

INTERACTION

VOLUME 28, ISSUE 3 | FEBRUARY 2026

A MESSAGE FROM THE OTF PRESIDENT



Ontario's Math Proficiency Test fails the test of transparency

Ontario's Math Proficiency Test (MPT) is back, and once again teacher candidates are being told it is necessary to protect educational quality. Yet nearly a year after its reinstatement, there is still no public evidence that the test improves teaching, strengthens student learning, or serves any purpose beyond creating another bureaucratic hurdle.

Reintroduced by the Ministry of Education in May 2024 and made a certification requirement in February 2025, the MPT applies to all graduates of Ontario Faculties of Education. Since then, the test has been administered across multiple windows during the 2024–25 and 2025–26 school years. Despite this, the most basic questions about its effectiveness remain unanswered: How many candidates pass on their first attempt? How many fail? How many struggle with the math content versus the pedagogical component?

These are not academic questions. They go to the heart of whether the test is fair, valid, and fit for purpose. In April 2025, the OTF formally requested this information from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). What followed was a months-long pattern of deflection. Promises that data would be shared “in the coming weeks” never materialized. Advisory

council meetings were held, postponed, or cancelled, and when they did occur, no results were shared. Even meetings with education partners produced no transparency.

At this point, the silence speaks volumes. It has become clear that the decision to withhold information lies not with EQAO, but with the Ministry of Education itself. That should concern anyone who values accountability in publicly funded education.

Ontario's teacher candidates already complete rigorous academic programs, extended practicum placements, and ongoing assessments of both content knowledge and pedagogy. A single standardized test—administered outside of that context and shielded from scrutiny—adds no meaningful assurance of quality. Instead, it risks deterring capable educators from entering a profession already grappling with staffing shortages.

If the MPT works, the government should prove it. If it does not, it should be abandoned. Until transparent data is released, the MPT remains what it appears to be: an unnecessary, unproven barrier that does nothing to strengthen Ontario's classrooms—and plenty to undermine trust in the system that governs them.

In solidarity,



Chris Cowley, President



Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan

Pension workshops for members

Join the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan for a virtual presentation to learn about one of your most important financial assets: your pension. [Access more information.](#)

Winter/Spring 2026

Each session is about 1.5 hours with a Q&A session.

PREPARING TO RETIRE

(for members within five years of retirement)

You have been contributing to your pension throughout your career. Now that you're thinking about retiring, find out how this asset fits into your financial picture.

This interactive and informative presentation will provide you with everything you need to know about preparing for retirement, and what to expect throughout the retirement application process.

You have several dates to choose from. Each presentation will be the same, so please choose a date below and click on it to register.

Webinar: *Preparing to Retire* (1.5 hrs)

Webinars available in English:

February

Thursday, February 26, 2026 at 6 p.m.

March

Tuesday, March 3, 2026 at 5 p.m.

Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 6 p.m.

Thursday, March 26, 2026 at 6 p.m.

Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 5 p.m.

April

Thursday, April 9, 2026 at 6 p.m.

Tuesday, April 21, 2026 at 5 p.m.

May

Wednesday, May 6, 2026 at 5 p.m.

Wednesday, May 13, 2026 at 6 p.m.

Webinars available in French:

March

Tuesday, March 10, 2026 at 5 p.m.

April

Thursday, April 2, 2026 at 6 p.m.

You will receive an email from OTPP confirming your registration. You will also receive a reminder email from OTPP one day before the webinar begins.

BEING A MEMBER

(for early to mid-career members)

Consider this your Pension 101. Designed for all early to mid-career members, you'll learn how your contributions and pension are calculated, and how to maximize your pension benefit.

Each webinar will be the same. Please choose a date and click to register. (Spaces are on a first-come, first-served basis; there isn't a waitlist. Sign up today to reserve your spot.)

Webinar: *Being a Member—Your Life as a Teacher* (1.5 hrs)

March

Thursday, March 12, 2026 at 6 p.m.

April

Tuesday, April 7, 2026 at 5 p.m.

You will receive an email from OTPP confirming your registration. You will also receive a reminder email from OTPP one day before the webinar begins.



**ONTARIO
TEACHERS'**

PENSION PLAN – RÉGIME DE RETRAITE
DES ENSEIGNANTES ET DES ENSEIGNANTS

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)

Call service hours: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday

A MESSAGE FROM THE OTF SECRETARY-TREASURER



Currents and currency

In my previous *Interaction* columns, I have written about OTF's six legislated Objects and the questions that help us animate them. I have also underscored the value of deliberate curiosity and dialogue and relationship-building. In this column, I'd like to share some thoughts about the consequences of dogmatically binding ourselves to archaic strategies and structures.

Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously posited the following: *You cannot step in the same river twice*. The aphorism implies that by the second step, the water has moved on and the person has changed. When I came across this idea again recently, I was reminded of my experiences, in my later teens, when I became a white-water kayak enthusiast. The lessons I learned on rivers (and on their banks) have stuck with me.

In my kayaking training course, when we first transitioned from flat water exercises to white water adventure, the instructor pulled us all aside at the river's edge and he urged us not to let our enthusiasm get the better of us. You must learn to read the river from its banks and to chart your course before you venture into the current. Only the untrained novice, the foolhardy, the reckless and the drowned—our instructor reinforced—skip this all-important step. Moreover, he asserted, you must re-read it every time you return because the river is *never* the same twice.

I learned from experience that first year what he meant. The water level, flow rate (a raging torrent) and currents in early May had, by late July, all subsided or changed dramatically. Rocks and ledges,

that had been submerged in May, were now exposed and, consequently, many viable channels and routes were now impassable in July. And that meant developing new river-running plans and strategies.

So, what is the connection to our work at OTF. Well, here's the thing. Both Heraclitus's aphorism and my whitewater experiences testify to the fact that strategies and tactics that worked in the past are not necessarily universally applicable and feasible (in whole or in part) in the present. Often, current circumstances (context) and actors (people) are different and approaches (tactics) that were once considered "tried and true" may need to be re-evaluated and adjusted or abandoned altogether.

That's why here at OTF we do our level best to cast a critical eye at our structures, processes and plans and to contemporize them to address anticipated and emerging realities. We try to make plans and develop strategies that are sufficiently nimble and flexible to be able to pivot when the plan-on-paper hits the execution and action phase in the real world.

And doesn't that just sound remarkably like reading the river from its banks—testing from the shore—the *currency* of our approach against the reality of the river *currents*, instead of just plunging headlong into the rapids and hoping for the best?

In solidarity,

Ian S. Pettigrew, Secretary-Treasurer



MOOSE HIDE
CAMPAIGN

CAMPAGNE
MOOSE HIDE

ALIGNING WITH
ONTARIO EDUCATION
(K-12)

The Moose Hide Campaign is an Indigenous-led initiative that is grounded in Indigenous knowledge and lived experience. And part of its offerings include educational resources.

The Moose Hide Campaign believes that learning deepens over time, where concepts are revisited with increasing complexity. Content is age-appropriate and framed with trauma-informed best practices to scaffold students as they gain

agency and imagine their contributions to positive futures.

Topics addressed are as follows: **K-3:** Care, Kindness, Belonging; **4-6:** Respect, Responsibility, Community; **7-8:** Identity, Consent and Accountability; **9-10:** Equity, Systems, Citizenship and **11-12:** Leadership, Reconciliation, Action.

Find out more about the Moose Hide Campaign and access the [lesson plans](#).

OTF MEMBER PROFILE: DONNUB JAFARZADEH

OTF Affiliate: Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)

Grade(s) and subject(s) taught: K–8; 9–12
(English, Drama, History)

School: Current LTO at All Saints High School, Kanata, Ontario

School Board: Ottawa Catholic School Board

Years of teaching: Eight years

What motivated or inspired you to choose teaching as a career?

It's a bit cliché, but I wanted a career that felt meaningful—one that held space for connection, shared learning, and continuous

growth, especially for kids who need to feel seen. What better place than a classroom?

What part(s) of being a teacher give(s) you the most joy or are most rewarding?

In more behavioural schools, it's the moment students feel safe enough to learn—because learning doesn't happen until they feel safe. Music has definitely been a powerful connector for me. I'll often bring in my ukulele to play and sing together—it goes a long way. In other spaces, it's about helping students discover what lights them up and scaffolding learning around those passions in meaningful ways.

What part(s) of the job do you find the hardest?

The most challenging part, in my experience, is the classroom violence. I've been slapped, had chairs thrown at me, and even been choked (all elementary schools)—and I know I'm not alone. It just highlights the critical need for a culture shift across boards to take classroom safety and respect for educators seriously.

What has surprised you the most about being a teacher? The lack of immediate action in relation to classroom violence. The provincial government and school boards will argue that they take it seriously, and yet there has not been a decline in violence against teachers and other education workers.

What's the biggest myth or misconception people have about teaching?

"Those who can't do—teach" This profession is filled with extraordinary educators who do this job because they love it—even when it's hard.

What tip could you provide for a new teacher?

Be gentle with yourself—especially in the first couple of years! Be intentional about creating class routines that work for you. Classroom management is key and is most effective when you build rapport with your students.



pension FACT



WHY THE 50-DAY RULE MATTERS

Many retired OTF members return to the workforce as supply teachers. Some members contact us about re-employment rules, specifically the 50-Day Rule that limits the work that occasional and supply teachers can take on in retirement. It is, therefore, important to remember that the 50th day marks the line between being “retired” and being “re-employed.” If a retired member chooses to work more than 50 days, they can do so simply by pausing their pension while they do it. The 50-Day Rule threshold simply helps protect the long-term stability of the plan for present retirees and future retirees. It also helps to create opportunities for the next generation of teachers to enter the profession.

We receive emails and calls, especially when staffing challenges arise in some regions. And it’s true: retired teachers have been incredibly important in helping schools navigate tough moments. In fact, many have chosen to pause their pension so they can return to classrooms for longer than the 50-Day Rule allows.

So why not just expand the rule? Because doing so would turn the pension plan into a labour market tool, something it was not designed to be. During the pandemic, a temporary change was made to help boards cope with exceptional circumstances. That temporary measure came with a commitment, from the Ontario government, to work on long-term solutions. It must act on sustainable recommendations, and not rely on stopgap measures that delay real progress.

Relying on retirees can help in the short term, but it doesn’t address the real issue: recruitment and retention. Ontario has tens of thousands of certified teachers who aren’t currently working in schools. The focus needs to be on making working conditions better so more of them want to enter the profession and stay, until they themselves reach retirement.



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Monday to Friday

THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NATION-BUILDING



Public education. Public good.

People for Education launched an eight-city event series: *The Promise of Public Education: the role of public schools in nation-building*.

The free, open to the public, two-hour panel event series kickoff was held in Toronto on Tuesday, January 20, 2026 at George Brown Polytechnic.

The panel included OTF President Chris Cowley amongst many other panelists to discuss the role of education in preparing future-ready citizens for a resilient, productive, and sovereign Canada.

Learn more about the [Education Promise](#).

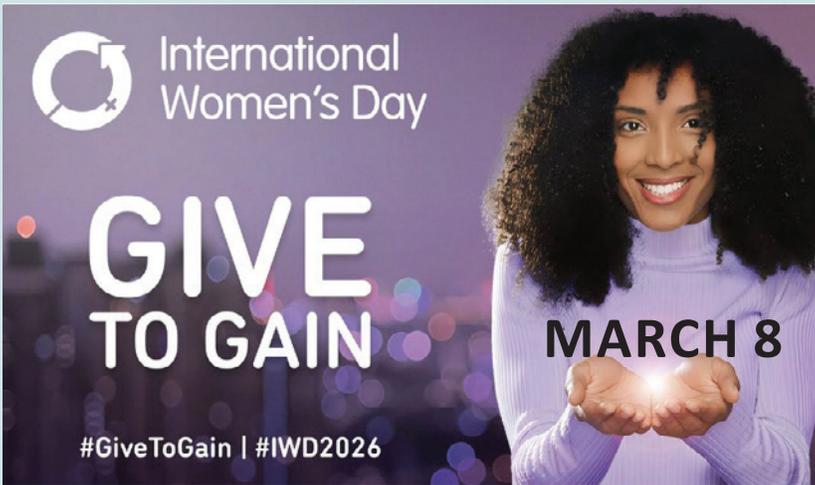


L to R: Paris Semansky, MCM—Co-Executive Director, People for Education; Mitch Davidson—VP Policy, Enterprise Canada; Noel Baldwin—ED, Future Skills Centre; Annie Kidder—Co-founder and past Executive Director, People for Education; Priya Tandon—President, Ontario Mining Association; Lauren Tedesco—COO, APMA; Andrew Parkin—Executive Director, Environics Institute for Survey Research Education; Chris Cowley—President, OTF; and Kate Blair Hagerman—Co-Executive Director, People for Education.



L to R: René Jansen in de Wal, OECTA President; Chris Cowley, OTF President and Ian S. Pettigrew, OTF Secretary-Treasurer

Photos courtesy of People for Education



Give To Gain emphasizes the power of reciprocity and support. When people, organizations, and communities give generously, opportunities and support for women increase. Giving is not a subtraction, it's intentional multiplication. When women thrive, we all rise.

Whether through donations, knowledge, resources, infrastructure, visibility, advocacy, education, training, mentoring, or time, contributing to women's advancement helps create a more supportive and interconnected world.

What will you **Give to Gain** gender equality?

Read [more](#).

When we give, we gain. Together, let's help forge gender equality through abundant giving. The IWD 2026 **Give To Gain** Campaign encourages a mindset of generosity and collaboration.



EDUCATOR LOAN FORGIVENESS IMPLEMENTATION

As of December 31, 2025, eligible teachers and early childhood educators in rural or remote areas are now able to apply for the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness (CSLF) program.

Learn more about the program's eligibility [Canada Student Loan Forgiveness](#).

Note: Presently, eligible applicants must apply by mail using the following form: [Application for Canada Student Loan Forgiveness](#). It is expected that by mid-March 2026 educators will be able to apply online.



The 2026 Susan Langley Earth Steward Teaching Award

Do you know an Ontario teacher who inspires passion for a more sustainable future?

The Susan Langley Earth Steward Teaching Award, in memory of Susan Langley, former chair of Learning for a Sustainable Future, recognizes exemplary teaching contributions to sustainability education.



\$1,000 to the winning teacher

Nomination Deadline:
May 29th

To see the selection criteria and to submit educator nominations visit:

LSF-LST.ca/earth-steward

For more info, contact alysa@LSF-LST.ca



TEACHER EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM

On February 6–7, 2026, OTF and the Affiliates held their annual co-sponsored symposium on teacher education. The event brings together the Liaison Officers who sit on the OTF Teacher Education Liaison Committees (TELCs) at the 14 Faculties of Education across the province, along with faculty members and teacher candidates from those institutions, to discuss current trends and issues in pre-service teacher education. And for the sixth consecutive year, members of the OTF Curriculum Forum, a network of some 50 subject/division associations that operate in Ontario, also participated in the program.

The theme of this year's event, ***Empowering teachers for today & tomorrow***, invited a focused and collaborative inquiry into the evolving realities of early career teachers. The attendees came together to critically examine the complex challenges beginning teachers encounter—including those related to mental health and well-being, the emergence of generative AI, and the rising incidences of violence and hatred in schools. Conversations centred on how Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs and early professional supports can best equip beginning teachers to thrive in the profession.

The symposium showcased two excellent keynote speakers, Dr. Joel Westheimer and Dr. Ann Lopez, who complemented the comprehensive agenda that also included engaging breakout presentations, facilitated by teacher educators and teachers from across the province, and an interactive Curriculum Forum Fair, facilitated by the provincial subject and division associations.

As we had hoped, this year's Symposium offered an opportunity to reflect collectively on these pressing questions and to contribute to a shared vision of what it means to empower teachers—both for the challenges of today and the possibilities of tomorrow.



Trent University Teacher Candidate Maggie Chalk introducing opening keynote speaker, Dr. Joel Westheimer



Dr. Joel Westheimer delivering opening keynote address



L to R: OTF Director, Professional Affairs, Lindy Amato; Keynote Speaker Dr. Joel Westheimer; and OTF President Chris Cowley



L to R: OTF President Chris Cowley and OTF Secretary-Treasurer Ian S. Pettigrew



L to R: OTF Curriculum Forum member James Steele; OTF Consultants Mohini Athia and Randa Meshki

Get more details about this year's [symposium](#).



GOVERNOR GENERAL'S HISTORY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

The Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching was created in 1996 to recognize innovative and impactful approaches to teaching Canadian history. The award places a spotlight on teachers that foster a deep understanding of the past and actively engage students in historical work through meaningful projects and initiatives.

Teachers working directly with students in a K–12 classroom setting are invited to submit their best history project for consideration of the award. Projects can take place as part of any subject, as long as there is a significant component of Canadian history.

Two of the 2025 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in teaching recipients are OTF members:

- **Ian Duncan**
Garth Webb Secondary School
Oakville, Ontario
- **Heather Howell**
M.M. Robinson High School
Burlington, Ontario

Apply for the 2026 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Teaching.



Nominations ARE OPEN and will close on March 31, 2026.



Visit teachingawards.ca

2026



Nominations ARE OPEN and will close on March 31, 2026

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



Exemplary
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Explore free or low-cost,
peer-reviewed,
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classroom resources.

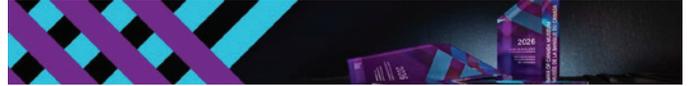


R4R

Resources for
Rethinking

Visit: resources4rethinking.ca

BANK OF CANADA MUSEUM'S AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING ECONOMICS



The Bank of Canada Museum's Award for Excellence in Teaching Economics recognizes outstanding economics educators. We want to inspire teachers to bring economic concepts into the classroom in new and creative ways.

In addition to the award, the winning teachers will each receive:

- a personal cash prize of \$1,000
- a cash prize of \$1,000 for their school
- a gift basket of resources and supplies for their class

Eligibility criteria

To be considered for the award, nominees must:

- be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident teaching in Canada
- be a certified teacher working full- or part-time at a Canadian school in the 2025 to 2026 school year
- have taught (or be teaching) students in Grades 6 to 12 (or Grade 6 to Secondary 5 in Quebec)
- have taught an economic concept to one of the grade levels listed above, in either the current or previous school year

You can nominate any teacher you can vouch for personally—whether you are a colleague, administrator, parent, or past or present student. You can also nominate yourself.

Your nomination must outline a specific project, activity or lesson plan that explored an economic concept. You must also provide evidence of the following award criteria:

- **innovation or creativity** in teaching using instructional strategies and resources used
- the **impact on the students' understanding** of the economy and economic literacy
- the **connection** between the lesson or activity and broader economic concepts in personal, local, regional, national or international contexts

You must submit your nomination no later than **11:59 p.m. (ET) on March 1, 2026**. Late entries will not be considered.

[Submit a nomination](#)

