



MEDIA RELEASE

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Bill 124 win for education workers: Ford forced to pay, but education still shortchanged

TORONTO, ON — On January 16, 2024, OSSTF/FEESO and ETFO stood before an arbitrator to argue for a fair remedy to the Ford government's unlawful Bill 124 wage suppression legislation affecting public sector workers. Today, Arbitrator William Kaplan issued his decision on a remedy, awarding members an additional 2.75 per cent compensation increase for 2021-2022, for a total amount of 7.25 per cent for the 2019-2022 contract term. Compounded, the total percentage increase is 7.41, including the one per cent increases allowed under the unlawful Bill 124.

The arbitrated award comes 15 months after Bill 124 – which the government knew would cause serious staffing issues in public services – was declared unconstitutional by the Courts.

“This decision reinforces what we have known all along; our members have been underpaid and undervalued for years while the Progressive Conservatives underfunded public education and shortchanged Ontario's students,” stated OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood. “In fall 2023, OSSTF/FEESO successfully negotiated a unique pathway that allowed us to secure an arbitrated remedy for members in advance of the final court decision on Bill 124. Now, our school board members will finally receive a remedy for wages that should never have been denied to them in the first place. We will also continue to fight this unlawful legislation in court until every OSSTF/FEESO member has received a remedy for wages lost.”

Added ETFO President Karen Brown, “We welcome Arbitrator Kaplan's decision, but recognize it does not replace the loss of our members' bargaining rights. This arbitration award is a clear acknowledgement of the egregious, unlawful suppression of wages that deliberately undermined our members' rights and livelihoods. The Ford government's unconstitutional attack on public sector workers must never be repeated.”

Today's award adds to the 0.75 per cent increases negotiated as a remedy in each of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, the first two years impacted by Bill 124. With today's award of 2.75 per cent for 2021-2022, members will receive a compounded 7.41 per cent increase for those three years. These increases include the one per cent annual increases allowed under the unconstitutional Bill 124, which unfairly restricted public sector bargaining.

Added Littlewood, “The Ford government's shortchanging of public education has caused significant staff recruitment and retention issues in Ontario schools. We will now seek to address these significant concerns through a future interest arbitration process.”

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“We trust Arbitrator Kaplan’s decision sends a clear message to the Ford government that they must never circumvent bargaining or trample on workers’ democratic rights again. Workers have a right to an unrestricted bargaining process. This is guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and must be upheld,” said Brown.

The government has 60 days from today to provide affected school boards with funds to cover the remedy owed to eligible OSSTF/FEESO and ETFO members. School boards must issue payments to all eligible members no later than 120 days after the release of this arbitration decision. The amount each member will receive will vary depending on their status during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years.

[ETFO](#) represents approximately 83,000 members, including public elementary teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel, and professional support personnel. Information about ETFO collective bargaining is at [etfocb.ca](#).

[OSSTF/FEESO](#), founded in 1919, has over 60,000 members across Ontario. They include public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, early childhood educators, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, university support staff, and many others in education.

Contact: Caitlin Reid
Media and Communications Advisor
Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation
Caitlin.Reid@osstf.ca
416-576-8346

Carla Pereira
Media Relations
Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario
cpereira@etfo.org
416-962-3836