

August 4, 2021

Ontario's teacher unions respond to Ford government's inadequate back-to-school plan

TORONTO, ON—Today, the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) issued the following statement in response to the Ford government's release of its back-to-school plan:

"The Ford government has not learned any lessons from its mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. For months, teachers and education workers have been saying that in-person learning is the best and most equitable way for students to learn. Although the Ford government is saying the same thing, its actions do not back up their words. Our members look forward to welcoming students back into school buildings, but expect the government to ensure that it is done safely.

For example, the government's ventilation announcement is too little and too late. Why wasn't this investment made 18 months ago? It's clear that they do not know what schools need, how schools operate nor how to keep students and education workers safe. They've ignored our calls for an advisory table and dismissed front-line education workers, but our offer to be consulted stands.

By releasing an incomplete and inadequate plan, instead of assuring families, staff and students that schools will be safe, the Ford government has attempted to create the illusion of normalcy. We are still in a pandemic, with the potential of a fourth wave driven by the Delta variant.

Entire sections of the guidance document are missing at a time when some students are already back in class and others will be returning within four to five weeks, including a plan to manage COVID-19 outbreaks in schools, learning recovery and renewal supports and resources, and a comprehensive plan to support student mental health and well-being.

The plan, which is similar to last year's reopening plan and loosens some protective measures, ignores the need for ongoing funding to ensure a safe and sustainable return to school. The government continues to download its responsibility to school boards and local public health agencies without providing adequate direction, time or funding."

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