

DEFEND PUBLIC EDUCATION 2019-2020

October 3, 2019

The labour movement has a deep commitment to ensuring that publicly funded education provides students the best possible education experience so they can succeed in life and participate in building a more just and equitable society.

The cuts by the provincial government are short-sighted and irresponsible. Their claim of a fiscal crisis has been exposed as a fabrication. The fact is there is incredible wealth in Ontario, and one simple act - reversing corporate tax cuts - would provide ample revenue for education and other public services.

It is clear that the Conservative Party has a very different vision of education than most Ontarians. But more than that – the approach of the Conservative government is fundamentally wrong. The drive to impose cuts to teaching and support staff, to school infrastructure, to educational supports, and to operating budgets of school boards will do irreparable harm. The ideology behind the cuts is revealed by the Premier personally attending the opening of a private American university in Vaughan that will focus on training teachers - even as thousands of teaching jobs will be eliminated.

The Conservative agenda should be rejected - by Trustees and School Boards, parents, students, education workers, and community activists. Labour should be part of a strong alliance resisting the government's cuts and galvanizing public support to defend the integrity of publicly funded education. The goals of such an alliance should include:

1. Reverse cuts to programs and classes, including second language classes
2. Reverse the increase of class sizes and closing of classrooms
3. Stop the incursion of e-learning into curriculum
4. Ensure fair treatment of all education workers
5. Support meaningful collective bargaining
6. Fund and carry out school repairs and deferred maintenance
7. Protect neighbourhood schools and expand their use as well-staffed community hubs
8. Restore provincial funding for energy efficiency retrofit programs
9. Ensure education workers and students are provided safe learning and working environments
10. Restore programs and curriculum to address Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples
11. Provide Trustees with dedicated staff support to do their work effectively

In these difficult times, School boards and Trustees are called upon to oppose the erosion of our public education system. School Boards and their Associations should not be pressured by the provincial government to carry out regressive policies. Trustees have a role in ensuring that people are involved in education decisions, to ensure the voices of Ontarians are being heard, and that the government is held to account for their cuts. Along with that responsibility, there

should be adequate resources in place for trustees to effectively engage and respond to constituents.

This coming year will be a difficult one for the education system, especially with collective bargaining taking place in an atmosphere of looming threats from the provincial government. We urge Trustees, education workers, parents, students and community activists to build strong relationships and shape a collective resistance to the cuts and austerity being imposed by the Ford Government. We must all work together for an education system which gives every student what they need to succeed.

On October 3, the Labour Council resolved to:

1. Work with affiliates and community to build strong alliances to defend publicly funded education;
2. Undertake a comprehensive campaign with our affiliates and in our diverse communities to shape a clear understanding about the attack on education and the cause of the contract disputes;
3. Co-ordinate bringing education voices to address other union meetings across the GTA;
4. Support the organizing of school walk-ins on October 10th.