

# Nearly 25,700 students receive tuition refunds after Ontario college strike, early numbers show

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Ontario's Ministry of Advanced Education confirmed today that 10.3 per cent of Ontario's roughly 250,000 full-time college students asked for, and received, their money back after the strike. (Martin Trainor/CBC News)

Nearly 25,700 full-time Ontario college students received tuition refunds after a five-week strike derailed their semester.

Ontario's Ministry of Advanced Education confirmed Tuesday that 10.3 per cent of Ontario's roughly 250,000 full-time college students asked for, and received, their money back after the strike.

Minister Deb Matthews said the figures are still preliminary and could change in the coming weeks as further numbers are reported by Ontario's 24 colleges.

- Thousands of Ontario college students opt to drop out and receive a tuition refund

"Over the past months, I have heard from students about hardships they have experienced as a result of this strike," she said in a statement. "It is clear that they have borne the brunt of the labour dispute between colleges and faculty."

Preliminary reports from colleges indicate that the vast majority, approximately 90 per cent of students, chose to stay and finish the semester."

Matthews said she expects many students who withdrew from this semester will return in January and September.

"I want to say to those students who did decide to withdraw, we hope you will return to college," she said. "We need your talent and skills in this province and want to keep seeing you succeed. We will work with colleges to support and encourage students to re-enrol."

Last month, the minister ordered colleges to refund the tuition money for any student who felt unable to complete the condensed semester. The decision is likely to cost the schools millions of dollars, which would have otherwise been saved because of the labour dispute.

The government ended the strike in November with back-to-work legislation passed in a rare weekend sitting at Queen's Park.

Earlier Tuesday, PC legislator Lorne Coe said the government was dragging its feet when it came to releasing the figures because the information was politically damaging.

"Ontarians have the right ... to know the consequences of the premier's lack of leadership on the community college strike," Coe said. "Will the minister stop playing politics and confirm today that approximately 25,000 dropped out from Ontario's community colleges due to the Liberal government's inaction?"

NDP education critic Peggy Sattler said government inaction over the strike has put all students in a difficult position and hurt their education.

"These students were backed into a corner, and made the very difficult decision to withdraw from the shortened semester entirely in order to get a refund," she said in a statement.

Those that have chosen to remain in class face their own challenges, including increased workloads and condensed schedules. Many students will be left struggling to recover financially and academically long after the semester is over."

Report Typo