring professionals who are tasked with nurturing student growth and development."

Dawn Hoffman, Principal Researcher at Strategic Communications, Inc. stated, "The data confirms that levels of violence in schools is high and increasing. With three out of four OSSTF/FEESO members reporting rising levels of violence in schools over the course of their careers, and upwards of three in ten having personally had physical force used against them in the last school year, we are seeing what could reasonably be called an epidemic in Ontario schools."

OSSTF/FEESO commissioned an online survey of over 6,500 members who work in public schools from kindergarten to grade 12. The key findings are:

- Violence in schools is a critical and growing issue
- Significant numbers of education professionals witnessed or personally experienced violence in the 2023 school year alone
- The risk is greater for women, especially for those who are education workers who provide direct services and supports for students
- Members report a lack of resources and accountability
- Exposure to violence adversely impacts schools' ability to recruit and retain qualified staff

"It's normal for me to come home from work with bruises, bite marks, and black eyes," said Carlin, an education worker and OSSTF/FEESO member. "I can't tell you how many times I've had chairs thrown at me or my hair pulled and even ripped from my head. The fact this has become normalized for me, and my colleagues, is a symptom of just how broken this system has become under the Ford government. It doesn't have to be this way, but Doug Ford and the Progressive Conservative party have deliberately left our students underfunded and our support staff undervalued."

Littlewood added, "It is unacceptable that education workers and teachers, particularly women, are experiencing violence in their workplaces. This is a systemic issue that demands immediate attention and action, especially from the Ford government."

OSSTF/FEESO is calling on the Ford government to work with us and other education unions to implement the following four proposed solutions to stop the rise of violence in Ontario schools:

1. **Emergency safe school funding** – The Ford government should allocate Planning Provision funding, which currently stands at \$1.39 billion, to create a new Emergency Safe School Fund to bring in more qualified staff, such as professional student support personnel, education assistants, and other education workers.
2. **Stay and Learn** – The province should create a dedicated tuition waiver to attract students into education programs for occupations experiencing shortages, such as education assistants and professional student support personnel. Similar programs have been introduced in health care and long-term care and are supported by the provincial government.
3. **Release the data now** – OSSTF/FEESO demands that the Ford government release data on serious student incident reports, risk assessments, and the Ministry of Labour's workplace violence inspection blitz of education worksites conducted in February and March 2023.
4. **Safe School Action Table** – OSSTF/FEESO calls on the government to commit to the development of a Safe School Action Plan, with a Community and Stakeholder Action Table that includes OSSTF/FEESO and other education unions.

"Behind every statistic is an education worker or teacher who has faced intimidation, threats, or physical harm while simply trying to do their job. It's beyond time for the Ford government to take this growing crisis seriously. We need them to work with us to ensure that every staff member and student is safe, healthy, and supported in Ontario schools. We are waiting for this government to act on our calls," concluded President Littlewood.

A short summary of the survey results is below. Please see the [OSSTF/FEESO Safer Schools media kit](#) for more information on the survey results.

- **Violence in schools is a critical and growing issue**
  - Three-quarters of members (75%) say 'there are more incidents of violence' since they have been working in the Ontario public school system, including 80% of education assistants, 79% of child and youth workers, 78% of permanent teachers, 73% of early childhood educators, and 65% of occasional Teachers.
  - Seven in ten members (69%) said the number of incidents of violence against teachers and education workers in Ontario public school system has increased since before March 2020, including 36% who believe incidents of violence 'has increased a great deal'.
- **Significant numbers of education professionals witnessed or personally experienced violence in the 2023 school year alone**
  - Two in five OSSTF/FEESO members (43%) witnessed an attempt of physical force against another staff person. The data rises to 78% among child and youth workers, 73% among education assistants, and 62% among early childhood educators. One-

third (33%) of permanent teachers witnessed an attempt of physical force against another staff person.

- Three in ten (31%) members report having personally had physical force used against them. Experiences with violence are widespread among professions serving Ontario's highest needs students; 75% of education assistants had physical force used against them, as well as 70% of child and youth workers, 63% of early childhood educators, and 16% of permanent teachers.
- **The risk is greater for women, as well as (largely female) education workers who work with special needs populations**
  - Women perceive and experience violence at the hands of students in greater numbers: 35% of female members were personally subjected to physical force compared to 20% of male members.
  - Three-quarters of education assistants (75%) report having had physical force used against them in the 2022-2023 school year; 89% of education assistants identify as female.
- **Lack of resources and accountability**
  - Lack of accountability amongst decision-makers has exacerbated workplace violence concerns. Members cited large class sizes and a lack of resources – funding and staffing – as both underpinning and exacerbating the rise of violence in schools.
  - During their time working in the public school system, 69% members report in-class supports (e.g. education assistants and support personnel) decreased and 49% in-school supports decreased (e.g. child and youth counselors, guidance counsellors). This is in addition to a perceived lack of community-based supports for students in crisis or who have complex behavioural and health needs.
- **Exposure to violence adversely impacts schools' ability to recruit and retain qualified staff**
  - Some members shared they were considering leaving the profession in response to the many stresses facing them at work, not the least of which was exposure to violence. This was in addition to school boards' inability to recruit qualified professionals to fill open positions for education assistants, child and youth workers, counselors, and other roles. According to members, exposure to violence and low pay created untenable working conditions for frontline staff.

*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.*