

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“A provincial government that doesn't care much about children, workers, or the truth”

– CUPE responds to *Star* report of Ford government's penny-pinching strategies for schools and COVID-19 –

TORONTO, ON – CUPE leaders expressed shock but not surprise at the findings in the Toronto Star's [investigation](#) into the 'watered down' strategies that the Ontario government used to keep COVID-19 out of schools. Laura Walton, president of CUPE's Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU), gave the following comment:

Thanks to the Star's investigation, we now know two things:

1. This government put students, workers and families in harm's way by not carrying out its own safety proposals for school reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic;
and
2. Premier Ford and Minister Lecce regularly lied to Ontarians about following the best medical advice for reopening schools and about putting students' safety above financial costs.

CUPE-OSBCU and its allies, on the other hand, have been echoing the best medical experts and sharing the experience and expertise of education workers since the pandemic began. We have demanded everything from better PPE in schools, to opening up closed spaces to allow more physical distancing, to additional staff to support students' mental health.

We knew these proposals would cost money; in fact, CUPE recently estimated them at \$1.2 billion, as outlined in its January submission to the Ministry of Education's funding consultation.

But we also put forward some no-cost and low-cost measures to the Ministry: mandatory screening for anyone coming through school doors; air purifiers for every room that's occupied in schools; smaller student cohorts that include workers, so that EAs and others don't move from room to room; identifying which workers have to be in schools during the shutdown; and a review of students' Individual Education Plans with an eye to safety and risk assessment.

And now it's been confirmed to us that we were making these requests to a government that didn't care that much about children, workers, or the truth.

If the Minister of Education cares at all about being accountable to Ontarians, he must immediately create an action table of all concerned parties to plan the safe reopening of schools and implement the proposals that were already made around screening, testing and class sizes.

It's time to translate the best medical and public health advice into action, rather than the lies and lip service that we've had so far from the Ford government.

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