

JOINT STATEMENT

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Ford government to blame for teacher recruitment and retention crisis in Ontario

Minister of Education Stephen Lecce and the Ford government have finally admitted that they have a teacher recruitment and retention problem. In an article published in the Toronto Star on February 21, the minister said to reporters that the province is looking at “every option available” to help ease the shortage of teachers in school boards across Ontario. The government faces the same challenges with recruiting and retaining education workers who provide services and supports to students as well.

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) have been highlighting this issue for years, and have offered to work meaningfully with the government to realize solutions that address and alleviate the many unfilled teacher and education worker positions in school boards across the province.

It should come as no surprise to the Ford government that the growing teacher shortage in Ontario, which is actually a recruitment and retention crisis, is a mess of their own making. However, instead of taking responsibility for the shortage and engaging in meaningful consultation with teachers and education experts to strategize solutions, the government continues to avoid responsibility and pursue their misguided priorities. They seem content to offer short-term, temporary, PR-focused schemes that purposefully fail to address the deep-rooted reasons why many teacher positions remain unfilled in schools across the province.

The Ford government’s failure to prioritize education funding demonstrates a blatant disregard for the essential role teachers play. The Conservatives’ chronic underfunding has left schools understaffed and overburdened, compromising the high quality of education our students deserve, and the level of support teachers and education workers should be receiving.

We have seen the negative impact that the growing teacher shortage has had on student learning firsthand in classrooms. In too many instances, classes are being covered by unqualified and uncertified adults, or are being merged with other classes, jeopardizing the quality of the learning, and placing a burden on classroom teachers and other school staff. We firmly believe that students deserve to have their classroom always staffed with a qualified and certified teacher.

This situation was only made worse by Bill 124, the province’s unconstitutional wage suppression legislation. The Ford government’s unlawful bill led to teachers and education workers being underpaid and undervalued for years. Its lack of respect for teachers and education workers is demoralizing, and that sense of disillusion is actively causing people to leave the profession or never enter it at all.

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The gravity of the recruitment and retention crisis is also exacerbating the alarming levels of violence within our schools. The government has failed to prioritize implementing proactive measures and the resources to address this issue, to ensure students and staff have safe environments conducive to learning and working. The government must take immediate action with real investment to address this ongoing concern.

Teachers are dedicated professionals who invest their time, energy, and passion into nurturing the potential within each student. Yet, the Ford government's continuous disregard for teachers' expertise, input, and well-being, as well as their attacks on the profession, have eroded the morale of the very individuals entrusted with inspiring Ontario's students and helping them to succeed. Allowing these conditions to persist harms students and schools.

A genuine commitment to publicly funded education demands a collaborative and respectful partnership between the government and its teachers and education workers, a sentiment that has regrettably been absent in recent times. Rather than vague suggestions that they met with "partners," we urge the province to engage in meaningful, open, and constructive dialogue with unions and other education partners to develop sustainable solutions to this crisis, and to make the immediate investments in publicly funded education necessary for students to thrive.

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