

Ford government's ill-conceived plan will not improve literacy, math skills

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Toronto, ON – Yesterday, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) learned about the Ford government's plan to improve literacy and math skills, but it doesn't add up. Put in simplest terms:

Limiting Teacher Input + Chronic Underfunding ≠ Improved Skills

The band-aid "solutions" put forward by the province on Sunday dismiss teachers' professional judgement and expertise, and will not improve students' literacy and numeracy skills.

"Yesterday, Minister Lecce told us that Ontario has underperforming schools," says ETFO President Karen Brown. "What we actually have are underfunded schools, which is something he and the government refuse to take responsibility for."

The Ford government is trying to obscure the depth of cuts they have made to public education. Because of inadequate funding year after year, school boards are having to deal with deficits to balance their budgets. This is resulting in deep cuts that will impact student success.

When you remove thousands of educators from public schools over time, and then add a few hundred back, you are leaving students across the province without the support they require to develop the skills they need to be successful in school and beyond.

**7,000 job losses in education on Friday + 1,000 new jobs on Sunday
= 6,000 fewer school staff to support students**

In addition, the province's decision to introduce a new Language curriculum that education stakeholders did not get the opportunity to provide input into proves how little they understand the public education system and how much they undervalue educators. ETFO has not been consulted on any changes to the Language curriculum nor its implementation for September, nor has ETFO seen a draft of the new curriculum. Making critical curricular decisions without genuine and meaningful collaboration and consultation with all stakeholders is irresponsible.

Teachers know what is needed to boost literacy and numeracy skills, but they cannot deliver this with limited access to specialists who support the literacy development of students. Three hundred math specialists will have more of a challenge and will have to contend with the fallout of the introduction of the new Mathematics curriculum during the pandemic in 2020. It was rolled out without effective professional learning for teachers, nor the resources to support student success and curricular understanding. We see a pattern.

As well, introducing a standardized reading screener, while removing supports from students, shows how little the Ford government appreciates the complexities of teaching and learning. Critical school funding does not need to be spent on a screening tool and licenses when teachers are already well-equipped to assess reading ability.

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Teachers already use their professional judgement to assess students in literacy and numeracy. They know which students are struggling and which would benefit from more focused supports, but those resources are not available to them. What they need includes funding for smaller class sizes, additional supports for students with special needs, and a commitment to addressing violence in schools.

Notes Brown, “The Ford government is fixated on one out of 157 recommendations in the Right to Read Report: a screening tool. Another standardized test is not the answer. It’s just another example of the province redirecting much-needed funds away from the classroom.”

Education Minister Stephen Lecce’s frequent reference to getting “back to the basics” implies schools have strayed from them. This is concerning and untrue. Adds Brown, “Schools are teaching fundamentals in literacy and math; PISA scores prove that. Rather than saying, ‘We have a good system, let’s make it better,’ Minister Lecce continues to undermine confidence in public education, teachers, educators, and school boards. We invite the Minister to choose his words wisely before attempting to erode public confidence in our high-quality education system.”

[ETFO](#) represents approximately 83,000 members, including public elementary teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel, and professional support personnel. Visit BuildingBetterSchools.ca.

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