

# PEEL EDUCATION WORKERS UNITED JOINT STATEMENT

## AS A NEW SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS, PEEL'S EDUCATION WORKER UNIONS PROVIDE A 'STARTING POINT' OF THEIR OWN

**September 3, 2025**

MISSISSAUGA, ON – On Wednesday, August 27, 2025, the Peel District School Board (PDSB) hosted their annual *Starting Point* event at Pearson Convention Center in Brampton. Historically, the event is a celebration of what the school board considers to be their successes, and an information session for the board's management and administrators around the system's strategic priorities and goals for the upcoming school year – with a focus this year on personal stories, and how those “stories today illuminate tomorrow.” Typically, the elected leadership of the education worker unions – who the PDSB is in the habit of referring to as their “union partners” – are invited to attend this event to hear the messaging being shared with board management. This year, for the first time in the history of this event, there was no such invitation – a clear indication that the PDSB has little to no interest in working collaboratively with the unions representing its workers to ensure all students are cared for and supported.

It's also worth noting that the PDSB's 2024 *Starting Point* event came with a price tag of close to \$65,000 (information obtained by one of the unions through a Freedom of Information request). In an era of significant underfunding and a lack of supports and resources for students, this figure should give all of us pause.

Since the last round of collective bargaining negotiations, the PDSB has consistently ignored and disregarded the concerns of its staff. While the PDSB does not see the value of working collaboratively and transparently, unions do. We have, on several occasions, met with the board and discussed the issues of importance and urgency for our members, students, and communities. We have met with PDSB leadership and continue to attend meetings that, very often, seem futile and performative rather than productive and collaborative.

We are the employees at the front line of public education in Peel each and every day, doing our best under incredibly difficult conditions. At this time, we are asking the PDSB to look inwards and to ask itself if the processes currently in place are truly working.

Below, we outline pressing issues shared by workers in the PDSB, organized under collective areas of concern that impact workers across job classes. Our hope is that, in sharing this 'starting point' of our own, the PDSB will be motivated to work with us towards a shared goal: a public education system in Peel that is just, compassionate, nurturing, anti-oppressive, equitable, and safe.

### **Unsafe and Unsustainable Workplaces**

Education workers no longer feel safe doing their jobs. Physical violence in schools is rising, and is quite possibly at an all-time high. All workers are stretched thin, offices and classrooms are being destroyed by students with significant needs who do not have the appropriate

supports and supervision in place. Student washrooms are routinely closed as they are unusable due to student misuse and vandalism. Classrooms are being evacuated as Educational Assistants (EAs) are being pushed into temporary or unstable roles. Students are increasingly being supervised by unqualified replacement workers.

These incidents of violence and aggression not only take a physical toll on workers (and, often, other students), but also an emotional toll. Collectively, our members report punitive absence management processes that risk privacy and breed distrust with their employer. Taken together, these conditions are resulting in increased incidence of mental health-related medical leaves.

### **Systemic Undermining of Frontline Education Workers**

There is a growing sense that educators' professional judgement is being systematically eroded. Teachers are, too often, pressured to alter student grades, despite having the assessment and evaluation data to support their decisions. Administrative directives often ignore educators' pedagogical expertise.

Due to the PDSB's lack of ability to recruit and retain staff, many schools have become revolving doors of administrators who are retired or too quickly moved into Acting Principal positions before being ready for that level of responsibility. This leaves these schools with leadership that is either not invested in the school community for the long term or is insufficiently trained and ill-prepared to meet the challenges inherent in running a school.

Long-serving occasional teachers are often passed over for hiring into permanent positions despite experience and merit. School-level clerical and office staff are not being hired in a timely manner, leaving our schools severely understaffed – very often at the busiest and most critical times of the school year.

Occasional staff are expected to complete unpaid mandatory training. Office staff are asked to complete training at their desks while still attending to their daily tasks without appropriate equipment or dedicated learning time.

### **Misuse of Resources and Misaligned Priorities**

Education workers are expected to take on more with fewer resources. Managers and supervisors are creating work to justify their positions while the board continues to rename, restructure and remove staff without consultation of all stakeholders, while education workers are pushed to the brink.

Roles which directly support students – such as those supporting English language learners or students with complex and significant learning needs – are being dismantled, while new higher salaried supervisory positions are routinely being added to manage the few staff that remain and who are now tasked with supporting hundreds more students, leaving little time for one-on-one support.

Office and clerical positions in the PDSB's field offices and central board office continue to be cut and converted to non-union roles – despite the number of employees in those locations remaining the same. Custodial and maintenance workers continue to have their workloads and

positions cut, leaving our schools with classrooms and washrooms that need to be closed because there isn't staff available to clean and maintain them.

### **Disregard for Process, Training, and Accountability**

Time and again, we have seen a lack of follow-through, consultation, or clarity. Tasks that were once the role of Principals, Vice-Principals, supervisors, and managers are continually downloaded onto education workers without time, training, or additional compensation.

New board initiatives and programs are routinely introduced without implementation support. Professional development opportunities are inaccessible to workers or are unpaid – an issue that is extremely prevalent for daily occasional teachers and office and clerical workers.

Grievances filed by unions are left to fester or unnecessarily escalate to arbitration, when they could be resolved at an earlier stage in the process.

Hiring processes for all employee groups are routinely bypassed and associated timelines ignored.

The collective agreements of all employee groups are not respected to their full extent. The PDSB *Mental Health Joint Steering Committee* – which is meant to be a key structure in supporting wellness and accountability throughout the system – is on the verge of dissolution; not from disinterest on the part of the education worker unions, but from the board's failure to engage meaningfully.

### **Equity, Anti-Black Racism, and Silencing of Social Justice Work**

Despite public statements about a commitment to equity, we continue to witness a lack of real action to support educators doing social justice work. Staff leading initiatives intended to confront and address anti-Black racism often face inadequate support. Teachers and educators who are following the curriculum, affirming student identities, and making space for the historically marginalized are outright silenced.

This lack of commitment undermines not only education workers but the very students who depend on us to create inclusive, safe, and empowering learning environments. Justice isn't meant to be a checkbox or an empty slogan – it demands ongoing and meaningful support, resources, and respect for the education workers at the forefront of this vital and urgent work.

### **A Call for Accountability and Meaningful Action**

The PDSB's *Starting Point* event signals a chance for new beginnings. Words alone, however, are not enough. *Our* 'starting point' – the starting point of thousands of education workers in the PDSB – demands that we centre students and workers first. While we recognize that some matters fall within the scope of collective bargaining and cannot be unilaterally changed, the PDSB must, in good faith:

- review and improve staffing levels for all employee groups;
- provide transparency on staffing decisions and funding allocations;
- ensure paid access to mandatory training and professional development for all employees;

- freeze the creation of new management and supervisory roles and redirect resources to frontline workers;
- respect the spirit and letter of collective agreements and engage in good faith processes to resolve outstanding grievances in a timely manner;
- recommit to maintaining and meaningfully participating in the Mental Health Joint Steering Committee and other collaborative structures; and
- demonstrate a genuine and ongoing commitment to social justice by providing real support to educators engaged in this critical work and including all educator staff in relevant training.

Despite the rosy picture painted by the PDSB during their *Starting Point* event every year, public education in Peel is in a dire situation. Any successes and positive outcomes experienced by students and families in the PDSB are *because of* the selfless, mission-driven dedication of the thousands of education workers who do their jobs with professionalism and passion every single day – in spite of working in a badly underfunded and unsupportive system. In our elected roles as local leaders, the PDSB can be assured that we hear ‘personal stories’ from members on an hourly basis every day. We would hope that when they claim that “stories today illuminate tomorrow” that they also include members’ difficult stories of challenges they’re experiencing in their workplaces, and that those would illuminate how they operate and engage going forward.

Our members remain deeply committed to students, their families, and the communities we serve. We are united and ready to work collaboratively. It is up to the PDSB to decide how we move forward to try to provide our students, staff, and communities with the schools they deserve.

Peel Education Workers United *is comprised of the unions representing every one of the more than 23,000 unionized workers in the Peel District School Board.*

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