

INTERACTION

VOLUME 28, ISSUE 2 | DECEMBER 2025

A MESSAGE FROM THE OTF PRESIDENT



Dear Colleagues,

Bill 33 is now law. Ostensibly called the *Supporting Children and Students Act*, it was marketed as a modernization effort, but its substance reveals a sweeping consolidation of power that threatens democratic governance in education and diverts attention from the real challenges facing students.

Along with OTF, education unions across the province including AEFO, ETFO, OECTA, OSSTF and CUPE—have been unequivocal in their assessment: the legislation centralizes authority in the hands of the Minister of Education while doing little to address the chronic issues of overcrowded classrooms, inadequate special education supports, or the long-standing underfunding of public schools. Their shared concern is that the bill reframes political control as student support, camouflage its intent behind reassuring language.

At the heart of the problem is Bill 33's erosion of local democratic oversight. Educators warn that the legislation dramatically expands ministerial intervention and sidelines school boards from decisions historically rooted in community needs. For them, the threat is not abstract—once local control is overridden, meaningful community representation may be difficult to restore. Elected

trustees, who answer to voters, risk being replaced by government-appointed supervisors who answer only to the provincial government.

This shift in governance is not a mere administrative adjustment; it fundamentally alters how education is shaped in Ontario. Those closest to students—families, trustees, teachers—would have reduced ability to influence decisions that directly impact their communities. Education workers have emphasized that such measures weaken democratic participation and make it easier for the government to deflect responsibility for problems it has contributed to through years of underinvestment.

The concerns extend beyond K–12 education. The Ontario chapter of the Canadian Federation of Students joined by other post-secondary labour groups, has raised alarms about the bill's implications for universities and colleges. New rules around admissions, student organizations, and campus fees are seen as intrusions on institutional autonomy and student self-governance, potentially worsening the funding crisis that already plagues the sector.

Advocacy groups focused on vulnerable students also see danger in Bill 33. The Ontario Autism Coalition has criticized the government's refusal to permit meaningful

(continued on page 2)



A MESSAGE FROM THE OTF PRESIDENT *(continued from page 1)*

public engagement during the legislative process, noting that families who depend on strong community advocacy are left with fewer avenues to influence policy. The decision to skip traditional committee hearings has deepened concerns about transparency and accountability.

Eliminating opportunities for public input suggests an intent to push the bill through without scrutiny—an approach that raises serious questions about the motivations driving these reforms.

What students truly need is not more centralized oversight but sustained investment: more teachers, smaller class sizes, robust special education services, and accessible mental health supports. Bill 33 offers none of these. Instead, it restructures governance in a way that concentrates power at Queen's Park while weakening the role of communities in shaping their own schools.

Ontario's publicly funded education system has long depended on the balance between provincial oversight and democratic, community-based decision-making. Bill 33 upends that balance. It is less a reform aimed at helping students and more a political maneuver that jeopardizes both educational quality and local democracy. Students, families, and educators deserve legislation that addresses real needs—not a power grab disguised as progress.

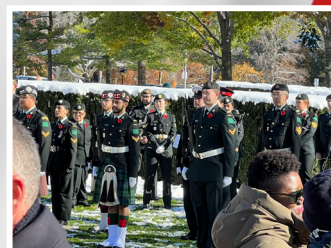
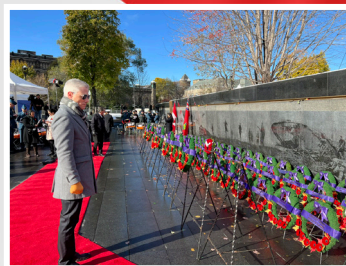
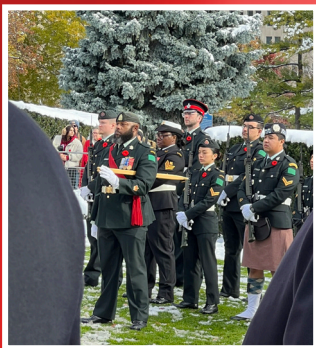
In solidarity,

Chris

Chris Cowley, President

REMEMBRANCE DAY CEREMONY AT QUEEN'S PARK

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. OTF President Chris Cowley attends Ontario's Ceremony of Remembrance at Queen's Park to remember and give thanks to our fallen soldiers and to honour all those who have served or are serving this country.





A MESSAGE FROM THE OTF SECRETARY-TREASURER

The difference between a roadmap and a recipe or regimen for success

In my Fall 2025 column, I wrote about the value of deliberate curiosity, signalled by the volume and types of questions we ask of ourselves, our students and others. In this column, I thought I would expand on some of the questions which occupy us as we strive to meet OTF's six legislated Objects, set out in the *Teaching Profession Act*. A collateral benefit for you, our members, is increased awareness of those six Objects.

To that end, I have identified the six Objects and articulated some questions which drive our efforts to fulfill our mandate. To be sure, an overarching question we ask ourselves is: how can we best/better serve you—our colleagues and members? While not an exhaustive list, here are some companion questions, linked more specifically to our six Objects, which help us “live” them.

Object a) To promote and advance the cause of education.

- What are existing and emerging policies and practices that could erode a confidence in and a commitment to publicly funded (and delivered) education?
- What forums and avenues can we leverage to champion and defend publicly funded (and delivered) education?

Object b) To raise the status of the teaching profession.

- For what promising practices in initial teacher education and professional learning should we be advocating?
- What exemplary practices should we showcase, amplify and advocate for in our position papers and submissions to political decision-makers and regulators?

Object c) To promote and advance the interests of teachers and to secure conditions that will make possible the best professional service.

- How can we lend our voice and actions to those of our Affiliates (sister teacher unions) to press for better learning and working conditions?
- How can we work with other education stakeholders in common cause?

- How can we influence the shaping of curricular and assessment/evaluation policies that centre the exercising of teacher professional judgment?

Object d) To arouse and increase public interest in educational affairs.

- What stories and narratives can we share with the public that convey the daily reality and lived experiences of teachers?
- How can we spotlight the myriad ways that teachers contribute both to preparing students to navigate an uncertain future and to building a civil, just and democratic society?

Object e) To co-operate with other teachers' organizations throughout the world having the same or like Objects.

- Through our international assistance program, how can we support sister organizations around the globe to set young people up for success?
- In what ways can we cooperate and collaborate with Federations across Canada and around the world to reinforce common values?

Object f) To represent all members of the pension plan established under the *Teachers' Pension Act* in the administration of the plan and the management of the pension fund.

- What vehicles and resources can we harness to help members better understand and take advantage of the “pension promise”?
- How can we work with our co-sponsor to ensure intergenerational equity?
- What questions or concerns of members should Plan administrators be aware of to inform how they serve Plan members?

Meeting our six Objects is always an unfinished journey and subject to unexpected and unanticipated twists and turns; however, the questions we pose about our six Objects, resemble an adjustable roadmap rather than an immutable regimen or recipe.

In solidarity,

Ian S. Pettigrew, Secretary-Treasurer

OTF MEMBER PROFILE: FLO BUREY

OTF Affiliate: Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)

Grade(s) and subject(s) taught: French Immersion Kindergarten for the past four years, previously French Immersion, Grades 1–6.

School: Lester B. Pearson Elementary School, Toronto, ON

School Board: Toronto District School Board

Years of teaching: 20



What motivated or inspired you to choose teaching as a career? I became a teacher because I wanted children who look like me to see themselves valued, represented and capable in ways that neither I nor my daughter were afforded as we went through the system.

What part(s) of being a teacher give(s) you the most joy or are most rewarding? The moments when a student realizes they can do something that they once thought was impossible fill me with incredible joy. Seeing their growth from September to June as more confident, more curious French-speaking learners is a real reward.

What part(s) of the job do you find the hardest? Confronting anti-Blackness on a daily basis makes the work persistently heavy. What many don't see is how Black teachers must navigate both lateral and vertical harm which compounds the challenges of an already demanding profession.

What has surprised you the most about being a teacher? What has surprised me most is realizing that the most impactful moments happen outside of formal lessons. Creating a space where students feel safe, seen, and cared for is what truly sets them up for lasting success.

What's the biggest myth or misconception people have about teaching? People often assume teaching is simply delivering lessons, but it's physical and emotional labour, advocacy and heart-work all at once. People rarely recognize that teachers are constantly holding space for students' needs, navigating complex relationships to meet those needs and working against systemic barriers while still trying to nurture every child's growth.

What tip could you provide for a new teacher? Build authentic relationships first so the students know they're learning from someone who sees and respects them. Also, remember that in order to survive and thrive in this work, you must protect your joy and your boundaries at all costs.

pension FACT



UNDERSTANDING BUYBACKS FOR OCCASIONAL TEACHERS

For occasional teachers, understanding how to build a secure retirement is essential. A common question we hear is about buying back periods of leave to count toward your pension. The process is unique for occasional teachers, and knowing the rules is the first step to making an informed decision.

While most occasional teachers are not eligible for buybacks, an important opportunity exists if you are granted an employer-approved leave of absence. In such cases, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) can administer a buyback, but only after your school board has officially reported the leave. The most critical point to remember is that the decision to grant a leave rests entirely with your employer. OTPP does not approve or advocate for leaves; its role is to process the buyback once the employer-approved leave is on record.

How is the buyback calculated?

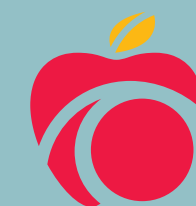
If you are granted an approved leave, the calculation is designed to reflect your specific work pattern. OTPP bases the buyback

on your service in the school year immediately preceding your leave. It is not calculated as a full-time equivalent.

Consider this example:

- You take a three-month (60 calendar day) approved leave.
- In the previous school year, you worked 116 days out of a possible 194—a work pattern of approximately 60 per cent.
- The amount of service you can purchase is 60 per cent of your 60-day leave, which equals 36 days of pensionable service.

This structure ensures the buyback is a true reflection of your teaching pattern.



**ONTARIO
TEACHERS'**

PENSION PLAN – RÉGIME DE RETRAITE
DES ENSEIGNANTES ET DES ENSEIGNANTS

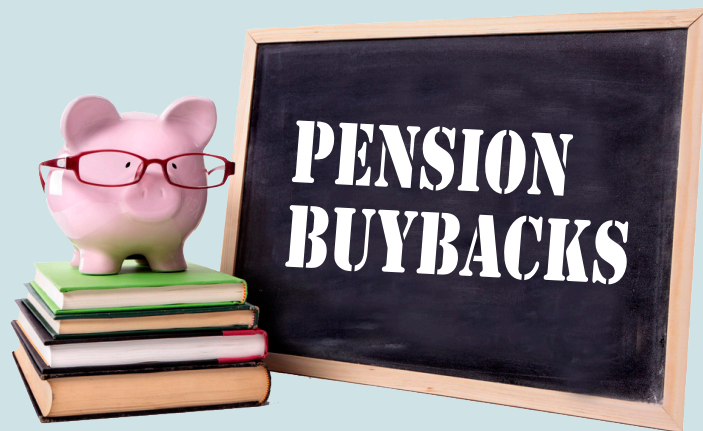
For more information, connect with
OTPP by email, phone or fax

Email: inquiry@otpp.com

Phone: 416.226.2700 or 1.800.668.0105 (toll free)

Fax: 416.730.7807 or 1.800.949.8208 (toll free)

Contact centre hours: 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.,
Monday to Friday





THE NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

On the 6th of December, we mourn the loss of fourteen young women who, while attending École Polytechnique in Montréal, were senselessly murdered in 1989 because they were women.

One may pause and ask why we still recognize this day 36 years later? Things must have changed? Things must be better? The sad truth is that gender-based violence is still a reality that far too many women face daily.

So, we will continue to mark this day to honour the fourteen women who were murdered and mourn with their families. We will keep their memories and story alive to educate younger

generations. And we will continue to raise awareness of ongoing gender-based violence and follow through with a collective commitment to keep pushing for change because 14 lives lost to gender-based violence is too many, and so is just one.

Say these names...

Geneviève Bergeron,
Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau,
Barbara Daigneault,
Anne-Marie Edward,
Maud Haviernick,
Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz,
Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair,
Anne-Marie Lemay,
Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard,
Annie St-Arneault, and
Annie Turcotte



2026

OTIP 
TEACHING
AW★ARDS

Nominate a teacher in one of three categories: elementary, secondary, or a beginning teacher in the first five years of teaching.

Winners will be invited to a ceremony to receive a personal award of \$1,000 and a Certificate of Recognition.

Nominations open January 19 and close on March 31, 2026.

teachingawards.ca


OTIP RAO.




*Happy
Holidays!*

The Executive and Staff of the

Ontario Teachers' Federation

wish you peace, joy and blessings of the season.

May the holidays be a special time with family
and friends and the new year be one of
hope and renewal.

In the spirit of giving, and in lieu of sending cards,

President Chris Cowley

has chosen to make a donation to



Chris
Chris Cowley
President

Ian
Ian S. Pettigrew
Secretary-Treasurer



Fondation
Rideau Hall
Foundation

ingenious

Canada's youth innovation challenge



This isn't just an
innovation prize,
it's a prize for
people wanting to
do good in their
community

Joti Gokaraju
2025 Ingenious+ award recipient

Receive \$1,000 to grow your project

Applications close January 23, 2026

www.ingeniousplus.ca



The OTF Special Recognition Award is presented annually to an organization, group or individual in acknowledgement of outstanding contributions to publicly funded education in Ontario, beyond the school board level.

This year, nominations will open
on January 19 and will close on March 31, 2026

For more information or to download
a nomination form, visit bit.ly/3OecGSt

THE CURE TO BROKEN PROMISES

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We're asking ourselves far too many "How did we get here?" questions as a society. But there's one, in particular, that sits at the heart of the CTF/FCE's work—and it demands our attention.

Education budgets have fallen so far that we're now at risk of breaking our promise to Canada's children. How did we let it get to this point?

This is not an opinion. You can look at the public education landscape in Canada and find as many examples of this issue as you'd like. The rates of teachers leaving the system are on a steady rise—and they are leaving earlier. The number of new teachers joining is falling, and those who stay often do so at the risk of their own physical and mental health. The effect of these three factors has hit a critical point that can't be ignored. But it is also just the visible symptom of a system that has been neglected for far too long. Educating, certifying, and hiring more teachers is absolutely necessary—but it is not the cure.

The "cure" is properly funding education systems so that they have the resources and staffing to support every child to fulfill their potential as healthy, happy, and productive members of our communities.

That's it. It's not complicated. There will absolutely be discussion and debate amongst those in the public education system about the best way to achieve that—professional discourse is healthy and should be part of improving things for our students. But the crucial step is to properly fund. Without that, the discourse—the one happening now in virtually every region of the country—is about how to serve too many children with not enough. In those conversations, there are inevitable winners and losers, and that is simply not acceptable.



Clint Johnston is the President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE), the national alliance of provincial and territorial teachers' organizations representing over 370,000 educators from coast to coast to coast, including the Ontario Teachers' Federation and its members. Follow Clint and the CTF/FCE on social media to learn more and to connect with your national teachers' organization:

Facebook: @ctffce; X: @CTFFCEpresident; Instagram: @ctfjohnston

So how, indeed, did we get here? Well, I have had the privilege of listening to, and being the voice of, teachers for a dozen years now, from the local level up to the national. I have listened to, advocated for, and lobbied on behalf of teachers for all those years—to politicians of all stripes, and I have a theory: one of the major reasons why this funding gap has been allowed to grow into the crisis it now is, and shocker, it's political.

Unarguably, education is the building block of each individual in a society and of the society itself. Each of us spends some 13 years of our lives making our way through the public K-12 education system. That's a lot of time. But educating a child, supporting their growth—mental, social, personal, physical, etc.—takes at least that long, and the results aren't immediately apparent: it is a cumulative effect from a collective effort sustained over time. And here's the crux of the problem: when it comes to the funding of education, the decision-makers have a

three or four-year term, dependent on context.

Most often, they are looking for the immediate return on their decision; it is the nature of the political system we have created. There is unequivocal and significant literature on the positive financial return that investment in education is for a government/society, but that return only comes after a decade or more in most cases.

This butts up directly against the fact that individuals in power, and their party, want results that will get them votes within a year or two. And so, when budget decisions are being made, too often education is left wanting—it is too easy to reduce and not have the consequences land on you, hard to do the right thing, and keep investment from falling behind. This, I believe, is a significant part of the answer to how we got here.

So how do we get out of here, back to where we should be? The answer is political will. We need to push every provincial and territorial decision-maker to look beyond their own horizon of an election. We need them to understand that the future of every child—those in classrooms today and those yet to come—is shaped by the 13 years we, as a nation, have promised will lead to a fair chance at a good life. We need them to see that every dollar withheld today is a child shortchanged, a child undervalued. This belief is what drives me, and everyone at the CTF/FCE, in our work each day. I know that your daily impact on students is what drives you as well—and you deserve to be fully supported in that endeavour.

Because, in the words of Gabriela Mistral,

"Many things can wait. Children cannot. Today their bones are being formed, their blood is being made, their senses are being developed. To them we cannot say 'tomorrow.' Their name is today."

**In solidarity,
Clint Johnston**