

March 26, 2020

MESSAGE FROM HARVEY BISCHOF, PRESIDENT, OSSTF/FEESO

In a time of great uncertainty, it is inevitable that some confusion will arise, even with the best of intentions. Sadly, we may also see attempts to create unnecessary division when the vast majority of people and institutions are doing their best to cope with an extremely difficult situation. Therefore, I want to provide some clarity about the advice the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) has provided to members with regard to online and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

OSSTF/FEESO members have always been, and will continue to be here for students. Above all else, we want our students to be able to move forward and to succeed, and we want students who are expecting to graduate at the end of this year to be able to do so.

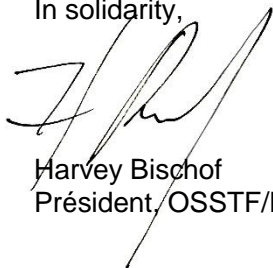
To ensure that happens, a formal working group, made up of representatives from OSSTF/FEESO and other unions as well as the Ministry of Education, has now been established. I have also spoken directly with the Minister of Education, and have reiterated our desire to work collaboratively to ensure that students are able to continue their education under these extraordinary circumstances. We have both committed to ongoing communication in the effort to best support students. Our goal is to put forth a plan that is equitable, accessible, and ensures our students can learn effectively in this unprecedented situation.

More than anyone, educators understand students and understand student needs. We recognize that students come to us from a vast spectrum of backgrounds and circumstances that will affect their ability to engage in learning outside of the classroom. As the COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold and contingencies are considered to ensure the completion of the current school year, educators, including OSSTF/FEESO members, are in an excellent position to take a leadership role in this process.

The individual measures some of our members have taken over the past few weeks to ensure students have the materials and resources they need is a testament to their commitment to our students. But we have asked — in light of the working group that has been established and our leading role in developing a province-wide plan that is equitable and ensures students can advance to the next stage of their education — that they be mindful not to implement anything that could run contrary to direction from their school board or forthcoming from our work with the Ministry.

Developing a plan that first and foremost addresses the needs of students but also respects the unique challenges of our current environment will not be an overnight process. But OSSTF/FEESO is committed to working with schools boards, unions and government partners to move quickly to develop a plan that works for all students, respects the needs of parents, and ensures our educators can deliver the resources and supports our students need to advance their education.

In solidarity,



Harvey Bischof
Président, OSSTF/FEESO