

Ontario's Education Unions United Against Bill 33

For Immediate Release: Tuesday, October 21, 2025

TORONTO, ON — As the provincial legislature returns, l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECA), Ontario School Board Council of Unions (CUPE-OSBCU), and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) have issued the following joint statement:

The Ford government introduced Bill 33, the *Supporting Children and Students Act*, earlier this year. It is a regressive piece of legislation that does nothing to support students and everything to consolidate power in the hands of the Minister of Education, Paul Calandra.

Our schools are facing a crisis, but not the one this government is pretending to solve. Ontario's public education system is buckling under the weight of underfunding. Class sizes are ballooning. Essential programs are being cut. Teachers and education workers are stretched to the breaking point. Student needs are going unmet, resulting in learning gaps and growing school violence. Put simply, there are not nearly enough trained professionals or services to properly support our students.

We have seen this playbook before. The centralization of power, the erosion of local democracy, and the imposition of punitive systems are hallmarks of American-style politics. Unfortunately, Premier Ford seems eager to emulate them all. This is not the Ontario we believe in.

Minister Paul Calandra's first legislative act in his new role is not about improving safety or educational outcomes; it is a calculated political maneuver designed to distract from the real crisis in Ontario education: chronic underfunding and reckless understaffing. Instead of investing in smaller class sizes and supports for students in schools, the government is choosing to scapegoat trustees while trying to hide that, since 2018, they have cut \$6.3 billion out of our publicly funded education system.

In early September, Minister Calandra said he is '100 per cent' looking at eliminating the role of trustees. Trustees across the province, elected by their communities, could be replaced by government-imposed appointees or supervisors for most school boards, as it is currently doing with five Ontario school boards. For over 175 years, locally elected school board trustees have diligently represented the voices of parents, students, caregivers, and communities.

We know trustees are not perfect, but the role is an important part of our education system. They are accessible and accountable to the Ontarians who vote them in, and if trustees fail to serve their communities, they can be voted out. Appointed supervisors answer to the Ford government and no one else, not to parents, students, or local residents. This is how democracy dies.

Ontario's students need thousands more trained teachers and education workers in their schools. They need smaller class sizes, enhanced special education and mental health supports, and fully funded programs that reflect their needs. What they do not need is more surveillance or more control from a government unwilling to invest in their success.

We must stand together—educators, parents, students, and concerned Ontarians—to defend our schools from this egregious political overreach, as stronger schools start with stronger local voices. The Ford government must abandon this regressive legislation and make the meaningful investments our students and educators deserve. It is time to leave the cuts and the centralization schemes in the past—Ontario students deserve a future that is as forward-thinking as they are.

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