

PROTECT PUBLIC EDUCATION

Education has and will always be the bedrock of how we progress in society. With the Ford Government in power that foundation is being undermined. Recently the Minister announced dramatic changes to Ontario's education system, including increases to class sizes and mandatory online learning in secondary schools.

The cuts being made to the education budget will have devastating effects on student well-being and achievement. Increasing class sizes affects the types of programs schools can offer, creates safety and workload issues, has a negative impact on student learning, and disproportionately affects students with special needs. What this means for students is less attention being paid to individuals, difficulty in the ability to properly offer differentiated learning, and an already overworked staff complement stretched even more thinly. The move to internet learning will not only cut front-line teachers, but may also open the door for corporate involvement in curriculum delivery.

The negative impact on learning will be exacerbated by paring down the already inadequate education funding formula, Grants for Student Needs (GSNs) and supports for children with special needs. The total amount of cuts is estimated at \$1.4 billion. Our province's school infrastructure is already suffering from a significant repair backlog, resulting in unsafe working and learning conditions. These new Conservative policies will have a dramatic effect on our entire education system and the future of our society.

Tens of thousands of students are leaving class on April 4th in one of the biggest walkouts in the province's history. Ontario's five education unions – AEFO, CUPE, ETFO, OECTA and OSSTF – have issued a common statement opposing the cuts, and have called for a mass rally at Queen's Park on April 6th.

When unions organize to stop education cuts, we find the widest support from allies we did not expect, and from communities we do not always connect with – because education serves such an important role in our society. Many newcomer communities know the promise of this land is not the current job (for which many are over-qualified) but the promise of their children being properly educated and having the greatest of chances to succeed in this society.

In the Harris years, mobilization of teachers and education workers was foundational in the mass resistance against his government, and served as a pivotal moment when many of today's best activists found their first voice of resistance. The labour movement needs to see this battle as one of the biggest fights for our future.

We know that this government is not immune to pressure, and that the brave parents who voiced their opposition to the cuts to autism funding caused the government enough shame for them to rethink their approach. We too can take on the fight, and win not just for the teachers on whom we depend to teach this generation, but also for all the education workers who ensure our schools are safe, clean, and welcoming.

We will continue to advocate, organize and mobilize for publicly-funded education that provides what every student – from Kindergarten children to adult learners – needs to succeed.

The Executive recommends that we:

- 1) Call upon the labour movement to support our education affiliates by turning out for the April 6th Rally at Queen's Park.
- 2) Launch a coordinated campaign to bring the entire labour movement into the collective efforts of our education affiliates and community allies.
- 3) Take this fight across Toronto and York Region by engaging diverse communities, progressive allies, union members and retirees, parents and students, to build a powerful resistance against Ford's cuts to the education sector.