

SCHOOL COUNCIL

newsletter

Hello Ontario School Councils and School Council Chairpersons.

We are reaching out to school councils to provide information and news directly from the **Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation**. We are the union that represents secondary teachers in the English public school system. We also represent a great number of the education assistants, early childhood educators, child and youth workers, office professionals, custodial staff, social workers, psychologists, tradespeople and numerous other education workers who work in many of the elementary and secondary English public schools as well as some English and French Catholic schools in Ontario.

Let's work together so there can be Safety for All

Ontarians understand that when education workers and students are at risk, so are the communities in which they live and the families they go home to at the end of every day.

Since March 2020, when the government closed schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OSSTF/FEESO focused on taking action and finding solutions that would create and sustain safe learning environments, for both education workers and students in every school in the province. We know that improving the quality of publicly-funded education must include creating a system that ensures safety for all.

Ontario needs a long-term vision for publicly-funded education that takes the advice of public health experts seriously and commits the funding needed to ensure

our students, families, and education workers have safe learning environments in every publicly-funded school in Ontario. This requires concrete actions that are inclusive of all student needs, and that support the efforts of the entire education worker team including occasional, casual, and itinerant education workers who provide important services to students.

By working together, we can achieve #SafetyforAll. Please visit our [website](#) for information on the reopening, health and safety and ways you can support #SafetyforAll.

Before the reopening of schools in September, OSSTF/FEESO submitted a framework for reopening schools to the Ministry of Education. We based that submission on four guiding principles that the Ministry of Education must address before reopening schools.

Our proposal, [A safe return for all: OSSTF/FEESO's framework for reopening schools in 2020–2021](#), is available to the public. The following is an excerpt of that submission.

A safe return for all: OSSTF/FEESO's framework for reopening schools in 2020–2021

Health and safety: The health and safety of students and staff must be protected. All health and safety requirements from the Ministry of Health and/or Local Public Health Units and all safety requirements contained within the *Ontario Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) must be met. Examples include Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), cleaning, disinfecting, physical distancing, testing for COVID-19, and self-

isolation for those with symptoms or who are immunocompromised. Union leaders and members must be aware of what these measures are and how they will be implemented in their school boards and job sites. Effective communication strategies from the government and employer in this area are necessary and essential.

Equity: OSSTF/FEESO is committed to protecting and enhancing public education. Equity must be at the centre of planning for the next school year and beyond. The impact of the pandemic is not experienced equally across populations. Increased efforts should be made to provide support to students and staff who require it.

Funding: Additional funding will be required. This additional funding must be provided by the provincial government to school boards, and it must be outside the parameters of what has been agreed to in the central collective agreement. For example, additional funding will be needed to address COVID-19 related health and safety costs, to repair and replace technology equipment, and to enhance staffing in all areas. The Ministry of Education should provide full funding for a fifth year (or additional credits) to allow students the flexibility and opportunities for catch up.

Collective agreements: All collective agreements must be respected. Central collective agreements have just been ratified and the conditions negotiated within these must continue to be followed. Any changes being contemplated due to the extraordinary conditions presented by COVID-19 cannot supersede what has been agreed upon by all parties. Many local collective agreements are still being negotiated. Decisions being made during these negotiations should not take into account the circumstances of the pandemic as that would mean that specific clauses relating to the pandemic would live on in collective agreements when they are no longer necessary or relevant.

Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education did not consider our submission guidelines. In fact, there are no minimum health and safety standards written into the Ministry's *Guide to Reopening Schools* to protect either students or staff during the pandemic. That is why OSSTF/FEESO, along with other education stakeholders, launched [an appeal with the Ontario Labour Relations Board \(OLRB\)](#) to seek minimum health and safety standards for all publicly-funded

schools in Ontario. On October 1, 2020, the Labour Relations Board dismissed our appeal for minimum health and safety standards. We continue to push for standards in our public schools, which will help protect students and staff. Our hope is that this will lead to the implementation of minimum standards so that we will have #SafetyforAll.

How can YOU help ensure that back to school means #SafetyforAll?

- Contact your local Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) and School Trustees.
- Lend your support and take action at [HereforStudents.ca](https://www.hereforstudents.ca).
- The students and staff of Ontario's public schools will thank you.