

COVID-19 UPDATE

March 22, 2020 • ISSUE 1

COVID-19 Pandemic Information Update

Information for All OSSTF/FEESO Members

OSSTF/FEESO Provincial Office

OSSTF/FEESO Provincial Office is committed to continuing to serve the membership during the pandemic. For the protection and safety of staff at Mobile Drive, however, the office itself will be closed until at least April 6, and staff will be working from their homes. During this closure, the Provincial Office switchboard will be open Monday to Friday between 8:30am and 4:30pm.

We urge all OSSTF/FEESO members to take active measures to reduce their own risk, and to adhere to the recommendations of Public Health officials. Some general information and resources related to COVID-19 can be found on the [COVID-19 Information page](#) on the Federation website.

The Emergency Care Benefit and Emergency Support Benefit

On March 18th, the Federal Government announced \$82B in aid for families and businesses during this time of uncertainty. Included in that aid program are the Emergency Care Benefit and the Emergency Support Benefit for Canadians who do not qualify for Employment Insurance (EI). This fund will be available in April, 2020.

We are encouraging all OSSTF/FEESO members who will not be receiving pay from their employer to apply for EI as soon as possible. We continue to attempt to get information regarding pay for casual and daily occasional members and will provide that as soon as it is received. It is important to note that under the new rules, members who have been advised to self-isolate or quarantine can apply for EI without a medical certificate. A member who falls into this category can apply to have the one-week waiting period waived. Members who do not qualify through the typical EI process are encouraged to apply to the new Emergency Care Benefit and the Emergency Support Benefit. A Record of Employment (ROE) is required to access all of the EI programs.

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The Emergency Care Benefit provides up to \$900 every two weeks for up to 15 weeks, to those affected by COVID-19. It is intended for those who do not qualify for EI, cannot go to work, and do not have paid sick leave. It will be available to:

- Canadians who are quarantined or sick with COVID-19
- Canadians who must stay home to take care of a family member with COVID-19
- Parents staying home to care for children because of school closures

The Emergency Support Benefit provides up to \$5.0 billion in support to workers who are not eligible for EI and who are facing unemployment. At this time we do not know how much this benefit will provide to individuals, or how long the funds will last.

Canadians will be able to apply for both benefits in April 2020 through the CRA website. When more information on these funds is available, including a contact number for assistance, we will communicate that information to members.

Members with specific questions on their EI claim or status should contact an EI representative at 1-800-206-7218. Local leaders should contact their Protective Services Field Secretary for assistance with additional questions.

Community Projects and Initiatives

We know that many individual OSSTF/FEESO members are actively supporting initiatives to assist those who have been most severely impacted by the social and economic disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We encourage OSSTF/FEESO Districts to consider ways in which they can play constructive roles within their communities during this crisis, either through donations, participation in existing projects, or by launching new initiatives.

In the coming days the Provincial Executive will also be considering ways in which the Federation might be similarly constructive on a province-wide level beyond our role in the education sector. Members who have suggestions as to how OSSTF/FEESO can play a constructive and impactful role during this crisis are encouraged to forward ideas to their local leaders.

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Information for OSSTF/FEESO Members in Districts 1 to 33

Through the March Break we have been making efforts to determine what OSSTF/FEESO members employed by school boards can expect while the province's schools are closed.

General Secretary Pierre Côté and senior staff have reached out to key personnel within the Ministry of Education, and we are hopeful that regular meetings or consultations for information sharing are in the works. Friday evening, an email was received from Minister Lecce, which also commits to future consultation but no specific dates have been set.

Learn at Home

On Friday, March 20, the Minister of Education announced the launch of [Learn at Home](#), an online portal that provides learning resources to help students “continue their education” while schools are closed. While these resources have been developed by OCT educators, the portal does not provide formal curriculum delivery.

The Minister also said that the province is developing a plan for scaling and building additional online learning programs, should they become necessary. We will continue to insist that education unions must be included in any such planning. The Minister's email, mentioned above, reads in part as follows:

. . . we propose to work with all education partners to develop a plan to support continuity of learning for students. We will be asking all school boards to use the upcoming school closure period to develop a plan should the school closure period need to be extended. Our goal would be to restore teacher led learning to the greatest extent possible, recognizing the challenges in doing so while respecting public health direction. We will be asking school boards to develop a plan that supports teachers in connecting with their students to ensure the successful completion of the school year for all students, and to support students in advancing to the next school year and to graduate.

No further details in this regard are known at this time.

Members' Responsibilities

Your first responsibility is to look after your own health and the health of others by following the advice of public health authorities to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Members who are being paid should be available during the work day but should not be reporting to worksites except in

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exceptional circumstances (e.g. cleaners who have been directed to work by their employers in consultation with the bargaining unit). To date, there has been no consistent message from the Ministry of Education regarding any other responsibilities.

Until a program is announced by the Ministry or your school board employer, we do not advise attempting to provide alternate learning plans on your own. If contacted by students or parents, direct them to the Learn at Home website discussed above. Avoid speculating with students about the possible length of school closure or any other matter for which clear information has not been provided by the appropriate authority.

Remember that all withdrawal of service actions have been suspended.

As the COVID-19 pandemic crisis continues to unfold, OSSTF/FEESO will be issuing frequent updates to provide members with as much pertinent information as possible.

Please frequently check the *myOSSTF* section of the OSSTF/FEESO website for updated information.