

The Premier
of Ontario

Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto Ontario
M7A 1A1

Le Premier ministre
de l'Ontario

Edifice de l'Assemblée législative
Queen's Park
Toronto (Ontario)
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August 27, 2012

Mr. Tim Hudak
Leader of the Official Opposition
Room 381, Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A8

Dear Mr. Hudak:

I want to thank you for your input on the Putting Students First Act. This is an important piece of legislation because it protects the gains we have made in education, while ensuring peace and stability in our schools for students and their parents.

Great strides have been made in improving public education over the past nine years. Class sizes are down, graduation rates are up and full-day kindergarten is giving our youngest students the very best start. Our education system is now among the best in the English-speaking world.

As you know, we are asking our teachers — as we have asked all our public sector partners — to agree to a salary freeze and to live within our fiscal reality as we work to *balance our budget*. As you also know, *collective bargaining agreements automatically roll over on September 1 at a potential cost of \$473 million to school boards, a cost that we simply cannot afford.*

The Putting Students First Act is based on a memorandum of understanding agreed to by a number of our education partners after more than 300 hours of negotiations. It contains a two-year across-the-board wage freeze. It provides full offsets to allow our younger teachers to move up through their grid. It also introduces a more reasonable sick-day policy, ensures fair hiring practices and gives teachers more say in how students are tested.

While my colleagues and I believe the proposed legislation is fair, balanced and reasonable, we actively sought your party's advice in advance of its introduction into a minority legislature — and we have listened. We have therefore revised certain elements in the bill to address the concerns you raised.

We are concerned with your lack of support for fair hiring and a more balanced approach to diagnostic assessment, but we are open to meeting you half-way. That is why I am announcing today that the diagnostics and fair hiring provisions will only be entrenched in this law and in collective agreements for our partners who have signed or will sign on to agreements by August 31. These provisions will not be entrenched in the collective agreements for any other union or board that has not already signed an agreement. We will move ahead with these provisions on a non-legislative basis only.

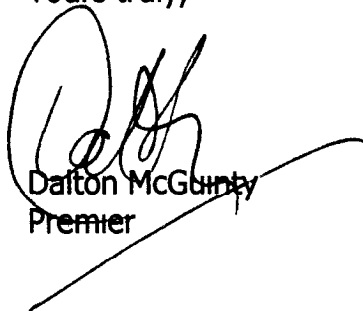
We made these changes to the bill before its introduction to enable its timely passage. We believe this to be a significant compromise.

Our government's goal is to make certain that school starts on time and that it continues without disruption. We have solicited and acted on your advice to achieve this crucial goal for the sake of our children.

We have all seen how slowly legislation can move through the legislature without the co-operation of the opposition parties in a minority government. As the only opposition party that has demonstrated a willingness to work with us on this bill, we appreciate your feedback. It is in the best interests of all Ontarians that we act constructively and in a spirit of collaboration to make sure the Putting Students First Act is passed without delay.

My colleagues and I look forward to being able to count on your support. Please accept my best wishes.

Yours truly,



Dalton McGuinty
Premier