



Michael (Mike) Foulds

A message from the OTF President

Rebuilding the foundation: A call to strengthen Ontario's teaching profession

In a moment of reflection, I recently found myself confronting a painful truth: for the first time in my career, I would hesitate to recommend teaching as a profession to my own children. This realization underscores the urgency of addressing the challenges facing Ontario's education system. At the heart of this crisis lie three essential pillars—***Recruitment, Retention, and Respect***—which must be fortified if we are to ensure a sustainable and thriving future for public education in our province.

Recruitment: Who will teach the next generation?

The landscape of teacher recruitment in Ontario has shifted dramatically. In 2015, only 16 per cent of new teachers secured permanent contracts in their first year. Today, that number has soared to over 70 per cent. While this might seem like progress, it masks a deeper issue: a growing disconnect between teacher availability and classroom needs. Despite the apparent demand, 27.5 per cent of teachers without permanent contracts report being underemployed.

This paradox is compounded by projections from the Ministry of Education, which anticipate rising student enrolment and increasing teacher retirements, all while the supply of new

teachers remains stagnant. Without intervention, a significant gap between teacher demand and supply is expected to emerge by 2027.

Rather than addressing this looming crisis, the government has shifted blame to teacher absenteeism, urging school boards and unions to improve attendance management. This response ignores the systemic issues at play. A 2025 Fraser Institute commentary—surprisingly aligned with union perspectives—urges policymakers to address the root causes of absenteeism, workplace violence, not just the symptoms.

One such root cause is safety. A recent [Auditor General's report](#) revealed a 67 per cent increase in violent incidents at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) between 2017 and 2023. During the same period, sick-day usage rose by 58 per cent. It's no coincidence—when educators feel unsafe, absenteeism rises.

Rural, francophone, and northern communities are already experiencing acute teacher shortages, with some schools unable to offer full-time instruction. To reverse this trend, we must create stronger pathways into the profession. This includes expanding teacher education programs and offering incentives such as tuition support, housing assistance, and guaranteed job placements.

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Retention: Keeping our best educators in the classroom

Recruiting new teachers is only half the battle. Retaining them is equally critical—and currently, we are losing that battle.

According to the Ontario College of Teacher's 2024 "[Focus on Teaching](#)" survey, 28 per cent of long-term occasional (LTO) and occasional teachers (OTs) reported working less than they desired due to a lack of stable opportunities. The same survey found that nearly half of all educators are considering leaving the profession within the next decade.

Why? The reasons are clear: increased violence in our schools, unsustainable workloads, burnout, and a lack of professional support. Class sizes are growing, mental health needs are escalating, and administrative demands are increasing. These pressures are pushing even veteran educators to the brink.

L'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO) and its Francophone partner organizations have long sounded the alarm about the dire shortage of teachers in French-language schools. Their 2021 [report](#) included 37 recommendations—most of which remain unaddressed. Meanwhile, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) have all released comprehensive reports highlighting the rise in workplace violence and the urgent need for safer school environments. (ETFO: [ETFO Violence Survey Results, 2023](#); OECTA: [Workplace Violence and Harassment Against Teachers: Results of a Comprehensive Members Survey](#) and [Safer Schools for All: Addressing Violence and Harassment Against Teachers](#); OSSTF: [Safe at School—school violence survey results](#).)

The Canadian Teachers' Federation's 2025 "[Parachute](#)" survey confirms that these issues are not unique to Ontario—they are pan-Canadian. Yet, instead of meaningful action, we are met with superficial solutions like cell phone bans.

Real retention strategies are needed. These include reducing class sizes, increasing access to classroom supports, and ensuring that professional development is relevant and empowering. Most importantly, we must address violence in schools to make teaching a sustainable, and safe long-term career.

Respect: Elevating the teaching profession

The third pillar—respect—is perhaps the most foundational. Without it, recruitment and retention efforts will falter. Over the past decade, public respect for teachers has eroded, fueled



by political rhetoric, chronic underfunding, and a growing disconnect between policy and classroom realities.

Ontario has cycled through four Ministers of Education in the past calendar year alone. This instability reflects a broader disregard for the voices of educators. It costs nothing to treat teachers with respect—to consult us on policy decisions, to value our expertise, and to recognize the critical role we play in shaping the future.

The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan remains one of the strongest in the world, offering financial security in retirement. But stability in retirement must be matched by stability during our working years. Teachers deserve to feel valued—not just through fair compensation, but through public recognition, workplace supports and professional autonomy.

Restoring respect for the profession requires collaboration. Policymakers, school boards, and communities must work together to ensure that teachers are seen—and treated—as the highly skilled professionals they are.

A Call to Action

The future of Ontario's publicly funded education system hinges on our ability to recruit, retain, and respect our educators. We must make it desirable to become a teacher in Ontario. We must make it sustainable to remain a teacher in Ontario. And we must ensure that teaching is a respected and valued profession.

As leaders in education, we have a responsibility to defend the profession and advocate for these changes. Our students—and the future of our province—depend on it.

Yours in education,

Mike

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President