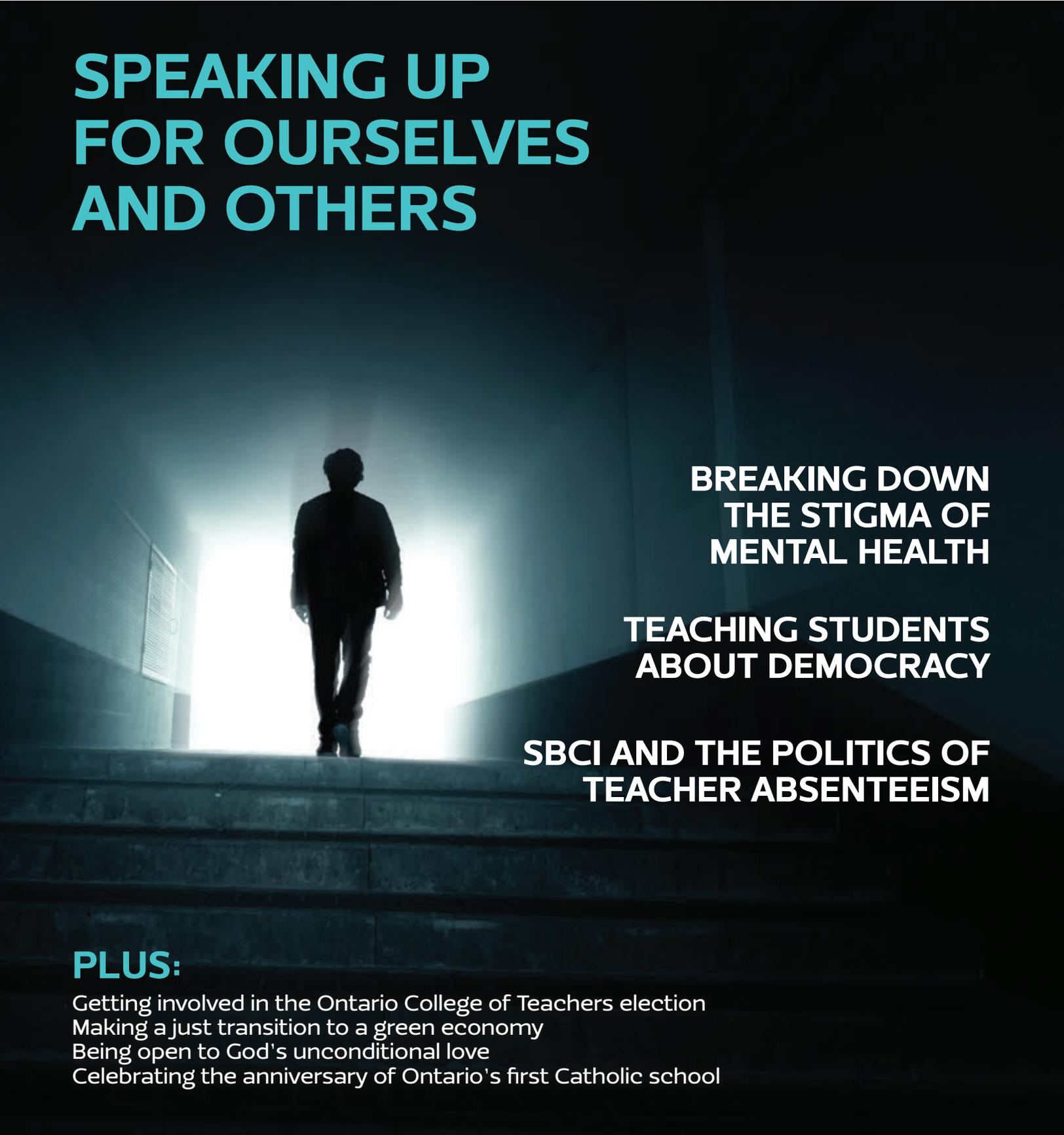


FEBRUARY 2018 ISSUE

# Catholic Teacher

MAGAZINE of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

## SPEAKING UP FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS



**BREAKING DOWN  
THE STIGMA OF  
MENTAL HEALTH**

**TEACHING STUDENTS  
ABOUT DEMOCRACY**

**SBCI AND THE POLITICS OF  
TEACHER ABSENTEEISM**

### **PLUS:**

Getting involved in the Ontario College of Teachers election  
Making a just transition to a green economy  
Being open to God's unconditional love  
Celebrating the anniversary of Ontario's first Catholic school

Order one to fit  
your needs and

**ENJOY!**



# AQ COURSES



MENU



ONTARIO ENGLISH  
**Catholic**  
Teachers  
ASSOCIATION

## Spring 2018

Registration Opens  
DECEMBER 5, 2017

Registration Closes  
MARCH 16

Courses Start  
APRIL 3

Courses End  
JUNE 15



## Summer 2018

Registration Opens  
APRIL 6

Registration Closes  
JUNE 1

Courses Start  
JULY 3

Courses End  
JULY 27



## Fall 2018

Registration Opens  
JUNE 12

Registration Closes  
SEPTEMBER 11

Courses Start  
SEPTEMBER 24

Courses End  
DECEMBER 14



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**SUBSIDIES**

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Math, Kindergarten and  
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WHO TAKES AN OECTA AQ SPECIALIST  
IN AN INSTRUCTIONAL COURSE, THAT IS  
NOT SUBSIDIZED.

**CLOSING**  
**DATES**  
WILL BE  
EXTENDED  
IF SPACES  
ARE STILL  
**AVAILABLE**

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT  
CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION

FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

GUIDANCE AND CAREER EDUCATION

INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION AND  
COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY IN  
INSTRUCTION

KINDERGARTEN

MATHEMATICS

READING

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

SPECIAL EDUCATION

STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

TEACHER LIBRARIAN

TEACHING COMBINED GRADES

TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

TEACHING STUDENTS WITH  
COMMUNICATIONS NEEDS (A.S.D.)

TEACHING STUDENTS WITH  
COMMUNICATIONS NEEDS (L.D.)

Part I, II and Specialist available

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[catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca)  
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# CONTENTS/FEB2018



## INBOX

- 4 PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
- 5 UP FRONT
- 6 CALENDAR/INDEX
- 7 EVENTS

## FEATURES

- 9 ED AID FUND SUPPORTS SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK IN GUATEMALA THROUGH WELLS OF HOPE  
**By Jason Arsenaault**
- 10 I FIGHT SO THAT STIGMA LOSES  
**By Chris Nihmey**
- 12 TOWARD A FAIRER ONTARIO  
Catholic teachers provide input on the 2018–19 Ontario provincial budget  
**By Mark Tagliaferri**
- 14 THE BIG BISHOP AND THE SEEDS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN ONTARIO  
**By Robert Smol**
- 17 HOW A MOCK ELECTION TEACHES STUDENTS ABOUT DEMOCRACY  
**By Michelle Newton**

## TEACHERS AID

- 19 TEACHER ADVISOR  
What you need to know about your long-term disability coverage  
**By Mary Lachapelle**
- 21 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
Student mental health and well-being resources for teachers to support students  
**By Belinda Russo**
- 23 CATHOLIC CONNECTION  
Being open to God's unconditional love  
**By Shannon Hogan**
- 24 LEGAL BRIEF  
New law widens benefit entitlement for work-related chronic mental stress  
**By Charlene Theodore**
- 25 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  
OECTA continues to lead professional learning for Kindergarten teams  
**By Claire Laughlin with Kyle Gleason and Katie Smyth**

## VIEWPOINT

- 27 THE FALLACY OF INNOVATION  
**By Anthony Carabache**
- 28 MAKING IT EASY TO BE GREEN  
A just transition for workers is essential for a fair, prosperous, and sustainable economy  
**By Adam Lemieux**
- 30 FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH  
A balancing act  
**By Gian Marcon**
- 32 THE ABSENCE (OF) DATA  
School Boards' Co-operative Inc. and the politics of teacher absenteeism  
**By Mark Tagliaferri**
- 34 MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION  
How to get involved in the 2018 OCT Governing Council election  
**By Peter MacDonald**

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



I hope you all enjoyed the holiday season, and have returned to school with renewed energy and purpose. The turning of the calendar year is an exciting time for teachers, as we see our classroom communities coming together and our students making real progress.

As everyone gets back to business, your Association is continuing to push for concrete solutions to address violence in the classroom, including better reporting procedures, appropriate programs, and more professional supports. Toward the end of last year, I had a number of opportunities to appear on local and national media to draw attention to the issue and discuss the solutions being recommended by the Association. I am hopeful that as the public becomes more aware of the problem, and we approach a provincial election in the spring, we will begin to see more significant action and investments.

We are also dealing with new issues. For example, as we travel the province, members of the Provincial Executive are increasingly hearing about the shortage of occasional teacher replacements for teacher absences. There are a number of possible explanations, which may vary from case to case, but it seems likely that the problem is at least partly related to the many new initiatives, reviews, and consultations coming out of the Ministry of Education. I will continue to raise this issue with the newly appointed Minister of Education, Indira Naidoo-Harris, and to encourage a more streamlined approach.

One thing is for sure: this Association steadfastly rejects any suggestion that teachers are abusing sick leave. This charge was heard most recently from the Auditor General of Ontario, in her 2017 annual report. Unfortunately, the Auditor was relying on data from a shadowy organization known as School Boards' Co-operative Inc. (SBCI). As you will read later in this magazine, SBCI is a business entity run by school boards, which profits by spreading the idea of widespread teacher absenteeism and then offering the solution, in the form of attendance management programs. There are serious questions about the credibility of SBCI's data, which might explain why they are so reluctant to share their detailed findings with the Association or the government. These attacks also ignore the many legitimate reasons why teachers should use our collectively bargained sick leave rights, for the well-being of ourselves and our students.

On a more positive note, many Catholic teachers are finding that a new calendar year is an excellent time to dive into some professional development. The Association has a number of opportunities in full swing, including the return of our PD Networks and the continuation of our popular WebExperiences. Registration is also open for the spring session of our Additional Qualification courses. These are just a few of the ways that your union is here to help you in your professional and personal life. I encourage everyone to learn more by speaking to the Association representative in your school, contacting your local unit president, or checking out our website at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca).

As we work to take care of one another, Catholic teachers are also as committed as ever to advocating for the rights of all workers. We were thrilled to see the government pass the *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act*, which raises wages and employment standards for millions of Ontarians. The new laws are the result of years of solidarity and activism among the labour movement and other worker-advocates. Sadly, we are seeing significant pushback from the business community, including punitive measures being taken against employees. This means that we will need to remain vigilant in exposing employer abuses, and in fighting for further improvements to the legislation.

Finally, we are fast approaching our Annual General Meeting (AGM), where hundreds of delegates will come together to share their ideas and govern the business of the Association. Last year, delegates navigated through some difficult issues, ensuring the organization's financial stability and approving a much needed reform of our provincial committee structure. These actions have enabled the Provincial Executive to undertake important long-term planning, including new programs that will prepare us for the next round of collective bargaining and beyond. AGM is the ultimate example of Catholic teachers working together to enhance the common good. I am confident that in 2018, we will continue co-operating and collaborating to serve the interests of our colleagues, students, schools, and communities.

ONTARIO ENGLISH  
**Catholic Teachers**  
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# UP FRONT



## TAKE AN AQ COURSE THIS SPRING

Registration for OECTA's spring AQ session is now open! Register by **March 16** for courses that run from **April 3 to June 15**. Check out the full AQ course menu on the inside cover of this publication, or visit the AQ section at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca).

A discount of \$200 is now available for anyone who takes an AQ specialist (excluding Religious Ed). As well, a limited number of \$450 subsidies are available for all math, Kindergarten, and information technology (ICT) courses.



## DESIGN THE OECTA CHRISTMAS CARD

Do you have an artistic side? The Association is looking for season-themed art to use on our 2018 Christmas card. The winning entry will grace the cover of *Catholic Teacher* next December and be the official card sent out by the Association to stakeholders.

Submit an original, two-dimensional piece of finished art (photograph, sketch, collage, or painting) to OECTA's Communications department by **April 1**. Entries can be received in hard copy or digitally (at least 300dpi). Send your submission to: OECTA, 65 St. Clair Avenue East, Suite 400, Toronto, M4T 2Y8, attention: Communications Department, or by email to [a.anezryis@oecta.on.ca](mailto:a.anezryis@oecta.on.ca). Please remember to include your unit and contact information.



## ACKNOWLEDGE A GREAT TEACHER

Do you know an outstanding teacher? Why not nominate them for an OTIP/OTF Teaching award? These awards recognize teachers who inspire students, colleagues, and parents in Ontario's publicly funded education system. Anyone can nominate a teacher in one of three categories: elementary, secondary, or a beginning teacher. Winners receive \$1,000 and a Certificate of Recognition both for themselves and their schools. Nominations close **March 31**. Visit [teachingawards.ca](http://teachingawards.ca) for more information.



## JOIN A PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE

OECTA standing committees provide opportunities for teachers to contribute their expertise and creativity, and to develop new interests, while serving the needs of Association members. Applications for membership on 2018-19 committees will be accepted online at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca) from **March 1 to May 1**. Committee appointments are made by the Provincial Executive and take effect July 1. For a full list of committees, their mandates, and members, visit the Leadership Opportunities section, under For Your Career, at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca).



## RECOGNIZE YOUR SCHOOL

The Catholic Education Foundation of Ontario (CEFO) recognizes the outstanding work of Ontario's Catholic elementary and secondary schools through two awards.

The **Michael Monk Award** honours a Catholic elementary or secondary school that has led the way by implementing exemplary innovative program(s) to improve the learning of their students. The award is \$4,000 and is jointly funded by CEFO and OECTA.

The **Michael Carty Award** provides grants of up to \$2,000 to Catholic elementary or secondary schools, to support initiatives that improve, develop, and enhance aspects of Catholic education that contribute to the whole person.

Applications for each award are due **April 3**. Additional information, including application forms, can be found at [cefontoario.ca](http://cefontoario.ca).



## AGM 2018 – RESOLUTIONS & NOMINATIONS BOOKLET NOW AVAILABLE

OECTA's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place March 10 to 12 at the Westin Harbour Castle hotel in Toronto. OECTA members from across the province assemble for three days to discuss, debate, and vote on changes to the by-laws, policies, and procedures that govern the Association. The AGM will also elect the Provincial Executive for 2018-19.

The *Resolutions and Nominations* booklet is available in the Members' Area of the website. This booklet includes all proposed policy, procedure, and by-law changes to be debated at this year's AGM, as well as the profiles of declared candidates running for positions on the Provincial Executive for 2018-19.

Contact your local unit office to find out how you can provide input regarding the AGM resolutions. News and updates can be found throughout the AGM at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca), on Twitter @OECTAProv, or on the OECTA Facebook page.



## JOIN GIVE IT UP FOR THE EARTH!

Many Christians mark Lent by "giving up" a bad habit or distracting practice. This symbolic sacrifice provides space to reflect on, and renew our commitment to God. Why not focus your Lenten fast on preserving creation? Citizens for Public Justice invites you to Give it up for the Earth! from **February 14 to March 29**. Give it up for the Earth! 2018 will signal to the government that we are making changes in our lives to reduce our personal and household greenhouse gas emissions. For more information visit <http://bit.ly/2DYnum7>.

## INDEX

### CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY IN ONTARIO

By Adam Lemieux

Campaign 2000, a cross-Canada network of anti-poverty organizations that the Association is proud to support, was formed almost 30 years ago to raise awareness about the 1989 all-party House of Commons resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. In November, the group released its 2017 national and provincial reports on child and family poverty.

Since Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy was introduced in 2008, government investments have made a significant impact on reducing child poverty. This should be cause for celebration, but also motivation to continue implementing the necessary policies to achieve Campaign 2000's original goal: ending child and family poverty for good. In the Association's brief to the Minister of Finance on the upcoming provincial budget, we have echoed Campaign 2000's call for significant increases to social assistance rates, including Ontario Works, the Ontario Disability Support Program, and the Ontario Child Benefit. We have also recommended further investments in affordable housing.

Below are some key statistics cited in Campaign 2000's report on child and family poverty in Ontario. The report can be found online at [campaign2000.ca](http://campaign2000.ca).

<b>20.1%</b>	➤ Poverty rate for children under age 18, 2008
<b>17.2%</b>	➤ Poverty rate for children under age 18, 2015
<b>29.1%</b>	➤ Poverty rate for children under age 18, before taxes and government transfers, 2015
<b>15.7%</b>	➤ Poverty rate for families with children, 2008
<b>13.4%</b>	➤ Poverty rate for families with children, 2015
<b>83.9%</b>	➤ Percentage of lone-parent families headed by women, 2015
<b>\$60,700</b>	➤ Male lone-parent median income, 2015
<b>\$42,150</b>	➤ Female lone-parent median income, 2015
<b>28.7%</b>	➤ Poverty rate for lone-parent families, 2015
<b>29.5%</b>	➤ Poverty rate for Indigenous children in Ontario, 2016
<b>49.1%</b>	➤ Poverty rate for racialized children, 2016
<b>\$4,886</b>	➤ Poverty gap for a single parent, with one child, on Ontario Works, 2017
<b>\$6,656</b>	➤ Poverty gap for a couple, with two children, on Ontario Works, 2017
<b>23%</b>	➤ Percentage of families with children spending more than 30% of their income on housing, 2016
<b>36%</b>	➤ Percentage of lone-parent families spending more than 30% of their income on housing, 2016

FEBRUARY

- BLACK HISTORY MONTH
- 20 Unit deadline for Young Authors Award entries
- 20 World Day of Social Justice
- 28 Pink Shirt Day

MARCH

- 1 Applications open for provincial committees
- 8 International Women's Day
- 10-12 Annual General Meeting
- 16 Spring AQ registration closes
- 19 Provincial level deadline for Young Authors Award entries
- 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 25 Earth Hour (8:30 – 9:30 p.m.)
- 30 Good Friday

APRIL

- 1 Scholarships & Fellowships application deadline
- 2 Easter Monday
- 3 Spring AQ courses start
- 22 Earth Day
- 28 Day of Mourning
- 28 World Day for Safety and Health at Work

MAY

- 1 Bursaries application deadline
- 1 Provincial committee application deadline

# EVENTS

## OECTA'S AQ INSTRUCTORS GET THEIR OWN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Just as it is important for Catholic teachers to review, upgrade, or expand their knowledge and skills, so too it is important for instructors of Additional Qualification (AQ) courses to engage in professional learning. This is why, on December 7 and 8, 2017, the Association hosted its first AQ Instructor Professional Learning Symposium. Attended by almost 80 Catholic teacher instructors, the symposium provided a dynamic and engaging learning opportunity.

Participants learned about the new online platform to which AQ courses will be transitioning in the spring. The symposium concluded with participants providing insights on how OECTA AQ courses could further develop, and how OECTA can help reach those objectives.

OECTA's AQ instructors are members with specialized qualifications and extensive teaching experience. Our AQ courses are delivered by members, for members. AQ courses are continually reviewed, renewed, and updated to ensure that participants are getting the most recent and relevant information possible.



## OECTA WELCOMES NEW MINISTER OF EDUCATION

On January 17, Premier Kathleen Wynne announced a cabinet shuffle. As part of the shuffle, the Premier appointed Indira Naidoo-Harris as Minister of Education, taking over from Mitzie Hunter. Minister Naidoo-Harris was originally elected in 2014, and previously served as Minister of Women's Issues and Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care (she will retain the latter portfolio). The Association welcomes Minister Naidoo-Harris, and looks forward to working with her.

## OCT FEE INCREASE MOTION DEFEATED

On December 7, the Governing Council of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) met to vote on a proposed \$28 increase to the annual College membership fee. This would have represented a 48 per cent increase since 2012.

At the meeting, Ontario Teachers' Federation President and OECTA Provincial Executive member Chris Cowley delivered a presentation, encouraging council members to defeat the proposal. During his comments, Cowley expressed that many Ontario teachers opposed an increase, citing several polls with overwhelming disapproval of the motion. Cowley also noted that the rationale for the proposed increase, which was to pay off the mortgage on the College's office building, was wrongheaded and unfairly asked teachers to shoulder the costs of OCT's expensive real estate investments. Finally, Cowley argued that the proposed increase ran counter to the College's strategic priority to "engage members."

After vigorous debate, the OCT Governing Council voted to defeat the motion.



# EVENTS

## ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR CONVENTION 2017

When the Association first began attending the OFL convention two decades ago, we brought only a few delegates. In 2017, as we continue to enhance our relationships with other unions and take an active role in promoting the common good, a 111-person delegation represented Catholic teachers at the biennial meeting of Ontario's labour movement.

The OFL has made great progress over the past two years, thanks in no small part to the work of President Chris Buckley, Secretary-Treasurer Patty Coates, and Executive Vice-President Ahmad Gaied. The Association enthusiastically endorsed them for re-election, and all three were returned to their positions.

The rest of the week was an opportunity for workers to affirm our values and offer solidarity with one another. Guest speakers included: Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the Federal New Democratic Party; Hassan Yussuff, President of the Canadian Labour Congress; Farrah Khan, Manager of the Office of Sexual Violence Support and Education at Ryerson University; and Stephen Lewis, former Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations. There were also panel discussions and debate on resolutions related to young workers, human rights, women's issues, health and safety, and green jobs. As usual, Catholic teachers were active at the microphones, offering our unique perspectives on resolutions dealing with child care, pay equity, mental health, and violence against teachers.

Although there was some heated debate about the proposed strategy for the OFL entering into this spring's provincial election, delegates eventually endorsed a comprehensive *Action Plan* for Ontario's labour movement for the next two years. We will look to build on recent success, including the *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act*. The legislation, which raises wages and employment standards for millions of workers across the province, was officially passed in the Ontario legislature during the week of the convention, providing ample cause for pride and celebration.



## RENEWING THE PROMISE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

In November, the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) convened a symposium for members of the Catholic education community. Called "Renewing the Promise," the event brought together teachers, administrators, trustees, parents, and clergy to discuss contemporary issues in Catholic education and build consensus on shared goals for the future. Over the course of two days, participants took in presentations and joined in small group discussions.

Catholic teachers were represented at the symposium by President Liz Stuart and other members of the Provincial Executive, as well as a number of local unit presidents. They engaged in discussions around some crucial issues in Catholic teaching, including human dignity, the common good, solidarity, and social justice. They also considered how all members of the Catholic school community can continue to work together to promote the value of publicly funded Catholic education to the government and broader public. Naturally, there was not always perfect agreement; however, everyone appreciated the opportunity to think deeply about the role that Catholic educators play in the home, school, and church.

## CATHOLIC TEACHERS SUPPORT TIM HORTONS WORKERS

In early January, owners of several Tim Hortons locations in Ontario reacted to the increase in minimum wage by cutting employees' paid breaks and reducing health benefit coverage. Media attention initially focused on a franchise in Coburg, owned by Ron Joyce Jr. and Jeri Lynn Horton-Joyce, the millionaire children of Tims' co-founders.

Since the news broke, labour organizations and citizens from across Ontario have come together to stand up for workers' rights and to demand that Tim Hortons' parent company, Restaurant Brands International Inc. (RBI), order its franchises to stop punitive actions against workers. On January 10, thousands of people attended protests at Tim Hortons locations across Ontario. This was followed by a National Day of Action on January 19.

The Association has been an active voice throughout, with Catholic teachers attending protests across Ontario, and President Liz Stuart sending a letter to RBI to demand that workers have their rights reinstated.

While we must maintain pressure on RBI, the Ontario Federation of Labour has asked that we do not boycott Tim Hortons products outright, as this would further hurt workers. Make your voice heard by tweeting using the hashtag #Istandwithtimhortonsworkers, and by signing an online petition, found at <http://bit.ly/2B0oHTy>.

# ED AID FUND SUPPORTS SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK IN GUATEMALA THROUGH WELLS OF HOPE

By Jason Arsenault

For the past nine years, St. Marcellinus Secondary School in Dufferin-Peel has worked in partnership with the Wells of Hope charity to bring water to the poor mountain region of Jalapa, Guatemala. Every March, St. Marcellinus sends a group of eager students and teachers on a social justice trip.

Wells of Hope's mission is to provide clean drinking water to the Indigenous population that lives in the mountains surrounding Jalapa. The founder of Wells of Hope, Ted van der Zalm, truly believes that God sends people to answer other people's prayers. Since hearing that call 14 years ago, the van der Zalm family has spent half of each year in Guatemala. (A profile of the van der Zalm family can be found in the December 2014 issue of @OECTA. See the archives in the For Your Benefit section at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca).)

For many years, the people living in the Jalapa Mountains had no access to clean drinking water, as drilling in the region is incredibly difficult and expensive due to the terrain. In Ontario's Niagara region, for example, a well can yield water at just fifty feet, while in Jalapa, the wells must be drilled deep through the mountains, to depths of a thousand feet or more. This process is incredibly costly and time consuming, which has deterred both private enterprise and the Guatemalan government, leaving the people in the region to walk great distances to sand-bagged reservoirs in the valleys. These sources are often contaminated from farming and the waste of grazing animals. Prior to Wells of Hope's intervention in the region, approximately one in five children under the age of five would become gravely ill or die due to contamination. Wells of Hope has worked to provide thousands of people in multiple villages with clean drinking water – something the organization and St. Marcellinus believe to be a human right.

St. Marcellinus learned of Wells of Hope's work 10 years ago and began sending groups to support the cause. St. Marcellinus does not participate in the drilling work, as that is done with heavy machinery, but rather contributes to building up the infrastructure in the communities where the wells are dug. Projects over the years included building homes for homeless villagers, building and beautifying schools, and building bridges over small gorges to allow students to safely walk to those schools. In recent years, these projects have been supported by OECTA through the Educational Aid Fund, which allows for even more to be done for our brothers and sisters in the region.

The relationship with Wells of Hope has not only strengthened the community in Guatemala, but also has become an important part of the fabric of the St. Marcellinus community at home in Mississauga. Through the years, St. Marcellinus has sent more than 20 different staff members and more than 80 students.



Fundraising for Wells of Hope has also become a staple at St. Marcellinus. The support of OECTA is greatly appreciated by the staff at St. Marcellinus and, more importantly, the people of Jalapa, as it has helped to get more people in appropriate housing and allowed more children to go to school.

Our support for causes like this are a true testament to our Catholic values. It allows our staff and students to be the hands and feet of God, answering the call of our most vulnerable in a distant part of our world. Though it is volunteer work – and it is hard work – the volunteers gain more out of the experience than they could ever put in. Volunteers are given incredible perspective and can truly bear witness to the struggles of life for some of our brothers and sisters. Seeing the smiles on the faces of children and adults alike, the line between want and need is drawn much clearer, allowing volunteers to experience one of Jesus' most important teachings: to truly love your neighbour as yourself.

If you have a project you would like to consider for an Educational Aid grant, visit the Educational Aid Grant Program page at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca), under Leadership Opportunities, in the For Your Career section. For more information on Wells of Hope, to donate, or to get involved, please visit [wellssofhope.com](http://wellssofhope.com).

*Jason Arsenault is a Student Success teacher at St. Marcellinus Secondary School with the Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit.*



# I FIGHT SO THAT STIGMA LOSES

By Chris Nihmey

**T**here are two sides to every story, two sides to every life. My life is no different. What makes my story unique is the life I hid for a decade – a life that stole away my confidence, my well-being, my strong character, and my hope for living. This is my story and, like all stories, it has two sides.

Coming out of university in 1997, I had it all. A multitude of accomplishments recognized me as a leader, a champion, a major “success.” I had all the accolades in my final year: President of Kinesiology at Western University, Dean’s list, two scholarships, Student of the Year, and acceptance into teacher’s college. I had the looks, the girlfriend, the talents, the skills and, most importantly, the smile. Oh, the smile. My saving grace. It would continue to protect me from any judgment or prejudice. Self-judgment and self-sabotage were destructive enough.

## I became a pro at masking my feelings

In 1998, hired as a permanent teacher, my future was golden. But the daylight would fade and darkness would soon emerge. I was Superman to those kids, swooping in to protect, to console, to educate, to heal. Flying this way and that, I was not sure where the abundance of energy was coming from, but it felt great and I never questioned it. Others chalked it up to my need for success and my dynamic, outgoing personality. I reminisced about these feelings on and off through late high school and university – exhilarating at times, but very dangerous. When the “off” button was pushed, my thoughts were incredibly awful. I became a pro at masking my feelings in depressing times.

Alongside my fake smile, the word “fine” became a shield. Negative thoughts led me to lock my bedroom or dorm room to avoid contact. In my profession, it led me to a locked staff washroom, where silence saved me. I refused to face staff who would see me as weak or less-than. Not one staff member knew what hid behind that door as I lay on the floor, week after week in the dark for 40 minutes, fighting for the strength to survive. It was excruciating, but it was necessary. The 12:15 bell is still imprinted in my mind and it may never vanish. This period led me to question my own existence. How I could go on? In those times, I fully realized that suicide is never a choice. Sickness makes this decision. No one wants to die.

## My flame of hope diminished to a dying ember

The year was 2000. We never saw “it” coming. Resigning abruptly from a permanent position (unheard of), a new adventure commenced. How could you ever foresee something so amazing, thrilling, outrageous? The highs of euphoria, uncontrollable talking, incessant praying and singing, preaching, to spending thousands of dollars I did not have. Self-labelled as chosen by God, to the complete conviction that I was Jesus Himself. Could anyone feel higher? But the higher thou goes up, the further thou shalt fall.

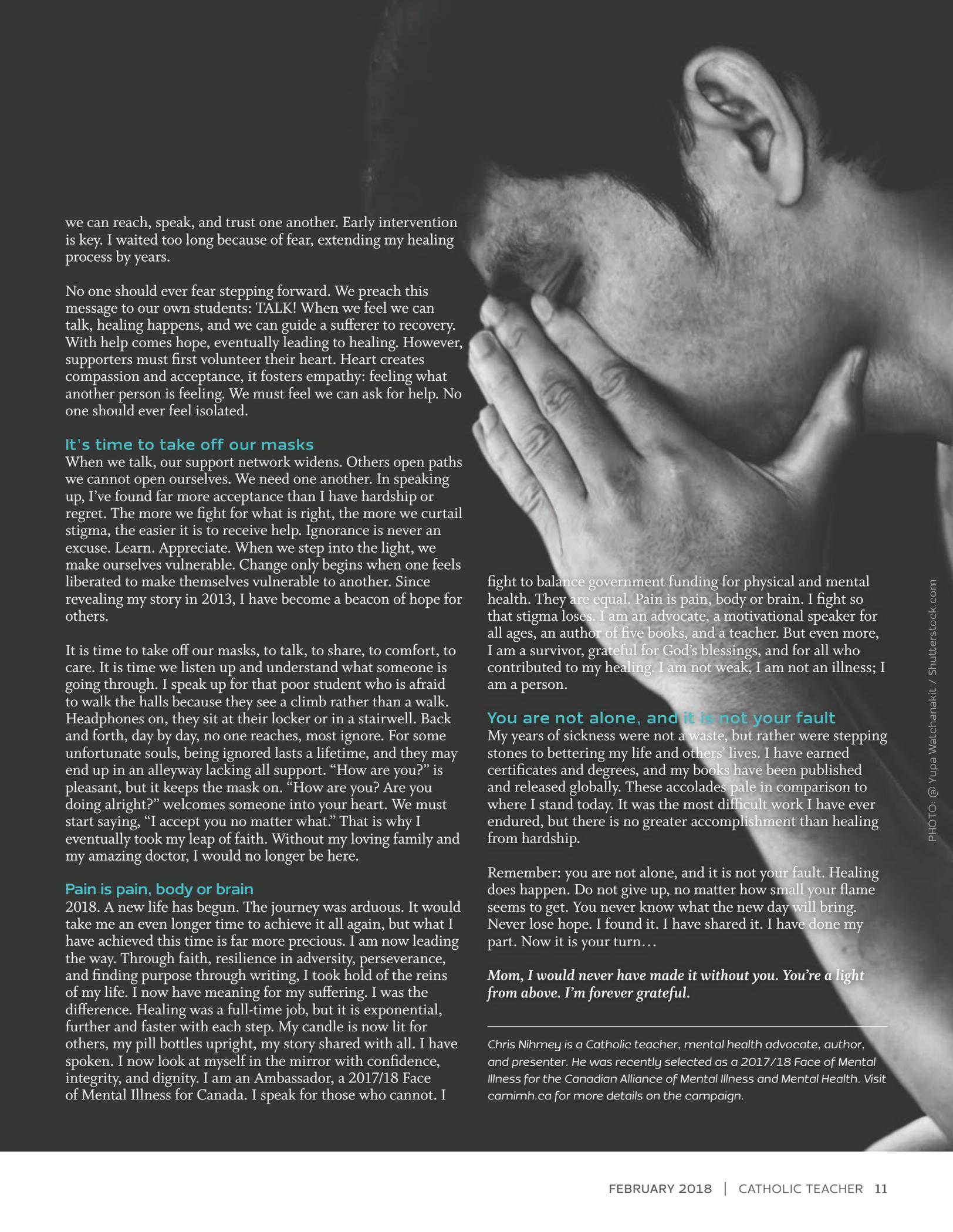
July, 2001. I lost myself. Unexpectedly, in mid-air, my cape was ripped away. I landed hard onto a mattress in the darkness of my parents’ basement. For two months, I hid under my cape, moaning, groaning, yelling, screaming, looking for answers I would never find.

“You have Bipolar Disorder.” The vibrant life I once knew was replaced with utter darkness, nothingness. My flame of hope diminished to a dying ember.

## It all began with opening my mouth and talking

A new life emerged, a decade’s worth: doctors, intense therapy, pill bottles, anger, frustration, dark depressions, angry highs, extreme anxiety, irrational rituals, fears, and consistent failure. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Generalized Anxiety joined my resume, and combined the trio left me lost and bewildered. Acceptance was step one. I did not know it would take so long to accept my ugly self. Trying to find a balanced faith life, multitudes of therapies, strategies, medication, unmotivated exercise, and life changes would lead the way as I tried to regain my sanity. The hill was steep, the road treacherous, and recovery miles and miles away. But it all began with opening my mouth and talking. Finally, I would take one blind step into the light.

At schools all over the world, students, teachers, colleagues, and administrators are struggling, living behind facades to avoid being labelled “weak” or a “failure.” I know it. I lived it. I did not know where to turn in a profession and society riddled with stigma. Times are changing, but we have a ways to go. It is essential we open up avenues of conversation for employees, in any profession, right now. Help will not come unless we feel



we can reach, speak, and trust one another. Early intervention is key. I waited too long because of fear, extending my healing process by years.

No one should ever fear stepping forward. We preach this message to our own students: TALK! When we feel we can talk, healing happens, and we can guide a sufferer to recovery. With help comes hope, eventually leading to healing. However, supporters must first volunteer their heart. Heart creates compassion and acceptance, it fosters empathy: feeling what another person is feeling. We must feel we can ask for help. No one should ever feel isolated.

### It's time to take off our masks

When we talk, our support network widens. Others open paths we cannot open ourselves. We need one another. In speaking up, I've found far more acceptance than I have hardship or regret. The more we fight for what is right, the more we curtail stigma, the easier it is to receive help. Ignorance is never an excuse. Learn. Appreciate. When we step into the light, we make ourselves vulnerable. Change only begins when one feels liberated to make themselves vulnerable to another. Since revealing my story in 2013, I have become a beacon of hope for others.

It is time to take off our masks, to talk, to share, to comfort, to care. It is time we listen up and understand what someone is going through. I speak up for that poor student who is afraid to walk the halls because they see a climb rather than a walk. Headphones on, they sit at their locker or in a stairwell. Back and forth, day by day, no one reaches, most ignore. For some unfortunate souls, being ignored lasts a lifetime, and they may end up in an alleyway lacking all support. "How are you?" is pleasant, but it keeps the mask on. "How are you? Are you doing alright?" welcomes someone into your heart. We must start saying, "I accept you no matter what." That is why I eventually took my leap of faith. Without my loving family and my amazing doctor, I would no longer be here.

### Pain is pain, body or brain

2018. A new life has begun. The journey was arduous. It would take me an even longer time to achieve it all again, but what I have achieved this time is far more precious. I am now leading the way. Through faith, resilience in adversity, perseverance, and finding purpose through writing, I took hold of the reins of my life. I now have meaning for my suffering. I was the difference. Healing was a full-time job, but it is exponential, further and faster with each step. My candle is now lit for others, my pill bottles upright, my story shared with all. I have spoken. I now look at myself in the mirror with confidence, integrity, and dignity. I am an Ambassador, a 2017/18 Face of Mental Illness for Canada. I speak for those who cannot. I

fight to balance government funding for physical and mental health. They are equal. Pain is pain, body or brain. I fight so that stigma loses. I am an advocate, a motivational speaker for all ages, an author of five books, and a teacher. But even more, I am a survivor, grateful for God's blessings, and for all who contributed to my healing. I am not weak, I am not an illness; I am a person.

### You are not alone, and it is not your fault

My years of sickness were not a waste, but rather were stepping stones to bettering my life and others' lives. I have earned certificates and degrees, and my books have been published and released globally. These accolades pale in comparison to where I stand today. It was the most difficult work I have ever endured, but there is no greater accomplishment than healing from hardship.

Remember: you are not alone, and it is not your fault. Healing does happen. Do not give up, no matter how small your flame seems to get. You never know what the new day will bring. Never lose hope. I found it. I have shared it. I have done my part. Now it is your turn...

*Mom, I would never have made it without you. You're a light from above. I'm forever grateful.*

Chris Nihmey is a Catholic teacher, mental health advocate, author, and presenter. He was recently selected as a 2017/18 Face of Mental Illness for the Canadian Alliance of Mental Illness and Mental Health. Visit [camimh.ca](http://camimh.ca) for more details on the campaign.

# TOWARD A FAIRER ONTARIO

## Catholic teachers provide input on the 2018–19 Ontario provincial budget

By Mark Tagliaferri

With Ontario's provincial election less than four months away, all eyes are fixed firmly on Queen's Park. The recent leadership drama that has engulfed the Progressive Conservative Party has served only to heighten tension and uncertainty. The campaign fireworks are well and truly underway.

Against this backdrop, the Liberal government will release its 2018-19 budget in late March. As it is an election year, the Liberals will hope to use the budget as a campaign tool, both to solidify the party's base and, perhaps more importantly, to entice undecided voters. However, if the Liberals hope to seize momentum ahead of the June election, the party must make good on its long-standing promises to invest in social programs and infrastructure; it must finally match its reality to its rhetoric.

In fairness, over the past 12 months the government made important progress in a number of areas. Legislation that provides free pharmacare for Ontarians under 25 years old, makes investments to provide 100,000 additional child care spaces, and overhauls the province's outdated labour laws and raises the minimum wage, will undoubtedly benefit citizens across the province. But as the Minister of Finance conceded in his Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review Statement, "We must go further."

Catholic teachers agree. Part of "going further" requires that the government fulfil its stated commitment to "improve public education, from Kindergarten to post-secondary." Although Ontario's education system is already considered one of the most successful and high-performing in the world, Catholic teachers have identified several key areas in education that require attention and further investment, and that should be front-of-mind as the government develops its 2018-19 budget.

### Student and teacher well-being

In recent years, the concept of well-being has taken on a more holistic and all-encompassing definition, having moved beyond a strict focus on physical health. Even still, persistent and emerging issues continue to impact the school community.

With respect to improving the culture of student mental health, the government has taken important steps over the past several years. Despite this, young people remain the least likely age group to seek out or receive adequate care. In order for elementary and secondary schools to support the many students with emerging or existing mental health needs, they must be adequately funded, prepared, and resourced. In this, the government must ensure that rural schools and/or schools with lower student populations are not disadvantaged in their attempts to provide students with a healthy environment. Any mental health funding must reflect the needs of the specific community it is intended to serve.

Part of improving well-being involves ensuring a safe and inclusive learning environment, one in which teachers feel safe from violence and harassment. For almost a decade, Catholic teachers have been raising the issue of violence and harassment experienced by Ontario teachers. To illustrate the scope and scale of the problem, in 2017 OECTA partnered with Pollara Strategic Insights to conduct a comprehensive survey of members. The results were sobering, and highlighted that the issue is significant and increasing in severity.

As outlined in OECTA's *Safer Schools for All* document, there are a number of steps the government can and must take to redress this issue. For instance, we urge the government to make significant, ongoing investments in professional supports – such as educational

assistants, mental health professionals, social workers, and child and youth workers. In addition, funding is necessary to provide programs for students who might need to be removed from the regular classroom for a time. Finally, the survey data made clear that increased funding for teacher training remains an important requirement. Neither students, nor teachers and education workers, can reach their full potential if their physical safety or psychological well-being are threatened or compromised; it is time for the government to act to ensure the well-being of everyone in the school community.

### Special education funding

On average, 18 per cent of students in each elementary school and 27 per cent of students in each high school receive some form of assistance from the special education department. And despite increases in special education funding, glaring problems remain.

The introduction of the Identification Placement and Review (IPRC) process helped to ensure that students requiring assistance receive the supports and placements they need. However, in 2017, 64 percent of elementary schools and 55 per cent of high schools reported restrictions on the number of students who could be assessed, and as many as 37,000 students experience significant delays. Compounding this problem is the persistent issue of the student-to-special education teacher ratio, which has climbed steadily over the last ten years. Research shows that smaller classes



enable teachers to more effectively address the unique learning needs of special education students. Additional funding can reduce the ratio of special education students to teachers. There should also be accountability measures to ensure that school boards allocate resources in the most appropriate and effectual manner.

### Investing in Indigenous education and students

While public attention is often drawn to the plight of students attending on-reserve schools, in Ontario, 82 per cent of Indigenous students attend a provincially funded school.

In the past year, the government has worked to embed Indigenous education into the school experience, and has provided funds for school boards to hire a dedicated Indigenous Education Lead. These are positive steps; however, there is much more to be done, as Indigenous students continue to lag their non-Indigenous counterparts in literacy and achievement. Redressing these persistent gaps will require continued investment in the professional development of certified teachers, as well as additional resources to ensure Indigenous students have

the proper supports. Robust investments will not only improve outcomes for Indigenous students, but also will contribute to broadening knowledge among the non-Indigenous student population.

### Maximizing efficiency in education expenditure

In recent years, declining enrolment has created questions around ways to maintain quality education, while finding cost savings. This question has led some to suggest that money could be saved by dismantling the Catholic education system.

Most understand that this position is wrong on its face: Catholic schools make significant contributions to the overall

excellence of the system; as well, research shows that amalgamation produces almost no long-term savings, and often ends up costing taxpayers significant sums in transition costs. That said, there are potential savings to be had by using school space in more efficient and collaborative ways, and incentivizing inter-ministerial and municipal co-operation.

One potential avenue is to consider shared facilities, specifically for co-terminus boards. Naturally, this would have to be done while protecting each school system's unique framework and structures; however, research out of the United States suggests that this approach can reap considerable savings. There are already several successful examples of such arrangements in Ontario, including the Humberwood Centre in Toronto, as well as in Brantford where St. Basil's Catholic Elementary School and Walter Gretzky Elementary School share a 90,000-square-foot facility.

Another option to maximize funding efficiency is for the government to reduce administrative bloat, and target money to the classroom. Each year finds a seemingly exponential growth in the number of new Ministry of Education initiatives. New plans, workshops, and consultations are implemented every year, often without consultation with teacher affiliates. The province must ensure that education funding is directed as closely as possible to the classroom. For instance, rather than promoting privatized attendance management policies, the government should instead be directing school boards to hire enough occasional teachers to meet classroom needs.

### Working for the common good

Advocating for a strong publicly funded education system that includes Catholic schools is of the utmost importance. But Catholic teachers are also called to improve the human condition by working to eliminate discrimination, foster understanding, and reduce poverty and economic inequality. This focus has direct and indirect benefits for our students, schools, and communities. Poverty and inequality prevents Ontarians

from meeting their basic needs, finding and contributing to their communities, and achieving personal goals. The government has taken commendable steps by increasing the minimum wage and piloting a basic income program, but we must continue to make robust investments in social programs such as Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, to assist Ontario's most vulnerable citizens. The lack of affordable housing also continues to be a major challenge for many Ontarians. In Toronto, for example, roughly 25 per cent of families with children age 12 or under are living in housing that is unaffordable, overcrowded, or in a poor state of repair. The Association will continue pushing the government to fulfil its promise to "build Ontario up."

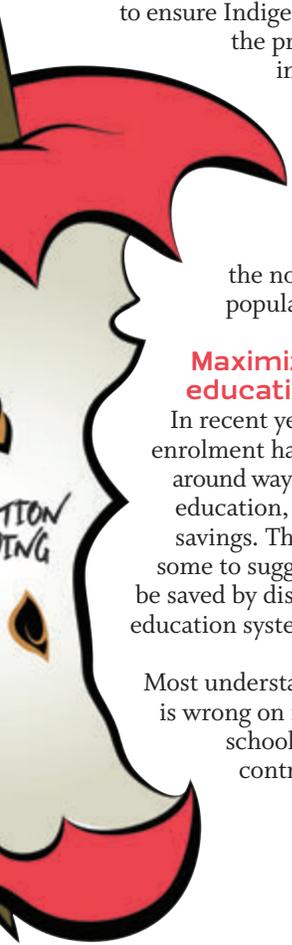
### The path forward

During his 2017 Fall Economic Statement, the Finance Minister pointed to fairness and investment in social programs as key drivers of Ontario's success. This was the platform upon which Kathleen Wynne was elected in 2013. However, Ontario still spends less per capita on programs than any other province in Canada. This should not be a source of pride. The 2018-19 budget provides the government an opportunity to fulfil its mandate. Investing wisely in education and other public goods will ensure that all Ontarians have the best chance to succeed in life. We call on the government to honour its promises, and make bold investments in Ontario's future.

To this end, the Association presented a series of recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, as part of the government's pre-budget consultations. The full brief is available at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca).

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*Mark Tagliaferri is Communications Specialist in the Communications department at the OECTA Provincial Office.*



# THE BIG BISHOP AND THE SEEDS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

By Robert Smol

2018 marks the 200th anniversary of St. Iona, the first known Catholic school in the province. Beginning in an improvised log cabin in the parish of St. Raphael in North Glengarry (near present day Cornwall), the school moved into a more permanent structure in 1826. Ten years later, the seminary function of Iona was transferred to Kingston, where its founder Bishop Alexander Macdonell had obtained a charter for Regiopolis College.

The beginning of Catholic education in Ontario is the result of the almost-singlehanded efforts of Bishop Alexander Macdonell, who immigrated to Upper Canada around 1803, as the head of a group of displaced Scottish Catholic veterans. Joining the small group of Scottish loyalists already settled in the eastern region of the province, they struggled to clear enough land to sustain their families and build a viable

agricultural economy in the region. The hard work, hunger, prejudice, and war they faced in Canada was nothing to them, given their collective experience back home.

In spite of the long, arduous journey to the still largely unsettled colony of Upper Canada, the promise of having the right to own and control their own land must have been a dream. Indeed, it is in the painful evictions of the Highland peasantry of the 1790s that the story of Macdonell the leader begins.

Born in 1760 at Inchlaggen in Glengarry, Scotland, and educated in France and Spain, Father Alexander Macdonell was serving as pastor in Braes of Lochaber in 1792 when the local farmers were being evicted by the landed gentry who, at the time, saw greater profits converting their lands into sheep walks. Refusing to abandon his parishioners, he accompanied them to Glasgow, where he tried to find work for them.

At this time, the war with revolutionary France brought an ever-increasing need for recruits for the British Army. In spite of the ban on Catholics joining the military, Macdonell convinced his government to authorize the formation of the Glengarry Fencible Regiment, with him serving as Chaplain (the first Roman Catholic Chaplain in the British Army since the Reformation). The Glengarry regiment was stationed first at the Isle of Guernsey, and later in Ireland.

With the disbandment of the regiment in 1802, Macdonell focused his attention on securing land grants for his veterans in Upper Canada, as military service normally authorized a veteran to a grant of land in the colonies. Arriving to the colony



A small school in a log cabin at the parish of St. Raphael may have been the building where the first Catholic school was opened in 1818.

in November 1804, Macdonell was one of only four Roman Catholic priests. The onset of war with the United States in 1812 brought renewed interest in the military experiences of Macdonell and his settlers. Many of the local Scottish Catholics served in the part-time militia units mobilized during the conflict. The Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles served in most of the major battles of the war. Returning as Chaplain, Macdonell personally accompanied his militia troops in the February 1813 attack on Ogdensburg, on the American side of the St. Lawrence River.

If there is a way to summarize Macdonell's political approach vis-à-vis the British government and colonial administration, it would be a dual approach of aggressive legal advocacy, coupled with affirmation of political loyalty. All this at a time when Catholics were denied entry into professions and treated as second class citizens, and their loyalty was often looked upon as suspect. In the wake of disastrous armed insurrections in his native Scotland and Ireland, Macdonell no doubt came to the conclusion that the rights of his fellow Catholics would be best assured in the long run by trying to work within the British political system.

It was shortly after war with the United States that Macdonell, now a Bishop, began to push for public support for Catholic schools. His tactic was to again play the "loyalty card," reminding the Colonial administration in Great Britain and here in Canada of the loyalty and courage shown by the Scottish settlers during the US invasions.

But the colonial administration were not the only ones reluctant to support Catholic schools in the province. Many of the Glengarry settlers, still struggling to make a living off their farms, were focused on more immediate material concerns. Nonetheless, Macdonell was careful to remind his people that, without some accommodation for schools, they would continue to remain "hewers of wood, and drawers of water." Macdonell also saw education as a means by which to identify and select promising candidates for the priesthood.

Returning to Great Britain at the end of the war, Bishop Macdonell managed to secure a grant of £320 for the education of the people of Glengarry. With this money, he established a small school in a log cabin near his house at the parish of St. Raphael in 1818.

This is believed to have been the building where the first Catholic school was opened in 1818. In later years, an observer described it as "a modest structure, but sufficient for the purpose."

A subsequent grant of £350 was used by Macdonell to construct an addition to the College of Iona, for young men who wished to study for the priesthood. Ten years later, Macdonell managed to secure a charter for a college (Regiopolis) to be established in Kingston.

Barely three decades later, the alumnus of St. Raphael's "modest structure" of a school were to occupy some of the highest offices of the province and the country. Among them were John Sandfield Macdonald, who served as Premier of the United Province of Canada from 1862-64, and after Confederation became the first Premier of Ontario, from 1867-71. His brother, Donald Alexander Macdonald, served as member of the Legislative Assembly and House of Commons before being appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario from 1867-71.

As we celebrate the contributions of Catholic education in Ontario, we should remain ever-thankful for the efforts of the Big Bishop.

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*Robert Smol is a teacher with the Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit. He also works as a freelance journalist and columnist. His work has appeared on CBC News, the National Post, iPolitics, and the Toronto Star, among others.*





# STUDENT VOTE

## 2018 ONTARIO PROVINCIAL ELECTION

Student Vote is parallel election for students under the voting age coinciding with general elections.

The purpose is to provide students with an opportunity to experience the voting process firsthand and practice the habits of active and engaged citizenship.

Ontario schools have participated in eleven Student Vote projects since 2003. In the last federal election, 370,000 students cast ballots from 2,800 schools.

**Register your school today:**  
**[www.studentvote.ca](http://www.studentvote.ca)**  
**or 1-866-488-8775**

The program involves four key steps:

- 1 Register your school:** The program is open to all schools and there is no cost to participate.
- 2 Receive materials:** Registered schools are supplied with print and online pedagogical materials, posters, maps, ballot boxes and voting screens in April.
- 3 Engage with the campaign:** Students learn about government and the election process, research the parties, candidates and issues, and engage in discussion with family and friends.
- 4 Student Vote Day:** Students cast ballots for the provincial election candidates. The Student Vote results are released publicly after the close of the official polls.

# HOW A MOCK ELECTION TEACHES STUDENTS ABOUT DEMOCRACY

By Michelle Newton

Early in my career as an educator, I struggled with diving into a subject or topic when I was not completely comfortable with my own grasp of the material. The main reason I first decided to participate in mock elections with my students several years ago was because of my lack of understanding of the political realm. I recognized that I needed to jump right in and learn along with them.

The OECTA Leadership Training Program played a large part in my newfound willingness to step out of my comfort zone. My participation in the program in 2009-10 gave me the confidence to put myself out there and learn more about politics and my union. Those who spoke over the four days inspired me, as did my new knowledge, and suddenly the OECTA “fire” was lit beneath me. Moving forward, I knew I wanted to participate in as many of the regional and provincial seminars as possible, to continue to build on this learning.

In February 2014, I was fortunate to be chosen to attend the OECTA Political Action Seminar, and it was there where I first heard about the Student Vote program. At the time, I was teaching a large Grade 5/6 class and I wondered if the program would be appropriate for my students, or if they were too young to tackle some of the more mature concepts involved, especially given that I felt I was not fully prepared to guide and support them.

I need not have been concerned – the Student Vote program had all the information and resources I needed as an educator, and it was geared to the level of my students. When I told my students about the program they were thrilled to hear they would be able to participate in a mock election, with their



votes counted and the totals announced just like the “real” provincial election.

As we went through the lessons, I discovered that my students were totally engaged. I was happy to learn alongside them. Several mature discussions took place about the issues involved with the election, like how it could affect the education sector based on the platforms of each of the parties. And finally, it was Election Day: the students’ votes were cast with real ballots, ballot boxes, and voting screens.

The following school year, there were a number of Grade 5 students that were in my class again in Grade 6. One of the first questions they asked was, “Do we get to do that vote thing again this year?” Coincidentally, there was a municipal election set to take place that October, and not only did they get to vote again, but I also invited both of the mayoral candidates to come and speak to the class before the election. I was pleased to see my students’ level of understanding,

and the deep, rich questions they asked the candidates.

**I am proud to know my students will enter adulthood much more informed and aware than I was.**

I believe that as educators, we need to educate our students about the world outside of the classroom, and find a way to bring it down to their level – rather than avoid certain subjects because they are “only in Grade 6.” I would highly recommend that other educators find a way for their students to participate in the Student Vote program for the upcoming provincial election. Even if, like me, you need to step out of your own comfort zone to do so.

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*Michelle Newton is a Grade 6 teacher and First Vice-President of the Thunder Bay Elementary Unit.*

## MATH Mondays!

Join us for new, innovative  
and practical ideas  
for your math class!

These sessions are tailored to meet curricular expectations that support best practices. Facilitated by teacher leaders from across the province, these live, interactive sessions will provide ideas and activities you can use in your classroom to support the implementation of an engaging and balanced math program.

### WHEN

New sessions starting  
Monday, January 29

LIVE from 4:30 – 5:30 p.m.  
and 7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

### WHERE

Anywhere you are!  
Visit [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca)  
for the full list of session topics and dates.

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
CONNECT WITH US AT:  
[catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca)

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR LONG-TERM DISABILITY COVERAGE

By Mary Lachapelle

Long-term disability (LTD) insurance, which protects your earning ability if you are unable to work because of injury or illness, is one of the most valuable group benefits you have. Your OECTA group benefits plan is customized to provide the disability coverage you need, as cost-effectively as possible. As a member, you are automatically enrolled in the OECTA provincial LTD plan.

Like most insurance, your LTD coverage is likely not something you think about until it is needed. However, there are a few things you need to be aware of:

## You have the option to discontinue your coverage while on a leave of absence

While on leave of absence, you have two options:

- Maintain your LTD coverage by continuing to pay your premiums.
- Discontinue your LTD coverage by ceasing your premium payments. When you return to work your coverage will be reinstated and you will be subject to a pre-existing condition clause.

### MAINTAINING YOUR COVERAGE

If you choose to maintain your LTD coverage and you become disabled while on leave, you are eligible to apply for LTD benefits. There will be no break in your coverage and you will not be subject to a pre-existing condition clause upon your return to work.

### DISCONTINUING YOUR COVERAGE

If you become disabled while on leave, you will not be eligible for LTD benefits. Upon your return to work, your coverage will be reinstated and you will be subject to a pre-existing condition clause if you become disabled within 12 months from the date of reinstatement. What is a pre-existing condition? This is a disability arising from illness or injury for which you obtained medical care during the 90-day period before you become re-insured.

## When your LTD coverage terminates

There are three scenarios in which your LTD coverage can or should be terminated.

- If you are eligible for a 60 per cent unreduced service pension – or will be within the later of either: the next 110 working days, or the expiration of your sick leave credits – you are NO LONGER eligible for LTD coverage and you should terminate your premium payments. Note: to qualify for a 60 per cent unreduced pension, you must meet the above criteria with 30 years of **credited** service and have your “85 factor” (age + qualifying service = 85).

- If you have reached the end of the month in which you turned 65, or you will reach the end of the month in which you will turn 65 within the latter of either: the next 110 working days, or the expiration of your sick leave credits, you are NO LONGER eligible for LTD coverage and should terminate your premium payments.
- If your retirement date is within the next 110 working days, and you have notified both the Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan and your school board, you MAY terminate your LTD coverage at this time (and cancel your premium payments). You can also choose to continue your LTD coverage until the date of your retirement, in which case you will be eligible to make a claim if you become disabled prior to this date.

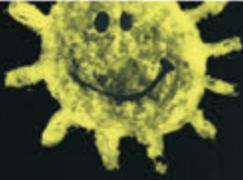
If you find yourself in scenario (i) or (ii), there is no reason to continue to pay into the LTD plan, as you are no longer eligible to receive LTD benefits. **The onus is on YOU to communicate the termination of your payments to OTIP through your local unit office.** If you did not realize your payments have continued after your eligibility has ceased, contact your local unit office immediately.

## Highlights of your LTD Plan Coverage/ Changes effective March 1, 2018

- Participation is mandatory for all members hired after September 1, 2013
- The waiting period to receive LTD benefits is the later of **110** working days or expiration of sick leave
- Your benefit level is **50** per cent of gross monthly earnings
- Your benefit is not taxable
- Your benefit will receive a cost of living increase based on the Consumer Price Index to a maximum of 2 per cent starting in January after two years on LTD
- Your LTD includes access to OTIP’s CAREpath and Feeling Better Now programs
- If your date of disability is prior to March 1, 2018 these changes do not apply to you

For more information on your LTD benefits and forms, visit the Benefits and Leave Provisions section in the Members’ Area at [catholicteachers.ca](http://catholicteachers.ca)

Mary Lachapelle is a member of the Counselling and Member Services department at the OECTA Provincial Office.



# → Child Care!

AGM2018



For the third year, child care services will be available to delegates during AGM and the annual dinner.

Care for children aged 6 months to 12 years old will be provided by Improv Care ([improvcare.ca](http://improvcare.ca)) at no cost to delegates.

For inquiries contact: [events@oecta.on.ca](mailto:events@oecta.on.ca)



## CHILD CARE HOURS

**Saturday March 10**  
7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

**Sunday March 11**  
7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
**Banquet**  
6:00 to 10:00 p.m.

**Monday March 12**  
8:00 a.m. to adjournment

# STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

By Belinda Russo

*Achieving Excellence, A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (2014) identified well-being as one of the four interconnected and renewed goals in education. Below are a few resources to help teachers in supporting student mental health and well-being.

## Level Up

Since 1921, the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) has been working to support the health and learning of children and youth in schools and communities through programs, services, partnerships, and advocacy. *Level Up* is a free, online resource that supports the promotion of positive mental health and overall well-being among children and youth. *Level Up* includes background information for teachers, activity cards, videos, and posters linked to the Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum and Living Skills expectations. The program addresses the following topic areas:

- Mental health
- Substance use and abuse
- Digital citizenship and cyberbullying
- Healthy eating
- Well-being

*Level Up* can be found at <http://bit.ly/2ncB6Q4>



## Teach Resiliency

The Teach Resiliency website was launched in May 2017. It serves as an online access point through which educators can search and organize relevant evidence-informed mental health resources. All resources are “searchable, digestible, and social.” The site contains links to additional online sources and supports.

This online resource can be found at [TeachResiliency.ca](http://TeachResiliency.ca)

## Supporting Minds

*Supporting Minds* (2013 draft) is a Ministry of Education document that provides educators with information to support students with mental health and addiction problems through early recognition and effective classroom strategies.

*Supporting Minds* can be found at <http://bit.ly/1cpaqQ6>

## Children's Mental Health Ontario

Children's Mental Health Ontario has a free, web-based resource developed by field experts. It offers information and resources for teachers, as well as links to various other websites that support the development of teacher knowledge and understanding of mental health and well-being. The site also contains resources to support student learning and understanding.

More information can be found at <http://bit.ly/2nfbTUe>

## The ABCs of Mental Health

The ABCs of Mental Health website offers two free, web-based resources, one for parents and the other for teachers.

The teacher resource gives educators insight into a particular behaviour, as well as support strategies for responding to that behavior. It includes ideas for promoting the mental health of children and adolescents, information about how children change as they grow older, descriptions of behaviours that might indicate a problem, and practical suggestions for next steps. The resource includes information on: anxiety; worry; anger; aggression; substance and alcohol abuse; unusual behaviours; self-harm; social skills problems; eating disorders; defiance; and attention and memory problems.

The resource can be found at <http://www.sickkidscmh.ca/ABC/Teacher-Resource/Welcome>

*Belinda Russo is a member of the Professional Development department at the OECTA Provincial Office.*

# Human Rights Caucus

AGM2018



Friday  
March 9

7:30 p.m.

## Giikweyaksichikewin – Doing Things in a Good Way

Led by **Tesa Fiddler**

Addressing equity issues or racism, specific to Indigenous people, in schools and communities can be difficult for educators. It requires learning and teaching about topics that might be uncomfortable, such as the Indigenous Residential School system.

Catholic teacher and Indigenous education advocate, Tesa Fiddler, has been exploring how Indigenous education correlates to social justice, anti-racism, and equity education. She will share with you how her work with teachers and students has created a safe space for bringing this content into your classroom. Tesa will also discuss the revised curriculum that rolls out in the fall of 2018, including how it was developed, its significance, and the connections to social justice and equity education.

# BEING OPEN TO GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

By Shannon Hogan

*Nothing can hold you back,  
Not your childhood, not the history  
of a lifetime.*

*If the past was a ring of futility,  
Let it become a wheel of yearning  
That drives you forward.  
If the past was a brick wall,  
Let it become a dam  
To unleash your power.*

RABBI TZVI FREEMAN

This quote by Rabbi Freeman speaks very powerfully on an aspect of love most often overlooked, of a compassion long forgotten, especially by people of faith. That is, the tender care of oneself, and the loving care of one's body and soul.

In the literary and musical world – and in the world of Hallmark cards – love is often placed between the lover and the beloved. True love, it seems, is declared only in reference to another: “I love you,” or, “I can't live without you.”

Even in love poems and music about the “end” of love, such as a breakup, the love itself remains a fixed entity between two mortals, and is considered collateral damage in the relationship's demise.

Love itself appears as a form of commodification that can be grasped, understood, held for ransom, and discarded at mere mortal whim.

Our western culture champions the commodification of love. It should come as no surprise that some of the most popular TV shows, like “The Bachelorette,” capitalize on this commodity. While these programs offer countless hours of entertainment, they only succeed because of an unspoken agreement in our culture – a social contract, if you will – that love and everything around it is a matter of strategy and manipulation and, at the

end of the day, can only be created or destroyed vis-à-vis a romantic connection with another.

As members of the human race, on the path of life and on the journey of faith, we often unconsciously subscribe to this understanding of love. And, as we can see from the life of Jesus, the commitment to love one's neighbour and all of humanity is fundamental to defining and living a Christian life. But while we do our best as people of faith to live this core tenet, there is one love that we often forget, neglect, or even deny: the love of self.

There is an important part Jesus' life that we often overlook in our desire to love and heal the world: Jesus got tired. Jesus got angry. Jesus told people to heal themselves.

Scripture often portrays Jesus going off to a “lonely place” to breathe and pray. It was not that Jesus needed a spa day – not that there is anything wrong with that – but, more accurately, he needed to remember what his healing ministry was actually about.

Whenever Jesus healed a person, he did not simply say, “Be healed!” When Jesus saw, and was asked to heal a suffering person, he would say, “Your sins are forgiven.” These words do not have much to do with leprosy, hemorrhaging, blindness, etc. Jesus knew that whatever was going on in a person's physical life, this was nothing compared to the desperate need for healing on a metaphysical level. More than sight, health, or mobility, Jesus knew the depth of hunger every human being has to experience love, especially in the form of tender mercy.

Once this love was experienced, people could begin to consider the possibility

that they were of value, of worth, even holy.

As Rabbi Freeman's quote suggests, we all carry with us the burden and hurt of the past. We cannot control what happens to us. We can only manage how we deal with it, and what we do in response. In my experience, managing the history of my life and its events has sometimes felt impossible. True solace and growth has only come in the moments when I let God love me enough to begin to heal; in those moments, I realize that I too may be of value, of worth, even holy.

God's unconditional love is, at times, almost incomprehensible to us. It totally contradicts the false humility with which we have been taught to live our lives – that if we think we are unworthy, useless, and hopelessly flawed, then we are humble before God and others. And maybe then, God will love us in spite of our iniquities.

Fortunately, we are at a point in the history of Christianity where that sad and flawed theology can be put to rest, gently and with some gratitude. In spite of it, and perhaps because of it, we are now able to consider with certain awe that we are completely loveable and precious to the God of our lives. Being open to even the possibility of God's unconditional love is all God needs. With this understanding, the ring becomes a wheel, the brick in the wall becomes a dam, and all that is released is light.

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*Shannon Hogan is a member of the  
Counselling and Member Services department  
at the OECTA Provincial Office.*

# NEW LAW WIDENS BENEFIT ENTITLEMENT FOR WORK-RELATED CHRONIC MENTAL STRESS

By Charlene Theodore

The labour movement has, once again, brought about systemic change that will benefit all workers. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) has broadened its entitlement to benefits for work-related chronic mental stress. Let's look back at how we got here.

The *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act* (WSIA) has long restricted benefits for workers claiming workplace injury due to mental stress. Since 1997, benefits were only given to injured workers if their mental health injuries came about under the following specific conditions:

- The psychological reaction had to be severe, or acute.
- The acute psychological reaction had to have been in response to a sudden and unexpected traumatic event.
- The traumatic event must have arisen out of and in the course of employment.

Change began in 2014, with a constitutional challenge brought by a union, the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA). In the ONA case, a nurse filed a claim with WSIB for mental stress caused by workplace harassment from a doctor, which had taken place from 1990 until 2002. Her claim was denied based on the above criteria, but her union appealed on the basis that the eligibility restrictions for mental stress claims violated her rights under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Specifically, it was argued that the restrictions created a discriminatory distinction on her access to WSIB benefits based on how the workplace injury was suffered. The

law had the effect of unjustly putting injured workers into two categories: workers with gradual onset mental stress claims, and workers with acute mental stress from traumatic events. More importantly, the WSIA did not make the same distinction for workers who sustained physical injuries. In the face of the evidence presented by ONA, it was determined that the criteria set out in the WSIA infringed upon workers' right to equal treatment under s. 15(1) of the *Charter*.

Widely considered one of the most noteworthy WSIB decisions in recent memory, the win by the union resulted in the following:

- The affected sections of the WSIA were rendered null and void.
- The WSIB issued a new draft policy on Traumatic and Chronic Mental Stress.
- The WSIB held stakeholder consultation sessions around the province with worker and employer groups to address concerns and solicit feedback.
- The provincial government tabled and passed the *Stronger, Healthier Ontario Act* (Bill 127).

The *Stronger, Healthier Ontario Act* took effect January 15, 2018. It allows workers to claim benefits for both traumatic and chronic mental stress injuries. By any standard, this is a sweeping change that will benefit all workers in the province.

And it all started with a union lawyer.

Charlene Theodore is In-House Legal Counsel at the OECTA Provincial Office.

# OECTA CONTINUES TO LEAD PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR KINDERGARTEN TEAMS

By Claire Laughlin with contributions from Kyle Gleason and Katie Smyth

Additional funding from the Ministry of Education enabled the Association to continue providing outstanding professional learning to Kindergarten teams, by hosting a conference this past November.

More than 200 teachers and early childhood educators, along with school board and Ministry of Education resource staff, came together to hear keynotes by Dr. Jean Clinton and Dr. Douglas Clements, as well as individual workshops on each of the four frames, digging deeper into teaching, learning, assessment, and evaluation.

While each participant had their own, unique memorable moments, many of those moments came from the insights delivered by our keynotes. Dr. Jean Clinton, a Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences at McMaster University, is a renowned expert in advocating for children's issues, serving as an education advisor to the Premier as well as the Minister of Education. Her special interest lies in brain development, and the crucial role of relationships and connectedness. Dr. Clinton spoke of the importance of building strong relationships with our students. She reminded us that when our eyes light up upon seeing our students, this triggers something in the brain of the child that makes them feel wanted, important, and accepted. Relationships, and that feeling of belonging, are immunization against mental health disorders. She emphasized that teachers and ECEs are co-learners with students – we are not here to “stuff the turkey!” All were encouraged to carefully consider the time spent connecting versus the time spent directing and correcting. Her phrase, “Good care educates, good education cares,” will remain with us all.

Ontario's Renewed Math Strategy is certainly a focus for all teachers. With this in mind, OECTA secured Dr. Douglas Clements as our second keynote. Dr. Clements is the Kennedy Endowed Chair in Early Childhood Learning and Professor at the University of Denver. He is a renowned contributor to many professional journals and magazines on the early years, especially focusing on mathematics. He served as guest speaker to OECTA's first Kindergarten team collaborative learning community projects. His research and related work is featured on the Ministry of Education websites, Edugains (edugains.ca), and on the Learning Exchange (thelearningexchange.ca). During his keynote, Dr. Clements spoke a great deal about children following natural developmental progressions in learning. Research, primarily undertaken by Dr. Clements, has revealed sequences of activities that are effective in guiding

children through these levels of thinking, when talking about counting and quantity. He spoke of learning trajectories, which have three parts: a learning goal (expectation); the developmental path along which children progress to reach goals; and a set of activities matched to each of the levels of thinking in that path, to help children develop to reach the goal.

Dr. Clements shared the [learningtrajectories.org](http://learningtrajectories.org) website with participants. In concluding, he reminded us that when teachers understand how children develop an understanding of math, they are more effective in questioning, analyzing, and providing suitable activities.

Over the remainder of the two days, Kindergarten teams attended workshops designed to help them dig deeper into each of the four frames. Emphasis was placed on: noticing and naming the learning; documentation (purpose and precision); the environment, including the outdoors; and more. It was inspiring to see how eager participants were to improve their practice. There was lots of learning taking place within the individual sessions. All were curious about different strategies that would help them plan and document through the lens of the four frames.

These workshops were developed and delivered by fellow OECTA members supporting Early Learning implementation, in their own boards. Our thanks for outstanding contributions and efforts are extended to: Jennifer Bos (St. Clair), Mary Day Mauro (Simcoe-Muskoka), Ashley Fung-Fook (Dufferin-Peel), Kyle Gleason (Renfrew), Alison Radley-Walters (Renfrew), Jonathan Rajalingam (Simcoe Muskoka), Katie Smyth (Wellington), and Jill Staples (Halton). Educators thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to learn and collaborate with each other and make new connections! A myriad of ideas were obtained to enhance the practice of Kindergarten teams.

OECTA continues to advocate for the need of Kindergarten teams to have time to collaborate and plan together. A Ministry of Education memo, allocating an additional PA Day for Kindergarten teams to collaborate, is imminent.

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*Claire Laughlin is a member of the Professional Development department at the OECTA Provincial Office. Kyle Gleason is a Grade 3 teacher in Renfrew, and an OECTA Kindergarten AQ instructor. Katie Smyth is a Kindergarten teacher in Wellington.*

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# MAKING IT EASY TO BE GREEN

## A just transition for workers is essential for a fair, prosperous, and sustainable economy

By Adam Lemieux

**M**ost of us recognize what we should be doing in our personal lives to combat pollution and climate change: driving less, flying less, consuming less. Reducing, re-using, recycling.

But when it comes to acting out our good intentions, things can become a bit more difficult. Canadians regularly rate protecting the environment and fighting climate change as top priorities, but we worry about the financial and practical costs. It is especially awkward for the millions of Canadians whose livelihoods depend on the very activities that are contributing to environmental destruction – oil and gas, forestry, the automotive sector, and so on. This tension was perfectly captured in a recent study for Natural Resources Canada, which found that while 34 per cent of Canadians think the guiding principle for the energy sector should be reducing greenhouse gas emissions, 25 per cent say it should be about keeping energy affordable, and 20 per cent prioritize generating more energy-related jobs or getting energy products to market.

Where should our solidarity lie? Do we prioritize short-term social and economic stability, or the long-term sustainability of our planet? Are we willing to put people out of work to avoid environmental harm? These are not new questions. The generally accepted definition of “sustainable development” dates back to 1987, when the United Nations convened the Commission on Environment and Development. The report, titled *Our Common Future*, said that our goal should be to maintain harmony between economic growth and ecological protection, through “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” But here in Canada, we have still not come close to developing a coherent philosophy or comprehensive plan of action. Despite repeated commitments, most recently in the Paris Accord, we continue to miss our targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, fighting climate change and protecting the environment continue to be seen as being in conflict with our goals of creating good jobs and achieving prosperity.

Over the past few years, the labour movement has tried to settle the dilemma by envisioning a near future in which societies consciously move to a more environmentally friendly economy, while being sensitive those whose lives will be turned upside-down in the process, and also considering how those who do

not benefit from the current economic system could be better served. The goal is to combine our concerns about equity and decent work with our desire to ensure a viable ecosystem. We call this a “just transition.”

### A greener economy

Some of this is not as revolutionary as it might sound. There are a few simple, market-based policy changes that could get us started down the path to a greener economy. For one, Canada has some of the lowest environmental taxes among industrialized countries. British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec have recently introduced carbon-pricing plans, and the federal government is set to pass legislation that will impose a carbon tax on any province that does not have a pricing plan in place by 2022; but we will still be well behind many of our peers. Implementing real financial motives to move away from carbon-intensive production is essential if we are to have any hope of meeting the emissions reductions targets that were agreed to in the Paris Accord. We should also tackle the more than \$3 billion in subsidies that Canadian governments give to oil and gas companies.

The crucial step is what comes next. To make the implementation of these policies politically palatable, and to make them work, people need to know that there is a viable alternative. This begins with the recognition that a green economy does not have to be a poor one. For example, the International Renewable Energy Agency predicts that 24 million jobs could be created in this sector by 2030. And as Statistics Canada has shown, jobs in the environmental and clean technology sectors have much higher salaries than the average Canadian job. In the interim, as new industries are developed, there are also possibilities in areas such as retrofitting homes or undertaking school repairs.

### People at the centre

To take advantage of these opportunities, there needs to be a concrete strategy to build the necessary infrastructure and encourage investments. It also means considering how workers can be protected and supported as the economy shifts away from their industries. Alberta can serve as an excellent model. As Rachel Notley’s NDP government mandated the elimination of coal-fired electricity, they developed a Coal Workforce Transition Fund, which will provide affected workers with income replacement to bridge them to new jobs or retirement, relocation assistance to help with moving-related expenses, and tuition vouchers to assist those who need more education or training to transition to a new career.

A just transition can also be an opportunity to recognize the inequities inherent in our current economic system, as well as the uneven distribution of consequences from environmental harm. In other words, our move toward a more sustainable economy should also be a move toward economic and social justice. As Pope Francis put it in his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.”

Possible strategies might include community benefit agreements, which could mandate that a certain percentage of public funding for the development of infrastructure be used to offer employment or training for workers from marginalized communities. We could also prioritize funding for initiatives that make more efficient use of energy and space while improving equity and quality of life – such as public transportation, urban design projects, or community hubs.

Certainly, there can be no discussion of equity without a specific focus on the needs of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities have been largely left out of the current economic system, while their land and waterways have often been destroyed by rapacious natural resource industries. At the same time, there has been longstanding discord between some Indigenous communities and some environmental activists, with Indigenous people too often having been used as mascots for conservation, somehow judged as less authentic for wanting to benefit from the same exploitation of natural resources that everyone else has been enjoying. Legal frameworks are evolving to give Indigenous people much more say over what happens to their land and resources, but a just transition will also consider how Indigenous people can be integrated in a new type of economy.

### How do we get there?

Jamie Kirkpatrick of the Blue-Green Alliance, which played a central role in the discussions around a just transition in Alberta, says that success depends on having all stakeholders involved from the start – business, government, workers, communities, and allies. This allows everyone to openly acknowledge and address the personal considerations that often hold people back, and helps to develop the most effective programs and strategies.

A similar process played out in Quebec, although it was driven at first by the provincial federation of labour, which smartly identified that the best way to protect workers was to foster buy-in on the need for a more sustainable economy, then lead the way in articulating what will be required to minimize hardship during the transition.

The good news is that others are starting to get on board. In November, at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Canada’s Minister of Environment and Climate Change responded to consistent pressure from the labour movement by announcing that the federal government will financially support Alberta’s plans for a just transition, and work with unions to develop a national strategy.

Here in Ontario, the Ontario Federation of Labour Environment and Green Jobs Committee has been reconvened after a 10-year lull. The committee will be examining how to engage workers in discussions about a more sustainable economy, and trying to convince the government to ensure that Ontario’s Climate Action Plan meets workers’ needs. Ideally, this will involve a formal mechanism by which the voices of workers, especially those in high-emitting, trade sensitive industries like auto or steel, can be brought to the table. There is no denying that the introduction of carbon pricing in Ontario could make these businesses less competitive compared to those in other jurisdictions that do not take environmental protection seriously. It is vital that the government be prepared to allocate the necessary resources for adjustment.

Of course, if this were as easily done as said, we would have done it by now. The environmental movement has powerful opponents – namely capitalism, colonialism, and the natural inability of human beings to weigh short-term benefits against long-term risks – that will take time to untangle. But the essence of a just transition is fairly straightforward. The idea is to eliminate the false choice between prosperity and sustainability, while considering how everyone can be brought into the economic fold. It is about recognizing, at an official level, the interconnectedness of all things. We will retain our individual responsibility to practice the three Rs, but with the understanding that true justice and sustainability can only be achieved on a much grander scale.

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*Adam Lemieux is Communications Specialist/Writer at the OECTA Provincial Office.*



# A BALANCING ACT

By Gian Marcon

On a recent trip to Rochester, New York, I was struck by the story of Kodak founder George Eastman, who literally started with nothing, yet went on to build the Kodak-Eastman photography empire. While his philanthropy and progressive treatment of his employees were part of his admirable legacy, what particularly resonated with me was his tremendous commitment to living a balanced life, which involved managing a world-renowned company while indulging in a vibrantly diverse series of leisurely pursuits. His oft quoted statement succinctly summarizes his views on the subject:

*What we do during our working hours determines what we have; what we do in our leisure hours determines what we are.*

What George Eastman was able to achieve in the early- 1900s in this regard was truly extraordinary, as evidenced by his well-documented commitment to family, friends, art, philanthropy, travel, and music. This is all the more remarkable when one considers his significant and concurrent work-related responsibilities.

Of late, a considerable amount has been written about the need for employees to develop and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Teachers are no exception. However, there is a marked difference between recognizing a need and actually effecting and supporting the changes to address it. There are many elements that contribute to a disproportionate personal investment in one's profession, not the least of which is a correspondent value system that reinforces such behaviour. This value system not only rewards those who work overly long hours, it establishes barriers that hinder attempts to introduce a more balanced approach.

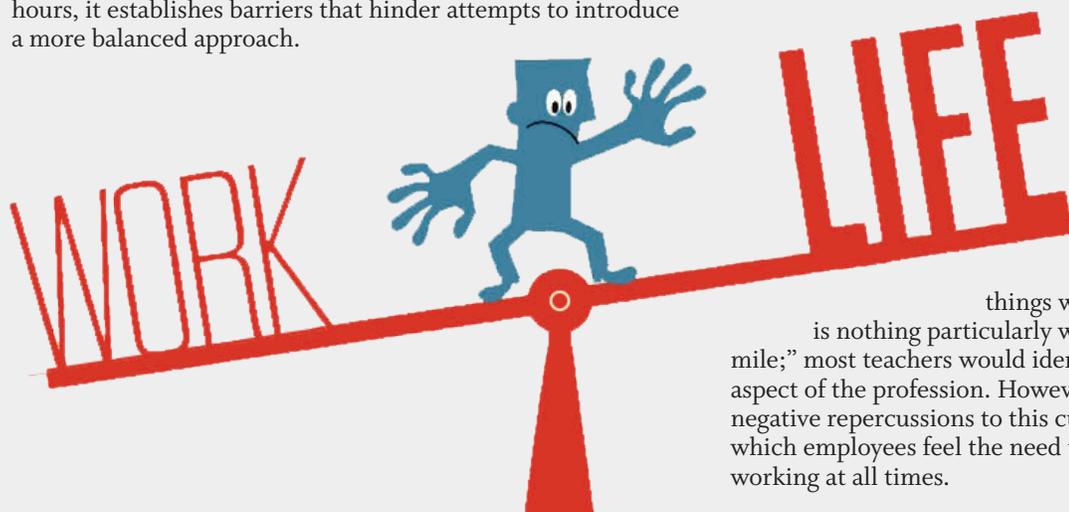
Unfortunately, the perception of what constitutes a valued employee has come to incorporate an expectation that a “good employee” is one who “goes the extra mile.” All too often this means “putting in the extra time” at the expense of an ever-decreasing repository of personal time. Teachers are all too aware of the expectation to go above and beyond what is “merely required” for their students and schools. This often involves commitments that go well beyond the traditional school day and school year. While teachers gain tremendous job satisfaction from willingly volunteering their personal time in order to contribute to a vibrant school community, there are instances where situations get out of hand.

During a recent mental health course that I completed, the term “presenteeism” was introduced to define the phenomena/ practice of being perpetually present and working constantly instead of taking earned or available time off from work. At one point, the course participants were encouraged to free-associate similar terms that described the aforementioned behaviour. What emerged were terms like workaholic, driven, committed, dedicated, hard-working, selfless, and vocation. It quickly became clear that even in our small group, which included health care professionals, social workers, and educators, opinions about what constituted a good work-life balance varied significantly.

While there was consensus around the negative connotations associated with terms like workaholic and driven, terms like selfless and hard-working evoke a much more sympathetic perspective.

In essence, what our little exercise demonstrated is that despite an appreciation that there are certainly examples of individuals who disproportionately invest in their working lives, there is also an underlying value associated with employees who will do what it takes to “get things done” and “make things work.” As stated earlier, there

is nothing particularly wrong with “going the extra mile;” most teachers would identify this as being a rewarding aspect of the profession. However, there are usually significant negative repercussions to this culture of presenteeism, in which employees feel the need to be present and to be seen working at all times.



In fact, Mental Health First Aid Canada identifies this kind of work-life imbalance as one of the signs that may indicate that a colleague has a mental health problem stemming from the stress associated with working excessive hours over a prolonged period of time. As professionals and union members, we are challenged with supporting one another so that we and our students can derive the inherent rewards associated with a vibrant and effective educational environment. Therefore, we should be concerned when the health and well-being of our colleagues is potentially compromised by what appears to be an imbalance between the work that we do and the lives we lead.

Recently, the American Psychological Association has begun using the term “work-life fit” instead of “work-life balance,” to more accurately capture the professional/personal paradigm. I believe the term appropriately illustrates that the dynamic between work and life is not a zero-sum game resulting in “balance,” but rather a tangible equilibrium that is a result of having established a “fit” between the two. It recognizes that our professional and personal lives need not – indeed should not – be treated as competitors for our time, but rather as flexible and necessary components that need to “fit” into our lives.

Finally, the question of how our values regarding work have developed and why some teachers struggle to achieve a “work-life fit” is complex, and merits further exploration. However, it is valuable to recognize the importance of equilibrium when it comes to what we do at work and what we do when we are not working. By being more conscious of how our professional and personal lives affect each other, we can begin to examine our choices and evaluate their impact as we move through our careers and our lives.

**Here are five ways to bring a little more balance to your daily routine:**

1. Build downtime into your schedule.
2. Drop activities that sap your time or energy.
3. Rethink your errands.
4. Get moving.
5. Remember that a little relaxation goes a long way.

*Gian Marcon is a member of the Bargaining and Contract Services department at the OECTA Provincial Office.*

**THIS YEAR AGM** *highlights...*



**HUMAN RIGHTS  
SPEAKER**

**Mark Henick**

**Monday, March 12  
10:30 a.m.**

Informed by his direct experience with stigma and the mental health care system, Mark Henick has dedicated his life to opening minds and creating change.

Mark is the principal and CEO of Strategic Mental Health Solutions, a boutique consulting firm that specializes in helping organizations and individuals to move strategically from basic mental health awareness toward meaningful, measurable action.

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# THE ABSENCE (OF) DATA

## School Boards' Co-operative Inc. and the politics of teacher absenteeism

By Mark Tagliaferri

**T**he title was printed in bold for all to read: “**Significant Increase in Sick Days Causing Financial and Resource Allocation Pressures for Boards.**” The conclusion, equally clear: “School boards need to develop effective attendance support programs to manage the increase in sick days taken by school board employees.” This was not the work of some blogger; these words were penned by Bonnie Lysyk, Auditor General of Ontario, and were included in her 2017 annual report.

Public discussion of teacher absenteeism is not new. In early 2016 a flurry of news articles accused Ontario teachers of using sick leave (or abusing it, rather) as a response to the 2012 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which eliminated the ability to bank sick days. When the stories broke, Liz Sandals – then-Minister of Education – waded into debate and publicly questioned teachers’ motives. Within days, the Minister walked-back her statement, assuring OECTA that she did “not believe teachers are abusing the sick-leave policy in any way.”

Unfortunately, the Auditor General’s report repeated these accusations and reignited debate. Almost immediately, stories of teachers misusing sick days flooded the airwaves. Lysyk’s decision to speculate on the causes of teacher absenteeism is troubling, as the Auditor General’s report is meant to be an apolitical value-for-money audit. But there is another more concerning aspect to this story, one that has gone largely unnoticed and unchallenged.

Over the past two years, virtually everything published on teacher absenteeism in Ontario has contained some variation of the following sentence: “A report by School Boards’ Co-operative Inc. (SBCI), says that teachers are taking more sick days, costing boards close to \$1 billion per year.” Articles then typically hypothesize why this increase has occurred and offer thoughts on what school boards can/should do to fix the problem.

However, amidst debate, few have stopped to interrogate that initial sentence; no one asks about SBCI (the company that conducted the research) or questions their report. In fact, people seem willing to presume SBCI’s neutrality. Speaking on-air to CBC’s Matt Galloway, Lysyk admitted that when she obtained the report she simply assumed its data and conclusions were objective and valid, and used them to develop her recommendations.

But should the public not know more about who this group is, and what is actually contained in the report?

All research, no matter how detailed, has biases and motivations that shape the findings. Given that SBCI’s research is now informing policy discourse and millions of public dollars might be spent as a result, we are right to ask questions that the Auditor General failed to: What are SBCI’s motivations? What are the company’s biases? And how might these biases and motivations influence their operations and findings?

According to its website, SBCI “is a not-for-profit co-operative, established in 1994 by a number of Ontario school boards to provide advice and guidance on workers’ compensation issues.” SBCI boasts a members list of 79 school boards and school authorities from across Ontario, including 28 English Catholic school boards. Day-to-day operations are run by a staff of 34 people, divided into Administration, Attendance Management, Actuarial, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) Claims Management, and Health and Safety Management departments. The organization is governed by a 10-person Board of Directors.

This all seems fairly standard and straightforward. But consider who at SBCI is doing the selling, and who is doing the buying. Currently, of the 10-person Board of Directors, eight members simultaneously hold positions as school board superintendents or senior managers – the remaining two are recently retired superintendents. In effect, this creates a scenario where SBCI’s leadership is comprised of school board senior staff members, who sell services back to school board senior staff members – in some cases, themselves. And they earn stipends to do so. Essentially, SBCI has created a self-sustaining and self-perpetuating business ecosystem.

There is nothing illegal about incestuous dealing. However, understanding the Board of Directors’ composition opens a window into SBCI’s potential motivation. The company generates business by fixing problems in education. For SBCI to sustain itself, not only must there be problems to fix, but also the nature of the problems must require a solution sold by SBCI. In this light, it is helpful to reconsider some of the specific claims in SBCI’s attendance report:

- Between 2011 and 2015, education workers increased average sick day use from 8.86 to 10.29 days (a 15 per cent increase at the elementary level, and a 14 per cent increase at secondary).
- The direct cost of absenteeism across Ontario is more than \$900 million per year.
- The 2012 MOU was the turning point, precipitating increased teacher use of sick leave.
- Boards should implement attendance management programs (which SBCI sells).

As noted, news stories about the report have generated heated debate, and many teachers have been forced to defend themselves against accusations of a “use it or lose it” attitude toward sick leave. As one reporter put it, “It’s hard to believe that respected professionals, who are so well treated by the public with their high salaries, rock-solid job security and plenty of vacation time, would act in such a petty, self-serving manner. But these numbers don’t lie.”

Or do they?

When stories initially broke in 2016, OECTA representatives asked SBCI to see the report in order to engage in discussion; SBCI refused. The Association asked to at least see the methodology to determine how sick leave was calculated; SBCI refused. More recently, in consultation with the Auditor General’s office, OECTA asked for more data so as to comprehensively respond to the report’s claims; nothing was provided. As it turns out, almost nobody has seen the report, outside of paying customers, one news outlet, and the Auditor General’s office. If an organization is concerned about a crisis in absenteeism, and claims to have proof, why would it refuse to show its math and explain how it arrived at its calculations?

By hiding its data and methodology from the public, SBCI makes it impossible to verify any of its findings. It also makes it impossible to address basic questions about the report’s claims and conclusions. Take SBCI’s dataset, for instance. Several of Ontario’s largest school boards did not provide data to SBCI. Despite this, SBCI published a province-wide average. These missing boards, with their tens of thousands of teachers, would significantly impact analysis. What adjustments did SBCI make to account for these missing figures? Are numbers weighted? Were regional and confounding variables taken into account? None of this is known or explained.

Then, there are more serious questions about SBCI’s calculations. Every news story, as well as the Auditor General’s report, specifically refers to teacher “sick leave” when reporting SBCI’s data. However, this might be misleading. The comparable board-level data at OECTA’s disposal do not align with SBCI’s numbers. In fact, it is apparent that SBCI’s figures likely include not only sick leave, but other forms of absenteeism, as well – such as maternity leave, bereavement leave, unpaid personal leaves of absence, etc. If this is true, then by bundling various categories

of leave under the umbrella of “sick leave,” SBCI has produced an artificially inflated average, and thus an artificially conflated – and inaccurate – perception of teachers’ use of sick leave. Could this explain SBCI’s continued refusal to publish its methodology?

There is a final concern. In the SBCI report, the 2012 MOU serves as a flashpoint: teachers lost the ability to bank sick days and rebelled. This anti-teacher narrative helps justify attendance management programs; however, digging deeper suggests that a strict pre-/post-2012 demarcation threatens to conceal a variety of different, sometimes competing trends at a more granular level.

For instance, the Auditor General’s report reprints SBCI tables from two Catholic boards; that data indicate that between 2012 and 2016 sick leave use *decreased* among elementary and secondary teachers in those boards by an average of 2.5 per cent. If other boards in surrounding areas show similar trends, then perhaps geography or local politics are more accurate explanatory variables than the MOU. Similarly, previous research reports show that between 2006 and 2010, teacher absenteeism in some boards increased at rates similar to those after 2012 – with a particular spike in 2009 resulting from the H1N1 flu outbreak. For these boards, absenteeism is better viewed as ebbing and flowing over the past decade, rather than being a post-2012 development.

All of this is meant to problematize rather than dismiss SBCI’s findings. Without SBCI publishing its methodology, there is no way for anyone to determine if the report skews or misrepresents data. However, this is only part of the problem. The bigger issue is that by not challenging SBCI’s findings, the report has become accepted as fact. Now, an unverified report, with undisclosed methodology, from a company that stands to gain from promoting a perceived crisis, is influencing government discussions. By incorporating SBCI’s data into her report, the Auditor General lends further legitimacy to those findings, and perpetuates an anti-teacher, anti-union narrative.

This is unfortunate. There are genuine discussions to be had about absenteeism. Teachers, like all education workers, have been subject to ever-increasing workloads, pressures, and violence in recent years. Stress-related long-term disability cases are on the rise. However, to have productive conversations, transparency is critical and apples-to-apples data comparisons must be possible. If SBCI wants to be at the forefront of this issue, it must show its math and verify its findings. Until this occurs, teachers will continue to be attacked in public, and SBCI will continue to politicize and profit from the fallout. This is not a path to meaningful progress. SBCI must be called to account. If the company continues to hide its data and methodology, then its credibility should be the only thing marked absent.

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Mark Tagliaferri is Communications Specialist in the Communications department at the OECTA Provincial Office.

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION

## How to get involved in the 2018 OCT Governing Council election

By Peter MacDonald

Elections matter. For proof, just look at what happened south of the border in 2016. For all intents and purposes, 78,000 voters within three counties in three states (Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania) swung the US presidential election in favour of Donald Trump. It was a stunning upset that has brought far-ranging consequences in America and around the world.

I mention this to underscore the point that every vote counts. This spring, you and I, as voting members of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), have an opportunity to make our voices heard by casting a ballot in the election for representatives on the Governing Council of the OCT.

Why does it matter? Because the members of the OCT Governing Council set policies that regulate our profession. They handle complaints from the public about teachers, and decide whether to exercise their power to discipline our members, up to and including revocation of our teaching certificates. They also set the fees that teachers pay to obtain and maintain our certificates.

In early December, the OCT's Governing Council met to vote on a proposal to raise the annual fee by 20 per cent, boosting the amount from \$150 to almost \$180. Prior to the vote on the fee increase, Chris Cowley, Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) President and a member of the OECTA Provincial Executive, made a presentation before the Governing Council, arguing against the fee increase. The rationale for the increase was to accelerate mortgage payments on the OCT property, located along the Mink Mile in Toronto's Yorkville area, one of the most expensive locales in Canada. Cowley stated that it was unfair to ask today's working teachers to assume a heavier burden in

order to retire a mortgage. In the end, the OCT Governing Council voted against raising the fee.

As members of OECTA, we elect representatives to the Ontario Teachers' Federation, as do the members of the other teaching affiliates. The affiliates, through the OTF, have done great work advocating on behalf of members, not only on the OCT fee debate but also lobbying stakeholders about the "mandate creep" of the OCT into areas that are outside its core duty, which is to regulate the teaching profession. It is, after all, a regulatory body and not a teacher advocacy organization. That is what teacher union affiliates do.

Over the past few years, the OCT has delivered professional development, run contests, offered prizes, and promoted its very own discount loyalty program. How the organization believes that any of these initiatives relate to its core regulatory functions and mandate, to maintain the public's confidence in the profession, is anybody's guess.

OTF's advocacy on behalf of teachers has yielded positive results. In addition to the Governing Council's vote against raising the membership fee, the OCT recently suspended its Loyalty Discount Program. Our elected representatives to the OTF are doing their part, but as individual members of the OCT, we can also have a more direct impact by electing teacher members to the Governing Council. The Governing Council is made up of 37 members, 23 of whom are elected and 14 whom are appointed by the government. Teachers get to elect 19 representatives, broken down by region and the four publicly funded systems. Administrators, supervisory officers, faculties of education, and private school members vote for the other four elected representatives.

I do not believe I have met a member who likes the Ontario College of Teachers. However, it is a reality that all 45,000 OECTA members have to deal with, whether it is to obtain and maintain our teaching certificates or, in rare instances, to face its disciplinary committee. As a regulatory body, the OCT has the power to impact teachers' livelihoods. Yet, voter turnout for OCT Governing Council has registered in the low single digits for each of its triennial elections since the turn of the century.

You have an opportunity to add your voice and change that dynamic. Voting begins on March 5. The deadline to cast your vote is April 9. Research the candidates, communicate with them through their blogs, and make an informed choice. Make the candidates accountable to you and remind them of their legislated mandate and of teachers' expectation that they respect the boundaries of that mandate. Most of all, please take the time to vote – it can make a world of difference.

The Provincial Executive has endorsed the following candidates:

**Solange Côté**  
NORTHWEST REGION FULL-TIME

**Stéphane Vallée - Acclaimed**  
NORTHWEST REGION PART-TIME/  
FULL-TIME

**Nicole van Woudenberg**  
SOUTHCENTRAL REGION FULL-TIME

**Alicia Nunn**  
ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
ELEMENTARY

*Peter MacDonald is a member of the Government Relations department at the OECTA Provincial Office.*

# Voting begins March 5!

As an Ontario Certified Teacher in Good Standing, you can vote for candidates to serve on the governing Council of the Ontario College of Teachers.

Council members serve to regulate Ontario's teaching profession in the public interest. Council decisions help to shape education in Ontario.

To learn more about the candidates, see their bios and blogs at:

[www.oct.ca](http://www.oct.ca) → [About the College](#) → [Council Election 2018](#).

Be a voter.  
It's never been easier.

Vote online from March 5 to  
April 9, 2018



WORKING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Learn more at [oct-oeeo.ca/councilelection2018](http://oct-oeeo.ca/councilelection2018), call our election information line at 416-961-8800 (toll-free in Ontario 1-888-534-2222), ext. 558, or email [youdecide2018@oct.ca](mailto:youdecide2018@oct.ca).



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