



Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario/
Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario
480 University Avenue, Suite 1000, Toronto, Ontario, M5G 1V2
Telephone: 416-962-3836 Toll-free: 1-888-838-3836
Fax: 416-642-2424
Website: www.etfo.ca

**ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION OF ONTARIO
NIAGARA TEACHER LOCAL
PROVINCIAL TAKEOVER
BULLETIN #5**

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Now Is Not the Time to Back Down

If ever there was a time to take stock of our beliefs, that time is now. As public elementary teachers in the province of Ontario, ETFO members have for decades met injustice head-on. Our unwavering commitment to our students continues to be the catalyst for change. With the government's artificial November 30th deadline looming on the horizon, it is essential that we stand united. When you look into the eyes of your students ask yourself: Are our students worth the struggle? Are you worth the struggle? The only answer is YES.

As ETFO President David Clegg has clearly acknowledged, this province is facing imminent financial challenges. Under the circumstances, no one is expecting an overnight quick fix to the funding gap. However, a commitment by the government to "close the gap" in funding speaks directly to the economic future of this province. Elementary teachers educate the leaders of tomorrow. It is essential that the government invest in their future. Waiting twenty-five or thirty years to achieve the teaching conditions presently enjoyed by our secondary colleagues and their students is not acceptable.

Premier McGuinty and the Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne continue to focus public attention on the government's salary offer; a diversion tactic the government hopes will draw attention away from the central issues of reducing class sizes in the junior and intermediate years; providing elementary teachers with the time required to assess, evaluate, and plan instruction for the diverse needs of our student population; and to ensure elementary students have access to specialist teachers, such as librarians and guidance counsellors.

It takes two parties to negotiate a fair collective agreement for elementary teachers. ETFO continues to reach out to the government to engage in discussions that will address the inequities in funding and provide elementary students across this province with the opportunity to meet their full potential. It would be easy to take the money and run but there is much more at stake. Minister Wynne characterizes a reduction in class size from 25:1 to 24.5:1 over five years as reasonable. She believes increasing supervision by 100 minutes/5 day cycle is reasonable. And her government sees imposing the artificial deadline of November 30th as a good problem-solving strategy and reflective of a good working relationship with elementary teachers, all the time side-stepping the historic inequities. ETFO does not have the luxury of the “me too” clause that was negotiated into the framework deal by other affiliates. The future of elementary education lies in our hands.

By addressing the core issues plaguing elementary education today, over 6,000 new teaching positions would be created. At a time of job uncertainty and declining enrolment, the education sector would provide opportunities for the hundreds of under-employed and unemployed teachers in this province. By “closing the gap” in learning conditions for elementary students, employment opportunities in other sectors would be opened up as qualified teachers are able to move into teaching positions. The time is now for the government to invest in four and eight and twelve year olds.

As hard as the times are, we must not lose sight of why “closing the gap” is essential. It is about having the tools and resources we need to do our jobs. It’s about the future of Ontario’s children.

David Clegg, ETFO
Provincial President
1-888-838-3836

Sharon Aloian, ETFO
Local President
Niagara Teacher Local
905-892-2917

Dave Kendall, ETFO
Provincial Chief Negotiator
1-888-838-3836

