

Update on Support Staff and Teacher/Occasional Teacher Central Table Bargaining

Exploratory discussions continued again today until they were interrupted by yet another press conference by the Minister of Education. During his press conference, the Minister announced that the funded average class size would be set at 23:1, that mandatory e-Learning would include a parental opt-out, and the Local Priorities Funding (LPF) - now called the Supports for Students Fund - would continue for the duration of the contract, starting in September 2020. Despite the Minister's statements at the podium, not one of these positions has ever been presented at the bargaining table.

The Minister's announcement of 23:1 fails to negate the significant losses to both student programs and to the education workers and teachers that provide these necessary services. As of now, we have still lost over 1000 secondary teachers in English public schools alone and with them vital courses and programs. This is directly contrary to the results of the consultations in which parents, students and educators rejected increases to class size. Only a return to 22:1 and reinstating other grants that have been cut will allow these losses to be reversed.

Furthermore, local class size caps are still at risk as earlier tabled strips to local class size language remain on the table.

While the parental opt-out for mandatory e-Learning is better for students, OSSTF/FEESO remains concerned that the funded average class size for e-Learning is 35:1. At those ratios, an already challenging delivery model becomes even more problematic to manage in a virtual environment. Clarity is still needed on the implementation of the e-Learning model and the risk that this program could be contracted out to private businesses.

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While the reinstatement of the former LPF puts some money back into the education system for vulnerable students, these funds are only available starting September 2020. The loss of these funds in the 2019-2020 school year has resulted in permanent cuts to staff and direct supports to students, including a loss of 50% of the District 26 Professional Student Support Personnel Bargaining Unit.

Despite the Government having access to their own consultations since May 2019, only now that the consultations are public are they admitting what parents and the Federations have been saying all along: they do not support larger class sizes or mandatory e-Learning. It is evident from the Minister's press conference that the Ford government has been solely responsible for the disruption to students' education from the very beginning.

At this point in time, we are still unsure whether these exploratory discussions will lead to formal negotiations.

The BargainingForEducation.ca website will be updated with further details within 48 hours.

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