

COVID-19 Pandemic Information Update

Minister of Education's inflammatory comments about educators do nothing to support safe reopening of schools

Yesterday, Minister of Education Stephen Lecce made a number of statements at a press conference that were inflammatory, disrespectful, and belittling of education workers and teachers who work in Ontario's publicly-funded education system. Amongst his adverse comments about OSSTF/FEESO and other education unions were statements that attacked the integrity and commitment of those on the frontlines of education.

One clear example was found in the minister stating, in a response to a reporter's question, that when providing supervision, educators "would walk out of the classroom" because of collective agreement provisions, thereby leaving students in an unsafe position. The minister's claim that educators would willfully compromise the safety of students demonstrates a clear lack of regard for the work of our members.

On the issue of "quadmestering" secondary school classes, the minister alleged that unions were opposed to this idea, which is flatly and categorically false. In addition, he said that he is not asking educators "for any more minutes, not even one more minute more, than what they are paid for – we're just asking for an element of flexibility." The suggestion that teachers and education workers are not willing to be flexible when it comes to student learning and supporting a safe and effective learning environment demonstrates the minister's lack of understanding of the work members do in the publicly-funded education system and their dedication to their students.

We have made it clear to the government that we are willing to look at ways we can be flexible at the local level in order to ensure a safe reopening of schools for educators, students and

families. Yet, the minister continues to politicize the current situation through divisive and inflammatory comments that have nothing to do with a safe reopening of schools.

We remain committed to offering our input on a safe school reopening plan. We remain equally committed to doing everything possible to keep our members and our students safe. Our members are on the frontlines of the education, and on the frontlines of the government's economic plan to reopen the province. They deserve to be heard and supported, rather than be disparaged publicly by the Minister of Education at a press conference.

As the COVID-19 pandemic crisis continues to unfold, OSSTF/FEESO will be issuing frequent updates to provide members with as much pertinent information as possible.

Please frequently check the *myOSSTF* section of the OSSTF/FEESO website for updated information.