

News Release

OECTA STATEMENT ON BARGAINING

March 3, 2020

TORONTO – Liz Stuart, President of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, has issued the following statement on the status of contract negotiations with the Ford government.

"Catholic teachers across Ontario have been unequivocal in our commitment to protect Ontario's world-renowned publicly funded education system. The Ford government has already reduced classroom spending, and we know what the long-term consequences of their plans will be. As a result of OECTA's bad faith bargaining complaint at the Ontario Labour Relations Board, the public consultation documents the government refused to disclose were finally revealed, and confirmed that Ontarians reject the Ford government's destructive education agenda.

As the last line of defence against these cuts, our Association is planning a province-wide full withdrawal of services on Thursday, March 5. However, as we have said all along, our priority remains to negotiate a fair agreement at the bargaining table. To this end, OECTA informed the mediator that we would be willing to resume negotiations on Wednesday, March 4, and to continue to bargain on Thursday and Friday if the discussions were productive. Despite constantly claiming they are available 24/7, and their priority is to keep students in class, the government has yet to accept our offer.

Catholic teachers are fed up with this government's games and spin. While our preference has always been to keep details of negotiations at the bargaining table, the repeated misrepresentations by Premier Ford, Minister Lecce, and other members of this government are undermining the bargaining process. It is time to set the record straight.

I can only speak for our Association, which exclusively represents elementary and secondary teachers in publicly funded Catholic schools. But for us, the pathway to a deal has been clear for months. Since well before Christmas, the OECTA Provincial Bargaining Team has informed the government that while we strongly object to their unconstitutional wage restraint legislation, and retain our fundamental right to challenge it through the courts, we are prepared to accept the salary they have offered at the bargaining table, in order to bring stability and certainty into our schools for our students and parents. Furthermore, we will work within the funding amount for health benefits the government has proposed at our table as recently as last week.

In return, we have called on the government to do what they have always claimed they want to do, which is to put money back into classrooms. This means Premier Ford must move away from his plan to increase class sizes, cut thousands of teaching positions, and eliminate tens of thousands of course options. He must move away from his plan to remove funding for supports for vulnerable students. And he must move away from his reckless scheme for mandatory e-learning, for which the government has absolutely no plans for implementation or how to support student success. In short, the government must reverse their cuts to publicly funded education, and restore teacher staffing to the same level as in 2018-19.

The bottom line is that despite the government's rhetoric, negotiations could have been concluded long before Catholic teachers were forced to take any strike action. Instead, the Ford government has chosen to insult teachers and education workers, and distract and confuse the public, all the while insisting that any agreement must include the permanent removal of resources from classrooms.

Never again should we hear from Premier Ford or any member of his government about how they are focused on reaching agreements that benefit students. Their claims that they are investing in publicly

funded education are simply not true. Time and again they have been given the opportunity to do the right thing, and time and again they have refused.

The public sees through the Ford government's agenda, and they support what teachers and education workers are trying to accomplish at the bargaining table. While the government tries to balance their budget on the backs of students, Catholic teachers are making the necessary sacrifices to protect our publicly funded education system over the long term. OECTA once again calls on the government to show they are serious about investing in students, by accepting our fair, reasonable framework, and coming to the bargaining table to work with us to bring an end to these negotiations."

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