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Ford government jeopardizing safety of all Ontarians with underfunded return to school plan

TORONTO – The Ford government is jeopardizing the safety of students, educators and all Ontarians by severely underfunding a safe return to school this September, say Ontario’s four major education unions representing the province’s elementary and secondary teachers and education workers.

The Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO), the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association (OECTA) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) represent 200,000 teachers and education workers who are expected to return to school under the government’s plan.

“This plan and the funding to support it falls far short of the \$3 billion that has been estimated for a safe and healthy return to school,” says AEFO President Rémi Sabourin. “More funds are needed for enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of schools, additional custodial staff, masks and personal protective equipment, health and safety training for staff and additional educators.”

“While the announcement of new funding is welcome, it’s quite clear that the Ford government isn’t willing to pay the full cost of ensuring the safety of students and educators in September,” says ETFO President Sam Hammond. “The Premier promised Ontarians that he ‘will spare no expense’ to keep people safe, yet he and Education Minister Stephen Lecce are betraying that promise to students, educators, parents and communities with this ill-prepared plan.”

“Educators want to be back with their students, but want to do so safely,” says OECTA President Liz Stuart. “The Ford model does not provide for the safe physical distancing that is expected in the rest of the province, and that health experts around the world have recommended to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It also does not provide the necessary additional resources to support distance learning for those families who elect to keep their children home, or to support students in schools who have unique learning needs. Ontario’s recovery depends on a safe return to school, and this plan does not provide it.”

“This plan is an insult to every student, every parent and every educator in the province of Ontario,” said OSSTF/FEESO President Harvey Bischof. “The Ford government has had four months to come up with a serious strategy – four months to consult, to plan, and to allocate appropriate resources to ensure a safe return to school in September. It’s clear from today’s announcement that they have squandered that time. In the midst of a global pandemic, Ontario deserves more than yet another half-baked scheme from Doug Ford and Stephen Lecce.”

-30-

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