

Ford government plan to address inequities in education falls short

July 10, 2020 - The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) is troubled by the Ford government's refusal to provide details about major changes planned for publicly-funded education in Ontario, and the government's unwillingness to commit adequate funding to accommodate those changes. An omnibus bill introduced by the Ford government earlier this week, supposedly to address the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, proposes significant changes to the education system. Characteristically for this government, these proposals have come forward without any consultation whatsoever with frontline educators.

OSSTF/FEESO strongly supports the need to address anti-Black racism and discrimination in all forms in our education system. The proposals laid out by Minister of Education Stephen Lecce, however, fail to provide any significant details on how that will be accomplished. By all appearances, the Minister's proposals fall far short of that goal.

Also, the "additional funding" the Minister continues to announce for the support of marginalized students and students with special needs is really just the partial restoration of the funding that was carelessly cut by this government when it came to power two years ago. Those ruthless cuts significantly disadvantaged the province's most underserved students, and the government's recent announcements fail dismally to address that problem, particularly in light of the significant extra challenges posed by the current pandemic.

The Ford government's vague plans are a far cry from the decisive actions that are required to address the inequities that Black, Indigenous and racialized students face. In the absence of proper funding for additional resources and supports, Ontarians cannot expect to see improved outcomes for these students.

This week's announcements demonstrate, yet again, that the Ford government understands neither the needs of Ontario's most marginalized students nor the education system upon which those students rely. Minister Lecce's habitual failure to consult frontline educators suggests that the government is simply not interested in gaining that understanding.

OSSTF/FEESO has learned that the government plans to rush the omnibus bill through the legislature and finalize these important decisions in a matter of a couple of weeks. We have serious concerns about the lack of consultation and transparency in the process for making these changes. To package all of these important changes into one bill and to circumvent meaningful public consultations is deeply troubling.

We will continue to reach out to the government to request genuine and thoughtful consultation with OSSTF/FEESO, an organization that represents over 60,000 experienced frontline education workers and teachers in Ontario.