

Refuting facts and rationale in the Ministry of Education/CTA Bargaining Brief

In an unprecedented move, the Ontario Government/Council of Trustee Association's bargaining brief contains rationale for the positions proposed. This politicized rationale, in an attempt to dissuade us from posting their brief, is built upon false facts and misleading statistics designed to obfuscate the real issues in these negotiations.

COMPENSATION

The government uses figures that have been publicly refuted. They overstated the size of the deficit, alleging it was \$15 billion when in fact, the deficit is about half of that. Their deficit projection was so inaccurate that it calls into question their debt projection in the rationale. To further muddy the waters, the government is using cost projections based on a four-year term agreement while the legislation defaults to a three-year term, thereby deliberately inflating the projected costs.

The government's rationale focuses only on the costs of public education, ignoring the fact that these expenditures are an investment in Ontario's future. The Conference Board of Canada's report, [The Economic Case for Investing in Education](#), clearly shows that for every \$1.00 invested in public education, Ontario's economy will see a return of \$1.30. Conversely, every \$1.00 removed from public education will cost Ontario's economy \$1.30. An investment in public education today will reduce future costs in healthcare, the judicial system and social services.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce supports the same approach. In its report, [Accounting for Ontario's Debt](#), the Chamber concludes that investing in public education will help grow the economy and ultimately reduce the provincial debt. Ontario includes education and healthcare in its budget, but is typically compared to various US states that do not fund education or healthcare from their state budgets. The report suggests that a better way to look at Ontario's finances is to compare it to one of the sovereign countries within the European Union, jurisdictions whose debt does include spending on education and healthcare. "Taken from this perspective," the Chamber says, "Ontario's current debt-to-GDP ratio of 41 percent seems less egregious when compared to Germany (64 percent), France (97 percent), and other European strongholds such as Belgium (105 percent)".

The government's claim that they are investing more in education is similarly misleading. In an attempt to show an apparent increased expenditure in public education, the government shifted the new childcare tax credit into the education budget. This added more than \$0.4 billion to the education budget based on the government's own [estimates](#) without adding a single penny to school board resources. The funding of this new childcare tax credit does not support public education. In fact, per pupil funding in education is down compared to last year. According to

the Ministry of Education's B-Memos, the 2019 per pupil funding is [\\$12 246](#), down from [\\$12 300](#) in 2018, resulting in a cut of over \$108 million in per pupil funding for the 2019/20 school year. This year's education funding falls behind inflation and enrolment growth, resulting in real losses for Ontario's students.

Our proposal of inflationary adjustments over a period of time would keep the real wage increase to zero. [Our research](#) shows that over long periods, our member's wages and salary tend to track inflation, thus our proposal for Cost of Living Allowance (COLA), which would eliminate the wrangling over compensation and allow negotiations to focus on proposals that advance the quality of education. Recent polling shows that 70% of Ontario citizens support cost of living increases for teachers and education workers, while only 18% oppose the idea.

BENEFITS

In an effort to save costs and streamline efficiencies, OSSTF/FEESO took over the provision of member life, extended health and dental coverage during the term of the last collective agreement with the creation of an ELHT benefits trust. The formation of the trust removed the liability and responsibility for the provision of benefits from school boards. The government position that benefit costs have increased out of line with the industry average uses flawed logic and fails to provide a complete picture. In their rationale, the government used a preliminary value of \$3,660 per FTE that underrepresented the actual cost of benefits. A more accurate calculation resulted in a higher per FTE funding number that included the additional cost of taking over the administration of the plan. These costs were previously borne by the school boards and government.

It is important to note that OSSTF/FEESO Benefits did take steps at plan inception to place adequate safeguards on plan provisions that were not in place with plans previously run by school boards. Taking such proactive steps has resulted in a benefits plan that is administered responsibly and is run in a fiscally sound manner.

To date, OSSTF/FEESO Benefits has received 4% increases per benefit year as opposed to the 10.6% claimed by the government. Our current bargaining position seeks only future inflationary increases aligned with industry trends. The government's use of 6-8% increases appears to be their estimate of the expected increasing costs of providing benefits, and quite frankly such estimates are not out of line with trends and estimates occurring in benefit plans across the country. This further demonstrates that the increases in the past have not been excessive.

SICK LEAVE

While the government uses cost savings to the system as a rationale for this proposal, they fail to acknowledge that the current sick leave plan was imposed illegally by the government through legislation, less than 8 years ago, resulting in a cost savings of \$1.4 billion.

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/new/bg0816a.html>

The government has deliberately cherry-picked a narrow data set to provide a misleading picture of sick leave usage by OSSTF/FEESO education workers. They claim that OSSTF/FEESO education workers increased their sick leave usage from 11.75 sick days in 2014-15 to 14.52 days in the 2017-18 school year. For Public Sector workers over that same period of time, the increase in sick leave usage shows a very similar pattern from 12.7 days in 2015, to 14.6 days in 2018. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410019601>

The government has provided data about the use of sick leave by OSSTF/FEESO education workers, but it has not considered the root causes behind the use of sick leave. Based on data from the *Harassment and Violence Against Educators (Ontario) Survey* by Santor, Bruckert and McBride at the University of Ottawa, there has been a seven-fold increase in violence against educators in the past 12 years. “54% of educators reported experiencing one or more acts of physical violence (during the 2017-2018 school year); 60% reported one or more attempts to use physical force and 49% experienced one or more threats. Overwhelmingly, this violence was student perpetrated.” In addition, 72% of respondents reported receiving explicit verbal assaults, obscene gestures and other forms of harassment from students. This type of violence is disproportionately experienced by women, especially those who identify as racialized, disabled and/or LGBTQ. https://storage.googleapis.com/wzukusers/user-34885059/documents/5d7385ad9dae29pZVnXP/educator_violence_final_report_2019.pdf

Addressing violence in the workplace, rather than punishing the victims, is a more effective solution to education worker absenteeism.