



Ford government must immediately use all available federal funding to ensure safety of students, educators

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TORONTO ON – The Ford government has consistently refused to make the necessary investments to keep students and educators safe during this pandemic. The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) welcomes the decision from the federal government to step in and provide additional support for Ontario's public schools and urges the province to immediately use all available federal funding to ensure the safety of students and educators.

"The province of Ontario continues to allow the federal government to do the heavy lifting when it comes to funding the school safety initiatives announced today. We really have the federal government to thank as they are providing 80 per cent of the \$650 million recently announced," says ETFO President Sam Hammond. "Premier Ford and Minister Lecce continue to take credit where none is due. They have recklessly refused to use funds available to them through the federal government's Safe Return to Class fund since September 2020. Instead, they have implemented half-measures that have led to a third wave, and disruption for students, educators and families across Ontario."

"The provincial government could have acted earlier by using the available federal funding to create in-school conditions that would protect students, educators and their families from COVID-19," Hammond added. "Why have they waited until the end of a pandemic school year to access the funds? Given the chaos we continue to endure, and the number of students and educators working in unsafe classrooms without proper physical distancing, their decision to wait until eight months into the school year is simply unconscionable."

ETFO is also concerned about transparency. "The federal government requires almost zero reporting. We are concerned that Premier Ford and Minister Lecce will, once again, abdicate their responsibility to make schools safe and prioritize other investments that aren't as critical as the health and well-being of students and education workers," says Hammond.

Critical investments should have and could have happened last summer. Real protections require investment. ETFO continues to call on the provincial government to:

- focus on the hardest-hit regions;
- prioritize vaccinations for educators and all other frontline workers;
- reduce class sizes to ensure two metres of physical distancing;
- mandate masks for kindergarten students;
- fund and provide N95 masks to educators;
- fund and implement improvements to ventilation and air filtration;
- ensure broad uptake of asymptomatic COVID-19 testing;
- implement paid sick leave; and
- provide financial support for families who need it while lockdown measures are in effect.

ETFO represents 83,000 elementary public school teachers, occasional teachers and education professionals across the province. Its *Building Better Schools* education agenda can be viewed at BuildingBetterSchools.ca.

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