

March 24, 2021

## Joint statement on Ontario budget from unions representing education workers

TORONTO, ON—Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) released the following statement today in response to the Ontario budget announcement.

As the province enters the third wave of the pandemic, the Ford government is delivering a budget that fails to even keep education spending in line with the rate of inflation and enrolment growth. Obviously, education is not a priority for this government.

The pandemic has had a profound impact on students, education workers and our communities. In addition to health and safety concerns, regular disruptions have resulted in considerable learning loss and widening achievement gaps. With this budget, the Ford government had an opportunity to provide students with the supports they will need in the months and years ahead. Instead, they continue to exaggerate their investments while actually shortchanging Ontario's students and families.

The government's ongoing refusal to invest in measures that would keep schools safe has led to deeply concerning health and well-being impacts for education workers, including hospitalization. Their erratic and inconsistent vaccination plan continues to generate confusion and chaos across the province. And their overall failure to respond to the pandemic has extended the crisis and continues to create uncertainty.

To date, the province has refused to make critical investments in publicly funded education, putting students, education workers and families at risk. The government has disregarded advice from medical experts, refused to enhance safety measures, and looked away as safety concerns and self-isolation requirements result in unprecedented staffing shortages across Ontario.

AEFO, CUPE, ETFO, OECTA, and OSSTF/FEESO call on the Ford government to invest in:

- lower class sizes to keep students safe and to address learning loss incurred during the pandemic;
- enhanced safety measures to ensure infection control;
- mental health supports for students and education workers; and
- supports for students with special education needs.

It's high time Premier Ford and Minister Lecce begin listening to education workers. The Conservative government's abandonment of publicly funded education is callous, and they must be held to account.

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