

A message from the OTF President



Parker Robinson

Dear colleagues,

The 2020-21 school year has begun. With much uncertainty, you are returning to your schools and doing your best to prepare for the challenges ahead. I commend you for this. Your dedication to our students is admirable. I am humbled to begin my journey working for you at OTF, joining the outstanding team of professionals that work on your behalf each day.

In the coming year, I will focus my attention on three key areas: amplify the voice of OTF's Affiliates in holding the government to account regarding their weak return to school plan and pandemic response; take action to shine a light on anti-Black racism (ABR) and systemic racism within our communities/schools/organizations; and finally, push back against the privatization agenda that is apparent to publicly funded education stakeholders.

We have already started the important work of addressing ABR and systemic racism. Communications stating the need to meet this issue head on will be shared with the Ministry of Education and faculties of education and the Ontario College of Teachers. As well, OTF is reviewing our own organization to be sure we are acting in a manner that provides a safe, equitable and fair organization that all educators can be proud of.

Each year, the incoming OTF president has the honour of selecting a charity to support in lieu of seasonal cards. This year, I have chosen Covenant House. Educators are always striving to help young people reach their potential. Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond our control, some of our students end up facing situations that lead them to difficult and painful outcomes. Covenant House has been helping vulnerable youth overcome homelessness, hunger, and the trauma of trafficking and has provided them with support and opportunities to change their lives for the better. Their work is inspiring. I look forward to OTF supporting this important work.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Parker Robinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Parker Robinson
President

Large-scale, standardized online assessments in Ontario

Wrong time, wrong move

In his 2016 work, *The Pedagogy of Standardized Testing: The Radical Impacts of Educational Standardization in the US and Canada*, Dr. Arlo Kempf observes that “mandatory attention to testing often flies in the face of good teaching” It’s worth noting that he observed this before a global pandemic. So, it is with incredulity and consternation that OTF greeted the Minister of Education’s September 23rd announcement that, amid a pandemic, EQAO would press forward with the field testing of online assessments of Grade 9 mathematics.

While this initiative is pitched as helping to prepare students for the future, it ignores their present circumstances. Far from supporting their mental health and wellbeing, also a rationale for undertaking this pandemic pilot, it is anathema to both. Students, their families and their teachers have other pressing concerns in school and at home. The prospect of EQAO tests in any format will do nothing to reduce their anxiety and stress levels.

There is no evidence that testing of this scope leads to the kind of outcomes - higher levels of engagement, better mental health and wellbeing thresholds - which the Minister associates with them. It is yet another example of embracing assessments that reduce the complexity of student learning and achievement to dots on a chart. Moreover, the Minister’s move appears to be in lockstep with a goal to deprofessionalize teaching and privatize publicly funded education in Ontario.

If the Minister wishes to re-build public confidence in the Ministry’s ability to be in step with current realities in schools and classrooms, not to mention homes, across Ontario, he can begin by immediately ordering the cancellation of the Grade 9 math assessment and the Grade 10 literacy test just as he wisely opted to do with the Grades 3 and 6 assessments. That would be a much better example of decision-making that is adaptive and sensitive to students’ and teachers’ mental health and wellbeing.



Increased mandate of TVO and TFO



Bill 197, the *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act*, passed in July, expands the mandates of TVO and TFO to give them greater responsibility to develop the content for online courses, with particular emphasis on the provision of secondary school credit courses.

OTF has also learned that there exists the possibility of TVO/TFO being able to offer a greater number and range of courses directly to students. TVO and TFO have been directed to prepare a detailed business plan over the next six months, outlining the steps they will take, and to consult with stakeholders in this regard.

The move to expand the mandates of TVO and TFO is especially worrying in light of recent actions by the provincial government to increase online learning for Ontario students, who are now obliged to take at least two high school courses online in order to meet graduation requirements. Seen in conjunction with other recent government decisions such as the removal of the requirement for directors of education to hold teaching qualifications and proposals to take the EQAO standardized testing online, it would be appropriate to be concerned about whether online courses offered by TVO/TFO will continue to be developed and delivered by qualified teachers.

OTF and the Affiliates have always enjoyed a positive working relationship with both TVO and TFO, working in close partnership with both organizations over many years. Therefore, OTF and the Affiliates will be looking to discuss TVO’s/TFO’s plans and our concerns regarding this latest development.



A message from the OTF Secretary-Treasurer



Scott Perkin

Dear colleagues,

As we finished the previous school year back in June, anticipating the respite of summer, we reflected on the many challenges that Ontario's educators and students had faced during the year: a government bent on undermining the integrity and success of the education system through funding cuts to critical programs, higher class sizes, mandatory e-learning, and changes to curriculum without meaningful consultation.

Add to all of that an evolving pandemic and the uncertainty of how to safely reopen schools ... and yet we still face a government that is unwilling to engage with and listen to Ontario's educators, those dedicated professionals who are determined to protect the learning environment and the supports necessary for student success.

Ontario's educators have made and will continue to make the best of a very challenging situation, as schools reopen and face-to-face learning returns.

At OTF, we are proud of the efforts of our Affiliates and all of Ontario's educators in advocating for their students and a safe and productive return to the school year.

As we bid adieu to President Anne Vinet-Roy as her term concluded at OTF's Annual Meeting in late August, we welcomed Parker Robinson as he began his term as OTF President. We wish Anne all the best as she takes on a new role this fall as AEFO President, and we look forward to working with Parker in his new OTF role on various initiatives during this next school year, a year that will also present many challenges.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Perkin', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Scott Perkin
Secretary-Treasurer

Edvantage



Looking to save on your favourite brands, book your next dream vacation or refresh your home?

Edvantage, sponsored by the Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan, offers program members special discounts, promotions and contests. It is available to members of Ontario's four teachers' unions. As well, teacher candidates, as associate members of OTF, can become members while they are enrolled in teacher education.

With *Edvantage*, you can save on cellphones, gym memberships, paint, travel, theatre tickets, shoes, furniture and more!

Check out the *Edvantage* website.

Indigenous education



The Indigenous Education page on the OTF website offers many resources for teachers including OTF specific resources (webinars, First Nations, Métis & Inuit Education Association of Ontario, and teacher research from the OTF Teacher Learning Co-op).

As well, there is a list of over 15 useful links to groups and organizations with resources for teachers.

Check out the [Indigenous Education page](#).

On the OTF Teacher Resources page, over 60 [useful links](#) are listed in the category of Indigenous education.



...returning this fall

OTF will again be offering webinars on a variety of topics including anti-racism, financial literacy, Indigenous and Black education, math and others. Watch for announcements in the latter part of October for the schedule for November and December.



Le Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions (COPA), OTF's equity and inclusive partner, has developed an excellent series of consent guides for educators, parents and students. This is part of a provincial initiative, *Respect for You and Me*.

The *Educators' Guide* provides practical, hands-on strategies to prevent sexual assault, based on student empowerment. The guide includes definitions of sexual assault, rape culture and consent and explains how educators can build empowerment, model resilience, use intervention strategies and work with communities to create a culture of consent and establish healthy relationships.

The *Parents and Caregivers Guide* provides information for parents and caregivers to prevent



sexual assault. The guide includes definitions of sexual assault, rape culture and consent and explains how parents and caregivers can support children and youth empowerment, reinforce resilience, and offer collective support to young people.

The *Students' Guide* provides information for students to prevent sexual assault. The guide includes definitions of sexual assault, rape culture and consent and explains how students can develop healthy relationships, supportive friendships, resilience, and advocate for peers experiencing sexual assault.

These resources are available on the [Safe@School website](#) in the resources section.