

Provincial Executive Liaison Report

OSSTF/FEESO Pillars
Promote & Protect Public Education
Defend & Support Members
Mobilize Members & Engage Communities

To: District 10, District Council

From: Martha Hradowy, Vice-President

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Promote & Protect Public Education

1. **Bill 166 – *Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports, 2024***

On Monday, February 26, 2024, the Minister of Colleges and Universities introduced [Bill 166](#), *Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024*.

The bill was ordered for Second reading on February 26, 2024.

The bill amends the *Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities Act* with respect to colleges of applied arts and technology and public universities. The amendments include the following:

1. Every college and university are required to have a student mental health policy that describes the programs, policies, services, and supports available at the college or university with respect to student mental health.

2. Every college and university are required to have policies and rules to address and combat racism and hate, including but not limited to anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia.
3. The Minister is authorized to issue directives in relation to the information to be provided about the costs associated with attendance at the college or university.

Staff at the Provincial Office will continue to monitor the progress of Bill 166. However, the bill does not warrant the Federation to take significant action for the following reasons:

1. The bill is redundant and performative, but public criticism by OSSTF/FEESO will expose the Federation to accusations of being pro-hate and against improving learning and working conditions.

Employers and unions/associations must comply with the *Ontario Human Rights Code and the Occupational Health and Safety Act*. The Code and OHR Commission have had guidelines on developing human rights policies and procedures since 2008.

Therefore, requiring policies and procedures to address and combat racism and hate are already required under existing legislation. Should OSSTF/FEESO District 35 believe an employer is acting in contravention of any legislation, they can employ the grievance process to resolve issues such as perceived non-compliance with legislation.

2. The bill may improve working conditions for OSSTF/FEESO members.
3. Requiring student mental health policies is something OSSTF/FEESO generally supports.
4. Requiring institutions to have greater transparency about student costs and fees is something OSSTF/FEESO has historically supported.

Summary

Strategically, criticism of the bill is not recommended because it could be used by the Ford government to discredit OSSTF/FEESO and position the Federation as an organization against accountability, transparency, and improvements in the postsecondary sector. Staff will continue to liaise with opposition parties and share information that could be used to advocate for improvements to the bill and as part of any party's communication strategy aimed at discrediting the Ford government's public education agenda. In addition, OSSTF/FEESO will work to raise awareness of Bill 166 through federation publications, such as *Queen's Park Notes* and/or *Update News*.

2. International Coalitions

OSSTF/FEESO continues to work with many international coalitions on issues related to public education and public services. The Trinational Coalition for the Defense of Public Education Organizing Committee continues its planning for the next biennial conference in San Antonio, Texas on November 8-10, 2024. The conference will be hosted by Local 67 of the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel of the San Antonio Independent School District.

OSSTF/FEESO sent representatives to the 68th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women as part of the Canadian Labour Congress delegation. In addition, OSSTF/FEESO is sending a delegation to the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) annual conference in Houston, Texas in May.

3. Student Achievement Awards

OSSTF/FEESO is proud to present the Student Achievement Awards annually to eight deserving students from across the province. These awards recognize the work of students in poetry, prose, and visual arts based on a theme. The 2024 Student Achievement Awards were presented in March at the OSSTF/FEESO Annual Meeting of the Provincial Assembly (AMPA). [A video of this year's winners](#) is available on the OSSTF/FEESO provincial website.

Defend & Support Members

4. Research Grant for Emergent Issues and Priorities

OSSTF/FEESO is strongly committed to supporting and promoting evidence-informed practices in public education. As part of that commitment, OSSTF/FEESO supports high-quality research and is pleased to announce up to three research grants each year, of up to \$3,500 each, to support conducting, presenting, and publishing research in support of public education and anti-racism.

Award Criteria:

- Relevance to 2023-2024 research priority, listed below.
- Willingness to write a summary report for OSSTF/FEESO and/or an article for *Forum*.
- Evidence of support for public education and/or the labour movement in previous publications and activities.
- Quality and feasibility of the project for which funding is sought; and
- A budget of estimated research expenses.

Theme Identified for the 2023 – 2024 Academic Year

- How identity-based hate speech impacts school climate and student/staff mental health.

OSSTF/FEESO is pleased to offer funding to the following research projects, pending confirmation of ethics approval, of \$3,500 each:

Researcher	Research Project
Salsabel Almanssori & Laxana Paskaran (University of Windsor)	Why did you quit your job? A narrative inquiry into the experiences of racial and gender minority recently departed teachers
Gabriel Roman Ayyavoo (Ontario Tech University)	Understanding the Impact of Identity-Based Hate Speech on School Climate and Mental Health: Exploring the Role of Mindfulness Activities in Reducing the Impact and Promoting Well-being

5. AEFO Consultation on French-Language Education

It has now been over a year since the *Association des Enseignant(e)s Francophones d'Ontario* (AEFO) completed its survey and consultation on the future of French-language education in Ontario. As requested by the General Secretary of AEFO, OSSTF/FEESO

had encouraged member participation through a DBU. Culminating in a summit May 2023, the summary report of this project (appended) includes recommendations within five themes:

- Un engagement collectif renouvelé (renewed collective engagement);
- L'école franco-ontarienne de demain (tomorrow's franco-ontarien school);
- De réels investissements dans le système scolaire franco-ontarien (real investment in the franco-ontarien school system);
- Des partenariats essentiels à la vitalité de nos écoles et de nos communautés (partnerships essential to the vitality of schools and communities); and,
- Un projet de société, au coeur de nos Communautés (community-driven societal project).

Having reached out several times to the Ministry of Education, AEFO received the response that the *Ministry of Education* (EDU) will not participate in any next steps but will “observe” the process and findings of AEFO.

In order to discuss this disappointing news and strategize on the best way forward, AEFO hosted a virtual meeting “Avenir de Franco Ed” March 8, 2024, to discuss next best steps. In attendance were 10 of the 22 engagement partners of the summary report. Upon completing a thorough review of the objectives and resolutions from the May 2023 summit and report, the cross-sector group has agreed to continue meeting with the goal of planning and implementing actions related to the above themes around the province.

6. Expanding the 50-day Rule Decision

The Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) stands by its position that Ontario's publicly funded schools require systemic solutions to systemic challenges. OTF asserts that framing an amendment to the 50-day rule as a solution belies the facts. Amending the 50-day rule is not the solution the Government suggests it is.

The Ministry's characterization of OTF's decision is disingenuous; it deflects attention from the root causes of the teacher recruitment and retention problem in Ontario. The fact is that retired teachers always have the choice to continue teaching beyond the 50-day rule limit; they only need to pause their pensions temporarily.

On March 4, 2024, OTF received a letter from the Minister of Education requesting support for an amendment to the 50-day rule, extending it to 95 days to allow some retired teachers and administrators to continue working without impacting their pension. This band-aid measure clearly has failed to solve the recruitment and retention problem that continues to plague schools in Ontario. Hiring unqualified individuals and re-employing retired teachers does nothing to solve a problem of the Government's making. The amendment distracts stakeholders from identifying underlying causes and pursuing robust solutions.

A pool of over 30,000 qualified, certified teachers in the province are not employed in Ontario school boards and classrooms. It's worth asking why. There is also a cohort of thousands of teacher candidates who, in a few short weeks, will also be among those available and eager to take on supply, short-term and long-term occasional, and permanent positions.

The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (The Plan) is intended to provide a secure income for pensioners in retirement. The Plan was never intended or designed to address labour market challenges. In the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, OTF reluctantly agreed to support an amendment to the 50-day rule, extending re-employment limits to 95 days,

as a temporary measure. This limited measure was intended to address unanticipated and unprecedented challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the announcement on the 18th of March, we have had numerous communications with retired members. A considerable number of those communications confirm what we have worried about since the 50-day rule was amended during the COVID-19 pandemic; there is an expectation this measure is the new normal and has become an incentive for some to take early retirement and seek re-employment.

In the 2022-2023 school year, having recognized that chronic ailments persisted in the system, OTF agreed to the same amendment on the condition that the Ministry agree to strike a Teacher Supply and Demand Action Table with various education stakeholders. The purpose of this Action Table is to explore the root causes of the recruitment and retention issue in Ontario schools and to land on recommendations leading to tangible solutions. The recommendations from the Action Table were to be implemented in the 2023-2024 school year.

Members matter and so does the work they do. OTF's decision to decline an amendment to the 50-day rule is born out of a desire to ensure that a temporary reprieve does not camouflage or exacerbate real causes. It is imperative that the Ministry does not conflate a temporary, band-aid measure with a permanent cure. Ontario's teachers deserve more support and practical solutions from this Government.

The OTF affiliates all stand by this decision, and a joint ETFO/OECTA/OSSTF-FEESO Statement was issued on March 19, 2024. The joint statement can be found at: <https://www.osstf.on.ca/en-CA/news/ford-government-must-deliver-real-plan-to-address-growing-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-crisis.aspx>

7. Submission to the Ministry of Education on Math Proficiency Test

OSSTF/FEESO staff have prepared a submission to the Ministry of Education on its consultation on proposed regulatory amendments related to proficiency in mathematics. The proposed regulatory amendments can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.ontariocanada.com/registry/view.do?postingId=46517&language=en>

OSSTF/FEESO members are concerned about a mandatory, high-stakes math proficiency test. Not only do Ontario students currently rank highly on the world stage, but there is also little empirical evidence that standardized teacher tests have any significant correlation to teacher effectiveness or student success.

The recommendations in this submission are designed to provide reasonable alternatives to a mandatory exit exam to become a certified Teacher in Ontario. These recommendations, if adopted and properly implemented in a collaborative manner with sufficient resources, will improve student achievement in mathematics.

The submission can be found on the OSSTF/FEESO website at: <https://www.osstf.on.ca/en-CA/resource-centre/briefs-and-submissions.aspx>

8. Submission to the Ministry of Education on Teacher Assignment in Technology and the Skilled Trades (TAS10 and TAS20) Courses Consultation

OSSTF/FEESO staff have prepared a submission to the Ministry of Education on its consultation on the Teacher Assignment in Technology and the Skilled Trades TAS10 and TAS20 courses. The Ministry stated that "it is exploring options to provide authority for principals to assign teachers with technological education qualifications to teach TAS10

and TAS20 by mutual agreement for one school year, with the ability to renew based on need.”

The submission can be found on the OSSTF/FEESO website at:

<https://www.osstf.on.ca/en-CA/resource-centre/briefs-and-submissions.aspx>

9. **FAO Economic and Budget Outlook – Winter 2024**

On February 13, 2024, the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) released its Economic and Budget Outlook report. This report compares the FAO’s projection of the Ontario government’s fiscal position from 2023-24 to 2027-28, compares the FAO’s budget outlook to the government’s plan as presented in the 2023 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, and describes the FAO’s updated economic outlook. The report, briefing deck, and media release is available from [https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/EBO-WI2024](https://www.fao.on.org/en/Blog/Publications/EBO-WI2024).

The FAO observes a pronounced deceleration in economic growth, which slowed to a rate of 1.2% in 2023. This deceleration can be attributed to increased inflationary pressures, prolonged elevated interest rates and a diminished global economic outlook. Such developments stem from persistent inflationary trends as well as the Bank of Canada’s maintenance of a high interest rate and are consistent, if a bit delayed, with the slow down predicted by the FAO in early 2023.

The FAO projects Ontario will post a \$4.7 billion budget deficit in 2023-24, slightly smaller than the \$5.6 billion projected by the government in its November 2023 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. Ontario’s budget deficit is expected to widen to \$6.2 billion in 2024-25 and gradually improve over the term of the FAO’s outlook, reaching a balanced position by 2026-27, one year later than expected by the government.

This is a reversal from the \$0.5 billion surplus the FAO predicted in June 2023. This significant downward revision is the result of both lower than projected revenues and higher than projected spending. The FAO now expects the government to record deficits through 2025-26, rather than the surpluses it had predicted in June, before a balanced budget is reached in 2026-27. Despite this increase, Ontario’s net debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to remain below the government’s 2023 Ontario Budget target of 40.0%. Ontario’s debt burden (as measured by the net debt-to-GDP ratio) is expected to increase from 38.3% in 2022-23 to 38.7% in 2024-25, before declining to 37.0% by 2027-28.

Revenue growth, which was exceptional in 2022-23 and 2021-22, has slowed. The FAO’s revenue projection is lower compared to its June projection, mainly due to lower projected personal income tax based on latest information from 2022 tax returns. The FAO’s updated prediction also shows a less optimistic projection for corporate and sales tax revenue through 2027-28.

The FAO projects spending growth will average 3.1% per year from 2022-23 to 2027-28, slower than the 5.2% average annual growth over the previous five years. The FAO’s spending projection has increased by an average of \$6.7 billion per year compared to the FAO’s June 2023 outlook, for a cumulative increase of \$33.4 billion over five years. This increase is due in part to higher projected spending on Ontario’s public sector salaries and wages, new government policy measures, and higher projected interest on debt spending to support the estimated increase in net debt. Overall, the FAO’s spending projection is similar to the government’s spending plan in the 2023 budget update with the exception of 2023-24, where the government’s spending plan is \$4.8 billion above the FAO’s projection, mainly due to a large unallocated Contingency Fund.

Amidst the backdrop of persistent elevated inflation and a Bank of Canada policy interest rate of 5.0%, exerting pressure on economic expansion, discernible indications suggest a potential recovery towards pre-pandemic growth levels. The Consumer Price Index 12-month change for January 2024 has receded to 2.9%, within the target range established by the Bank of Canada. This development may signify an upcoming reduction in the policy interest rate, thereby increasing the propensity to spend and boosting economic growth.

Budget deficits over the next few years are now projected based on lower projected personal income tax revenue and lower corporations tax revenue, somewhat offset by higher projected sales tax revenues. The FAO's projections are largely in line with those predicted by the government in its November 2023 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review.

The FAO anticipates a notable uptick in expenditure, totaling \$10.1 billion. This increase primarily stems from higher salaries and wages across the public sector, attributed to both previously awarded compensations and anticipated adjustments to address the repercussions of the unconstitutional wage restraint mandated by Bill 124. Furthermore, the FAO forecasts an additional \$4.7 billion increase in expenditure earmarked for Ontario's public sector remuneration in future years, driven by the ramifications of heightened inflation on yet to be settled collective bargaining agreements.

The FAO has adjusted its assumptions for public sector wage growth to reflect the estimated impact of Bill 124 retroactive compensation and higher wage settlements. The outcomes of upcoming negotiations or arbitration awards could further affect the FAO's spending projection. The FAO's current spending forecast now assumes that all union and non-union public sector employees that were subjected to Bill 124 will receive wage increases to adjust for the impact of the legislation. Retroactive wage increases have already been awarded through both arbitration and government decisions. For example, in 2023, the Ontario Nurses' Association, the College Employer Council and some Ontario Public Service Employees Union bodies were awarded retroactive wage increases for the impact of Bill 124. The government has also recorded a \$2.5 billion contingent liability in the 2022-23 Public Accounts of Ontario to recognize the potential impact of retroactive payments. Overall, the FAO estimates that the cost of wage increases to adjust for the impact of Bill 124 from 2022-23 to 2027-28 will total \$13.7 billion. At this time, they do not appear to include the third year of the Bill 124 remedy that was awarded by Arbitrator Kaplan to education sector trade unions.

Of note, the FAO projects spending to be much lower than that projected in the government's spending plan. For example, over the three fiscal years to 2025-26, the FAO is projecting that the government is planning to spend \$4.0 billion less on education than the FAO has determined is necessary to support existing programs and policies. Underspending is also expected in health (\$2.2 billion) and children, community, and social services (\$1.7 billion). In contrast, the FAO projects spending on other programs to be \$11.4 billion more than needed by the government for existing programs. The significant excess funds are largely due to the government's substantial contingency fund, for which there is no spending plan. The net result is \$4.6 billion in spending over projections by the government for this period.

Mobilize Members & Engage Communities

10. Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) Winter 2024 Report

As member of the *Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC)*, OSSTF/FEESO attends all Annual General, Provincial Advisory Council and Board meetings of the Coalition. Further, currently assigned staff sit on the Executive and two committees of the Board.

The most recent two-day Provincial Advisory Council Meeting took place February 29 & March 1, 2024, and included updates from the President, the Public Policy Coordinator and the Membership and Administration Coordinator. The Ministry of Education declined the invitation to attend and report this meeting.

National update from *Child Care Now*

Bill C35 – “An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada” is through and awaiting Royal Assent. The legislation sets out the Government of Canada’s vision for the *Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care (CWELCC)* system.

There have been several right-wing conservative critiques and analyses of \$10/day childcare in the last four to six weeks. The biggest issue is not the amount of federal money, it is the lack of contribution, accountability and formulae for dissemination from the provinces/territories. To wit, there is underspending of federal funds in every jurisdiction and the movement to increase for-profit childcare spaces is spreading nationally. Nova Scotia has the best model with an Engagement Table including all stakeholders.

OCBCC Report highlights:

- good response to salary position paper released October 2023 (available here: [Position Paper and Policy Brief on a Publicly-Funded ELCC Salary Scale - The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care \(childcareontario.org\)](#))
- press re: \$10/day creating 6+year waitlists misleading in that space has always been lacking, we just now have people actually putting names onto lists
- current campaigns:
 - *Worth More* (https://www.childcareontario.org/worth_more) to highlight individual advocacy actions that can be taken
 - *The Wage Project* (https://www.childcareontario.org/wage_project) “Creating an Anti-Racist Child Care System in Ontario”

Regional/Organizational Reports key points:

- staffing and space management frustrating without data from government
- concerns expressed re: changes to kindergarten and potential impact on the child care sector

A strategic planning session was held to prepare for the 2024-2025 year. Relevant dates: MPP lobbying: March 2024; Council & AGM: September 26-27, 2024; *Child Care Worker Appreciation Day (CCWAD)*: October 24, 2024.

Questions regarding the OCBCC and Early Learning can be directed to Rosemary Judd-Archer, Executive Assistant (rosemary.judd-archer@osstf.ca)

AEFO issued a similar statement which can be found on their website.

11. Community Organizing

OSSTF/FEESO continues to develop its community organizing work as part of the Federation's Strategic Action Plan, called Organizing for Better Schools, Stronger Communities. The Federation formed the Organizing Better Schools, Stronger Communities Ad Hoc Work Group, which continues to develop an implementation plan that will involve locally based strategies. The Work Group is made up of OSSTF/FEESO members who are active organizers in their local communities. These members have been diligently working in the field by socializing organizing concepts among our local leaders and developing regional awareness of core issues affecting the community.

The first Organizing Institute conference occurred on March 22-23 in Toronto, which brought District leads and members together to learn more about successful member and community organizing. The focus of this institute was to focus on local worksite representatives to conduct organizing with members and community members in and around the region they work in. Organizing meetings at the regional level are planned for 2024/2025 year.

12. DBU Memos Issued

- 110 OMERS 2023 Investment Returns
- 111 Ministry Correspondence – Professional Development Funding for Early Childhood Educators
- 112 Strike by Contract Faculty at York University
- 113 Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) Special Recognition Award
- 114 OSSTF/FEESO Awards for Members – Racial Justice Agent of Change Award 2024
- 115 McGill University Research Study
- 116 Ministry Correspondence-Regulatory and Policy Reforms to Support the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act
- 117 OSSTF/FEESO Boutique
- 118 Municipal Lobbying Registries and Codes of Conduct – for Members Only
- 119 HS/WSIAC Regional Training Sessions
- 120 CTF National Letter Writing Campaign – Pan-Canadian School Food Program
- 121 Multi-University Study on Recertification Pathways for Internationally Educated Teachers
- 122 Equal Pay Day 2024
- 123 April 28 Day of Mourning
- 124 Equity Advisory Work Group Vacancies 2024 - 2025