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OECTA ANNOUNCEMENT ON BARGAINING POSITIONS

This afternoon, OECTA President Liz Stuart will be releasing a statement to media clarifying the OECTA Provincial Bargaining Team's negotiating positions around wages and benefits.

It has always been our Association's preference to keep details of negotiations confidential to the bargaining table. We believe this demonstrates respect for the bargaining process and helps achieve the best possible agreement for members. However, we have never dealt with a party in bargaining quite like the Ford government. Their repeated misrepresentations of the main issues at the bargaining table are unproductive for reaching an agreement, and harmful to the reputation of Catholic teachers.

This week, OECTA informed the mediator that we would be willing to resume negotiations on Wednesday, March 4, and to continue to bargain on Thursday and Friday if the discussions were productive. Despite constantly claiming they are available 24/7, and their priority is to keep students in class, the government has yet to accept our offer.

The Association believes it is time to cut through the government's games and spin, and to set the record straight. To this end, President Stuart will inform media that since well before Christmas, the OECTA Provincial Bargaining Team has told the government that while we strongly object to their unconstitutional wage restraint legislation, and retain our fundamental right to fight it through the courts, we are prepared to accept the salary they have offered at the bargaining table, in order to bring stability and certainty into our schools for our students and parents. Furthermore, we have said we will work within the funding amount for health benefits the government has proposed at our table as recently as last week.

In return, we have called on the government to do what they have always claimed they want to do, which is to put money back into classrooms. This means Premier Ford must move away from his plan to increase class sizes, cut thousands of teaching positions, and eliminate tens of thousands of course options. He must move away from his plan to remove funding for supports for vulnerable students. And he must move away from his reckless scheme for mandatory e-learning. In short, the government must reverse their cuts to publicly funded education, and restore teacher staffing to the same level as in 2018-19.

In our efforts to negotiate a fair agreement, the Association has been saying this to the government's representatives at the bargaining table for months. However, in light of the Ford government's ongoing attempts to mislead Ontarians, the time has come to say it publicly. As a result of OECTA's bad faith bargaining complaint at the Ontario Labour Relations Board, the public consultation documents the government refused to disclose were finally revealed, and confirmed that Ontarians reject the Ford government's destructive education agenda.

It is understandable that this information might be disappointing to some members. But given the Ford government's insistence on finding permanent savings in publicly funded education, and their appalling, bad-faith behaviour in the bargaining process, the Association believes this is the best way to protect the working and learning conditions in our schools. With their blatant mistruths exposed, Premier Ford and Minister Lecce must explain why they remain focused on deep, permanent cuts that will undermine publicly funded education, and that have already been rejected by Ontarians.

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