

INTERACTION

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A MESSAGE FROM THE OTF PRESIDENT



Setting the table for publicly funded education

It is a privilege to write my first column as OTF President. I begin with confidence in what Ontario's teachers can accomplish together.

Of late, the news is awash with talk of collective bargaining and that arena is the exclusive purview of OTF's four Affiliates; it does not reside within OTF's legislated mandate. That distinction matters. OTF's role is to help set the table: advocating for research-based and experience-informed policies, coordinating joint work where appropriate and useful, and amplifying the voice of the profession and its members adding a provincial lens. OTF, as the umbrella Federation, is strongest not when four Affiliates become the same, but when four distinct voices of the Affiliates find a common note.

That note includes a call for reinvestment in publicly funded education. Ontario's publicly funded education system is being starved. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives calculates that, since 2018–2019, funding has fallen \$6.5 billion behind inflation and enrolment growth.

Public education is not a tap. The government cannot trickle funding to the system for years, and expect magical results to appear. It takes time to fill the tub: to recruit and retain teachers, rebuild supports, restore programs, and create the conditions where students thrive. Yet it can be drained quickly. An educated society is the warm water in which we all live; when the system is starved, that water cools.

Privatization rarely arrives carrying a sign. It may appear as a platform or procurement choice. The new \$750 classroom supplies program is a prime example. A restricted, Staples-operated portal, where our members have identified higher prices, cannot replace adequate, predictable systemic funding. It is a procurement announcement, not a system plan. UNESCO warns that poorly regulated private education can widen the divide between rich and poor. A strong publicly funded education system does the opposite; it closes gaps and raises us all up. Excellent education cannot be reserved for those who can afford it; it must be accessible to all.

The long view is required in teacher education. Moving to a 12-month program may reduce barriers, but quality preparation and meaningful practicum experience must remain central fixtures of the program. The provision for transitional certificates, which licenses candidates before completing their professional preparation, should end.

OTF will continue to support its members, and defend publicly funded education, something we have done since 1944.

Yours in education,

Nathan

Nathan Core, President

