

# UNION MYTH INFORMATION

**DEBUNKED**

## MYTH #1

**IF YOU ARE INVOLVED WITH THE UNION, YOU ARE EXPECTED TO VOTE NDP.**

OSSTF/FEESO does not dictate how its member should vote; nor does it have an exclusive political partnership with any one party. Our Federation strives to maintain good working relations with all the major political parties in Ontario. Through our lobbying efforts, we try to keep all politicians aware of issues facing our members. We promote the importance of public education and champion ideas and practices that benefit education workers and students. OSSTF/FEESO by its very nature is a political entity, but rather than siding with a single political party, we spread our influence across the spectrum. All members are free to vote as they choose.

## MYTH #2

**UNIONS PROTECT INCOMPETENT WORKERS.**

OSSTF/FEESO has no tolerance for incompetence or unprofessionalism. Such behaviours not only compromise the education system, but tarnish the good reputation of all education workers. Our Federation does, however, vehemently protect a member's right to a fair performance appraisal and due process. We recognize that members accused of unsatisfactory performance may have been unfairly targeted or that there may be underlying issues or conditions that need to be taken into consideration. OSSTF/FEESO protects every member's right to a fair process.

## MYTH #3

**ACTIVE UNION MEMBERS GET OSTRACIZED BY EMPLOYERS.**

Your right to belong to and be active in a union is protected by provincial and federal laws and is guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. A standard clause stating that there shall be no discrimination or coercion exercised against an employee for participating in union activities is also included in most collective agreements. Furthermore, many progressive employers recognize that unions are an integral part of doing business and regularly consult union leaders on matters of employment. OSSTF/FEESO protects its members from any arbitrary actions from employers.

## MYTH #4

**INVOLVEMENT IN THE UNION TAKES UP TOO MUCH TIME.**

It's true that some members donate generous amounts of time to their union. There are opportunities to participate on councils and committees, join meetings and help out with projects. However, there are many also many Federation opportunities which will take up little or no time: distribution of newsletters, attending a workplace meeting, discussing Federation issues and initiatives with colleagues and voting in local elections. Being involved in OSSTF/FEESO means contributing as much time (or as little) as you wish.

## MYTH #5

**EDUCATION UNIONS BENEFIT WORKERS, BUT ARE BAD FOR EDUCATION.**

Our Federation is an important stakeholder in Ontario's public education system. Our most recent educational initiative was titled the "Students First Plan" and its aim was to provide students with the best possible learning environments and conditions. An entire floor of our Provincial Office is dedicated to Educational Services. We provide cutting edge professional development to education workers and we produce current, socially-relevant curriculum. We initiated the first comprehensive research project on bullying in North America. Clearly, we are invested in the health and strength of the education system and the well-being of students. We do, however, acknowledge that the working conditions of our members are intrinsically entwined with the learning conditions of students and when we advocate for one, for advocate for both. OSSTF/FEESO is committed to protecting and enhancing public education.



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**MYTH #6**  
**UNIONS ADD TO THE STRESS OF A WORKPLACE.**

There is no doubt that working in the field of education can be stressful, but the image of a union presence as a disruptive force in the workplace is unfounded and outdated. OSSTF/FEESO prides itself on the working relationships it endeavours to develop with employers. While we hold strong and sometimes differing positions than employers, we attempt to solve these differences with a minimum of impact on teaching and learning. When stress originates from conflict between members, our Mediation Resource Services Bank provides mediators to help bring peace. Rather than being a source of stress in the workplace, OSSTF/FEESO works to address such problems.

**MYTH #7**  
**UNIONS ARE ONLY ABOUT GOING ON STRIKE.**

OSSTF/FEESO members have participated in many notable provincial actions including: the 1973 protest to protect our right to strike, the 1989 protest to protect pensions, and the 1997 protest against Mike Harris' Bill 160. Historically, local bargaining units have resorted to strikes as a last resort when negotiations fail. However, the vast number of collective agreements are reached with no need for any type of job action. Over the 2008/2009 school year, OSSTF/FEESO settled 132 collective agreements without a single work disruption. Our members are committed to their jobs and the students they teach and support, but they also realize that the important work they do must be protected. The decision to resort to a strike is never taken lightly

**MYTH #8**  
**I PAY MY DUES TO THE UNION BUT GET NOTHING IN RETURN.**

Members of OSSTF/FEESO pay one of the lowest dues rate in Canada: 1.3%. What do you get in return? Just some of the benefits and services that our Federation offers its members include: contract and salary negotiation, the handling of labour grievances and arbitrations, pay equity, pension advice, health and safety training, healthcare benefits, long-term disability, curriculum advice and lessons, educational resources, legal advice, professional development, political lobbying, international assistance, awards and scholarships, mediation, and the promotion and protection of public education. OSSTF/FEESO provides its members a broad range services to ensure that their jobs are secure and protected.

**MYTH #9**  
**THE UNION IS JUST A BUNCH OF COMPLAINERS.**

It's true that union members complain . . . they complain when they witness: unfair labour practices, members being treated unfairly or arbitrarily, when a mutually agreed upon contract is broken, when health and safety regulations are ignored, when the work of education workers is undervalued, and when the tenets of public education are threatened. We don't just complain, though; we are a proactive organization. We challenge employers who do not respect the work or contracts of workers. We lobby the government on issues of education and worker's rights. We not only ensure that health and safety rules are being adhered to, we provide input on the writing of such legislature. OSSTF/FEESO acts on behalf of its members.

**MYTH #10**  
**UNIONS WERE ONCE NEEDED BUT NOW THEY ARE OBSOLETE.**

Anti-union sentiment in North America is at an all-time high. One strategy used by businesses that don't want to deal with unions is to acknowledge that they were needed during the industrial age, but have no place in a modern economy. They cite today's absence of industrial age conditions such as: low wages, poor benefits, no job security, and employer greed. If only such conditions were a thing of the past. Unions continue to fight for the rights of workers and have extended their mandate. Not satisfied with having helped established, among other things: the weekend, eight-hour work days, public education, universal healthcare, public pensions, and the minimum wage, unions now also champion many social movements and causes that benefit everyone. Unions remain relevant and valuable in today's society.