



## **Submission to the Ministry of Education on Modernizing Education**

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) is a strong, independent, socially active union that promotes and advances the cause of public education and the rights of students, educators and education workers. While establishing working conditions for its members, OSSTF/FEESO also works to build strong public services, preserve academic freedom, prevent the privatization and commercialization of our educational institutions, ensure that students receive an education that is free of bias and discrimination and provide an equitable opportunity for all students to succeed in a strong, well-funded public education system.

OSSTF/FEESO welcomes the opportunity to provide the following written feedback to the Ministry Initiatives Committee (MIC) discussion on modernizing education. Below, you will find our response to the questions asked at the MIC meeting on February 10, 2022.

### **1) As we continue to modernize the education system, where do you think we need to go next?**

Publicly funded education in Ontario has been dedicated to providing students with rich learning opportunities, skills, and a sense of community for generations. These building blocks for student success enhance the social and economic fabric of a diverse, dynamic, and prosperous province. OSSTF/FEESO believes a strong, publicly funded education system continues to be essential to Ontario's future.

The global pandemic presented unprecedented challenges. The pandemic highlighted the crucial role education plays in maintaining a strong and vibrant society. However, it has also magnified the significant inequities that continue to plague our public services and institutions and negatively affect the lived experiences for students and families in Ontario.

Through this experience, the people of Ontario have gained a greater clarity and understanding that policies and strategies that lead to the privatization of Ontario's public services are a disservice to communities across this province. These types of policies only further divide communities in every part of Ontario.

Policies developed by the Ministry of Education to modernize education cannot lead to less contact between teachers, education workers, and the students they work with. Simply providing technology alone, without the accompanying skilled and qualified people, will not solve the societal issues we are facing.

What is also evident through our experience with the global pandemic is the benefit of in-person learning. This includes, but is not limited to the mental health, development, and academic success of students across all ages.

OSSTF/FEESO is urging the government to join us in building for a future that moves beyond the status quo. Our plan, [Strengthen Public Education – Rebuild Ontario](#) will help to rebuild the province and the people living in it. OSSTF/FEESO recognizes the need for publicly funded education to evolve to meet the needs of all who rely on it and is committed to working with families, community leaders, elected leaders, and various stakeholders who seek to strengthen and enhance publicly funded education in Ontario.

To modernize education, we believe that the government must commit to the following aspects of strengthening publicly funded education for students and families:

- Increasing student-centred supports and services: Permanent, predictable, and meaningful funding is of paramount importance to Ontario public schools and Ontario students. Previous cuts to services, staff, and facilities have left the system scrambling to provide education with fewer resources, fewer staff, and fewer opportunities for all.
- Centring schools as part of our communities: When communities thrive, the public education system thrives. While supporting a well-funded public education system is essential to the rebuilding of Ontario after the pandemic, it is equally important to provide the supports that families and communities need to foster a strong recovery in the short term and beyond. When we make public investments in all aspects of education, we see the social and economic benefits to Ontario. By extension, investments in public programs benefit families and lead to better societal outcomes for all.
- Improving learning conditions for all: Improving learning conditions for all is about recognizing and meeting the unique needs of learners. We see learning conditions as equity conditions, creating an improved Ontario. When students feel safe and see themselves represented in schools, they succeed.
- Addressing systemic inequities: OSSTF/FEESO promotes the need for systemic changes and actions that are permanent. Funding must be sustained and specific to addressing systemic inequalities. Envelopes of project-based funding does not support systemic change. OSSTF/FEESO believes in centring families, communities, and students at the heart of public education and in the need for students to see themselves within the system.
- Providing safe, healthy learning and working conditions: Publicly funded learning centres/schools and campuses should be a source of pride and full of opportunity in every Ontario community. Students, teachers, and education workers, in early learning to postsecondary, excel when there are safe, healthy, and well-maintained environments in which to learn and work. Improving the quality of the learning and working environment requires significant, sustainable investment combined with proactive and culturally responsive measures, regulations and leadership from the next Ontario government and School Board Trustees.

**2) Course types/pathways: i) Regarding the secondary courses and pathways, do you think we have it right? What might you be hearing from post-secondary partners? Consider that students currently have the following options: (C= College; M= College/University; U= University; E= Workplace; O= Open); ii) What**

**senior-level course types are needed to best prepare students for all post-secondary pathways?**

Course types, names, and pathways have, in some cases, led to stigma and barriers for students. OSSTF/FEESO believes the government should examine this issue. However, in addressing stigma and barriers, the government cannot simply change course codes and assume the work is complete. OSSTF/FEESO believes that class sizes must not increase as a result of this work. Any changes to the course codes/pathways will require a negotiated settlement on class size between the parties.

- 3) Curriculum review cycle: i) What criteria should the Ministry consider when reviewing curriculum for revision, including the scope of those revisions, to ensure curriculum is relevant today and prepares students for their future? ii) How often should curriculum be reviewed? iii) How many curriculum documents should be revised and introduced into schools each year?**

For a comprehensive response, please review the Ontario Teachers' Federation submission to the Ministry of Education in October 2020, [A Roadmap to Renewal – Revisiting the Curriculum Review Process in Ontario](#).

- 4) Modernized learning opportunities: i) How could external learning experiences, for example learning with an Elder, be recognized for credit?; ii) How should the Ministry use experiential learning and other modernized learning approaches to build entrepreneurial and other transferrable skills students need in our rapidly changing world?**

OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the Ministry of Education seek the input from each of the Indigenous nations in Ontario. The Ministry must respect Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and their role within their nations.

Further, OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the Ministry of Education approach the Chiefs of Ontario or Anishinabek Nation and other Indigenous organizations to consult on this matter.

Lastly, OSSTF/FEESO believes that the Ministry of Education cannot focus solely on entrepreneurial skills. In fact, what would serve students well is a focus on building citizenship, a sense of belonging, and other transferrable skills that students need in our rapidly changing world. This would allow students to be nimble in how they adapt to the variety of challenges they might be facing.

- 5) Graduation requirements: Is there anything Ontario should change about the OSSD requirements?**

- Elimination of the EQAO testing
- Elimination of the OSSLT as a graduation requirement
- Elimination of mandatory e-learning credits

