

## ETFO files for conciliation in effort to reach fair agreements

**For Immediate Release – August 29, 2023**

Toronto, Ontario – Given the unacceptably slow pace of bargaining, earlier today the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) advised school board agency and government representatives that the Federation would be applying for conciliation with the Minister of Labour for its two central tables – teacher/occasional teacher and education worker.

“Over the past year, ETFO’s central bargaining team has attempted to resolve key issues to secure a fair deal for its teacher, occasional teacher, and education worker members. But after a full year of bargaining without sufficient progress and negotiations at a standstill, the Federation is filing for conciliation,” says ETFO President Karen Brown. “Our members have been incredibly patient, but their patience has run out.”

On August 25, ETFO learned that the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation will recommend to its members that they enter into a process to resolve bargaining with the Ford government through a proposal that includes binding interest arbitration. At this point in time, ETFO does not think this option is viable, given some of the issues the Federation would like addressed during bargaining, including: violence in schools, the crisis in the recruitment and retention of educators, the hybrid learning model, the early reading screener, and special education supports for our most vulnerable elementary students.

A plan that might be acceptable at the secondary level may not work at the elementary level, where the needs of educators and students are different. Notes Brown, “Binding arbitration, at this point in bargaining, is rolling the dice with our members’ hard-won rights and entitlements. We are hopeful a conciliation officer – a neutral third party - will help us explore all possible options in reaching agreements that are fair for our members, that support the work they do with elementary students, and that strengthen our public education system.”

Entering into binding arbitration could also impact local bargaining with individual school boards where many workload and professional issues need to be addressed.

While ETFO was initially able to make some significant progress at its Education Worker Central Table, bargaining at this table has been stalled for months. ETFO’s experience at the Teacher/Occasional Central Table has been less constructive. No progress has been achieved at this table on any key issues. In addition, the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association/government bargaining team has refused to remove strips they tabled on issues such as sick leave entitlements and professional judgement.

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The Ford government is currently demanding significant cuts to sick leave, benefits, and professional judgement. Binding arbitration would mean that the arbitrator is 100 per cent in control over what happens to those items.

There is never a guarantee of gains during bargaining, but the best chance of getting government cuts off the table and getting the improvements ETFO members and students need is to give the legal bargaining process a chance.

“Our goal is to reach fair central agreements for our members, so we are optimistic that the conciliation process will be successful,” adds Brown. “Our world-class public education system – and the education professionals who support that system – need to be respected by this government. Students are our future and we are prepared to fight for them.”

ETFO members have been without an agreement for almost a year; collective agreements expired on August 31, 2022. In an effort to reach a fair agreement, ETFO has engaged in 30 bargaining sessions, split between its two tables, since August 30, 2022.

The Federation is holding central strike vote meetings throughout the province from mid-September to mid-October. The results will be announced once voting is complete.

[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](https://www.buildingbetterschools.ca).

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