

Statement from Laura Walton, president of CUPE's Ontario School Board Council of Unions, regarding the announcement by Minister of Education Stephen Lecce on the provincial government's plans for reopening Ontario schools in September:

CUPE education workers know what it will take to reopen schools safely and we know what it will cost. We know the work, we've made the calculations, and we've made the recommendations. But what we see from the Premier and the Minister of Education is no more than the government trying to reopen our schools on the cheap.

For parents, students and staff to be confident about going back to class, Ontario schools need more funding, and they need it for supplies and staffing. CUPE has calculated that amount to be around \$600,000,000, far more than the government is providing.

For example, the funds announced will hire fewer than 900 custodians province-wide. That's less than 10 hours' worth of extra cleaning per week per school. I doubt that any Ontario parent will think this is enough.

What we need is 4800 more custodians, or an average one more custodian per school – people who will do deep cleaning overnight, who will clean washrooms regularly throughout the day, who will clean major touch points multiple times per day, who will refill the soap dispensers when they're empty, who will take on all the extra tasks the Ministry has outlined in its "Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools."

But just as important as custodians will be the EAs, school secretaries, ECEs, clerical staff, paraprofessionals and all the other workers who will be responsible everything that's required for safe healthy schools. We need more clerical staff, because they are the ones who will be charged with screening and testing and liaising with public health and parents if there's an outbreak. More school secretaries who will enforce restricted access to schools. We need more ECEs and EAs to train children to put their masks on and use them properly and to keep them physically distanced and practising hand hygiene. We need more social workers and psychologists to support students with additional mental health needs. We need more EAs to support students who've fallen behind after the long school shutdown.

Our message to parents is that it's not too late. Our members will be calling their MPPs to demand the government provide the funding to keep students and staff safe when schools re-open, and we urge parents to join us in that call.

July 30, 2020