

CONSULTATION IS KEY TO MEANINGFUL STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENT PROCESS

**OPSEU RESPONSE TO THE “TRANSITIONING
TO STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENT 3 FOR
ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES”
DISCUSSION PAPER**

April 30, 2018

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OPSEU Response to the “Transitioning to Strategic Mandate Agreement 3 for Ontario Universities and Colleges” discussion paper

More than 40,000 members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) work in our province’s 24 public colleges and 11 public universities. OPSEU members work at all levels of the Post-Secondary Education (PSE) system: We are faculty, front line support staff, custodial workers, and we ensure campus security. The work of OPSEU members ensures quality education and services at public post-secondary institutions throughout Ontario.

The people of Ontario care deeply about quality post-secondary education in Ontario, and understand that it is central to good jobs and a prosperous future for families, communities and our province.

Absence of meaningful consultation

OPSEU is a major stakeholder in PSE, and it is of paramount importance that both locally and centrally, our members’ representatives be consulted properly during the Strategic Mandate Agreement process. Unfortunately, that did not take place during the SMA1 (2014 to 2017) and the SMA2 (2017 to 2020) processes. The SMA2 discussion paper states, “Within the context of government’s overarching goals of transparency and accountability, SMAs help the government plan for the future...”

The absence of that “transparency and accountably” is glaring. We do not know what the SMA2 looks like in the colleges to date (April 2018). Although the university agreements from the SMA2 round have been recently uploaded to the Ontario.ca website, the college agreements are still not available there. The expertise of OPSEU representatives at Ontario colleges and universities was ignored during the SMA1 and SMA2 processes. The SMA3 process must fully engage OPSEU local and central representatives as part of any meaningful consultative engagement.

We understand from the SMA2 discussion paper that “...a key commitment from the SMA2 process was to reaffirm that metrics and targets included in SMA2 are a beginning point for further discussion with the sector.” OPSEU was not consulted in the establishment of those beginning points, and we have still not been informed of those metrics and targets. OPSEU has also not received real commitment from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) that there will be any meaningful consultation during the SMA3 process.

Lack of transparency and consultation regarding metrics

In the SMA2 discussion paper, it is stated that SMA2 “...creates a foundation for metrics and targets and begins the transition of colleges and universities to a performance and outcomes-based funding model.” As a major stakeholder, OPSEU finds this proposed funding model alarming. A well-funded, accessible public system is essential to strong communities.

Tying funding to unknown performance assessments and unspecified outcomes relies on metrics which have not been released, and which are of dubious provenance and interpretation.

The SMA2 discussion paper states:

The SMA2 process included significant progress on system-wide and institutional metrics and targets. Data definitions have been improved upon and issues related to data sources have been identified for future discussion.

SMA2 also created a foundation for discussion on how to improve processes around collecting and comparing data and for moving toward a system that better aligns funding with student outcomes and the performance areas and goals articulated in the agreements.

The MAESD has not shared any of the mentioned data with OPSEU. This lack of transparency is indicative of why the metrics are not trustworthy.

All data and metrics must be revealed to OPSEU and other stakeholders so that they can be properly analyzed and reviewed.

Requirement of permanent, long-term funding

The SMA2 discussion paper mentions that during the SMA2 period (2017-2020) “... funding will not be allocated directly to the achievement of specific targets”. OPSEU is concerned that the key objectives of the SMA3, “metric improvement”, and “development of a funding mechanism for SMA performance targets as part of the Differentiation Envelope design”, have been developed by MAESD to an advanced

level which precludes meaningful input from key stakeholders. OPSEU continues to insist that stakeholder input and transparency are essential to meaningful outcomes in the best interest of PSE.

The importance of an academic senate

There is a structural limitation to Ontario’s public colleges, which is different than Ontario universities. All public Ontario colleges, except for Sheridan College, do not have an academic senate, or a body that supports and promotes collegial governance. Unlike the colleges, Ontario universities have senates in place which can review and help shape the metrics for those institutions. In order to uphold the spirit of due diligence, MAESD must fully engage the frontline staff and faculty of the colleges in the review of applicable metrics.

Proper consideration of barriers to accessible public PSE

OPSEU recommends a complete review of all systemic and structural issues that present a barrier to students’ access to college and university programs and services. Students who are Indigenous, who are racialized, who have a disability, students who are geographically isolated in the North or in remote areas have limited ability to access PSE services including mental health services, accommodation of special needs, and child care services. Outcomes must be based on metrics that include a full assessment of barriers.

OPSEU urges that MAESD works with us to set out clear guidelines and criteria for the process of determining and assessing

institutional metrics. This can only be done properly with input from all stakeholders. MAESD in its SMA3 process must also include, but not limit its scope to, issues of institutional governance, staffing complement, social development, mental health support services, etc. OPSEU members are the frontline staff who serve and work with students every day. We are the experts on the ground who deliver quality PSE in our communities, the insights of frontline staff must be taken into account for any meaningful discussion on metrics.

Failure to reveal data and process regarding determination of differentiation plans

OPSEU is opposed to the process of differentiation as outlined by SMA2. Earlier during the SMA process, the government took the stance that differentiation will become a key policy driver for PSE. To that end, the discussion paper states, “Going forward as part of this policy framework MAESD will focus on and make funding decisions aligned with institutional strengths and a planned approach to growth.”

This is of significant concern to OPSEU. It fundamentally goes against the vision that founded the colleges in our province half a century ago; to create PSE institutions that serve their community. By moving programs out of reach, an elitist mandate is created which privileges staff and students who are able to afford living away from home and/or who do not have other responsibilities such as jobs and family which prohibit relocation.

Differentiation risks entrenching a two/multi-tiered PSE system, where some institutions will be disproportionately better funded than the others with regards to particular programs and services, thereby creating have/have-not colleges and universities. This policy has significant negative impact on our northern institutions, where staff and students have particularly difficult geographical barriers to relocating to access programs and staff jobs.

We do not know how differentiation will play out in light of the government’s stated plans to increase the PSE student number in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) by 25 per cent (40,000 to 50,000 per year) in the next five years. OPSEU is requesting a complete and detailed review of how the strengths and growth potential areas of institutions in the SMA1 documents have been determined given the lack of consultation of major stakeholders including OPSEU and the frontline workers. In light of the government’s planned initiative to increase the number of STEM graduates, OPSEU recommends proper consultation of stakeholders and full transparency with regards to data.

Experiential Learning limitations

OPSEU was shocked to learn in 2016 about a new deal between Colleges Ontario and the McDonald’s fast food chain corporation. This deal permits McDonald’s employees who have taken in-house training programs to go directly into the final year of a two-year business diploma at Ontario’s colleges! To ensure quality education in our PSE system, we cannot

outsource public education to corporations such as McDonald's.

Recognition of experiential learning, as mentioned in the SMA2 guidelines, is a disturbing new direction unless done with proper corresponding faculty supervision and support. It can lead to an erosion of quality PSE. If experiential learning is to remain a priority for MAESD, SMA3 must include a fulsome engagement with faculty regarding how best to accomplish that goal.

Contract work, part-time work, good jobs and quality education

OPSEU is proud to have organized 20,000 part-time support staff at Ontario's public colleges. This is an important step towards improving PSE for Ontario's college students. A key outcome of Ontario PSE is good jobs for our students.

OPSEU recommends immediate recognition of union membership for all part-time faculty at Ontario colleges. Further, we recommend that the government properly fund good, permanent, full-time jobs at Ontario's colleges and universities.

Fully funded tuition for all students at Ontario's public colleges and universities

The SMA2 discussion paper states that the OSAP program provides "free average tuition for many low and middle income Ontario students". The government has taken money out of the PSE system for years, and is playing a game of smoke and mirrors when it claims it is offering students free tuition. The OSAP program

transformation gives discretionary tuition amounts to Ontario students, which in turn creates financial precarity among the PSE institutions, which must vie for student tuition dollars. Further, this system ensures those students who rely on tuition subsidies do not have equal access to education programs of their choice. By offering only average tuition amounts to these students, they have limited access to the more expensive programs, including STEM programs, which would result in higher paid jobs upon graduation. Students deserve equal access to education, provided through a fully funded public post-secondary education system which does not put the burden on students or individual institutions.

Conclusion

OPSEU is ready and willing to engage in fulsome participation with the government as a key stakeholder in improving Ontario's public education system for all workers and students. As the union representing frontline staff at all of Ontario's public colleges and many Ontario universities, consultation with representatives of our members is essential to determining the best path forward. Front line staff are the experts in determining what is best for students in terms of programming, learning conditions and provision of services on college and university campuses.

All workers at Ontario's public colleges and universities have the right to a union. It's time for the government to recognize that all part-time college faculty must have union representation. Ontario's post-secondary institutions must model excellence as an employer. As the primary providers of Ontario's workforce training, they should raise the bar for employers.

Full transparency and cooperation including sharing of metrics, determination of processes in gathering and assessment of metrics, full participation and consultation in determination of programming at Ontario colleges, and respectful involvement at every level of decision making is essential to world class post-secondary education excellence for Ontario students and the workers of tomorrow.

Colleges and universities deliver quality education and services because of the quality faculty, support staff and service, maintenance and security staff on the front lines. The government must commit to investment in an education system which has the dedicated long-term funding it needs to provide the programs and services students deserve.

Notes:

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/college-and-university-strategic-mandate-agreements-2017-2020>

² <https://opseu.org/news/ontario-shouldnt-outsource-public-education-mcdonalds>

Authorized for distribution by:



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