



The Sentinel



Virtual Classrooms - Are They Here To Stay? Michael Totten, President (Acting) & CEO of Elementary

If Mr. Lecce and Mr. Ford get their way, COVID-19 will be the weapon used to bring devastating and sweeping changes to publicly funded education. And why wouldn't they bring these changes? After all, it is quite clear that the Ford Government wants nothing more than to take publicly funded education and privatize it. Mandatory E-learn courses were just the beginning. While provincially, OECTA did as much damage control as possible on the issue of mandatory E-learn during bargaining, no one could have predicted the lasting effects that Covid brought on this year and will bring into future years.

This government will clearly do anything they can to reduce the importance of teachers to their students. Using a pandemic to establish new rules in education when the entire education system is hanging on by a thread is about as low as you can go. So of course, the Ford government

went there. Once the door opened to virtual classrooms, this government clearly saw dollar signs. The creation of permanent virtual schools is now not just a thought, but an all-out discussion. Out of one side of his mouth, Mr. Lecce has claimed how important it is to have students in school. As teachers, we couldn't agree more. We know that the social interaction students get with their peers and the face-to-face personal support students get from their teachers is what makes school so foundational to the development of our students.

Yet, the creation of virtual schools is high on Mr. Lecce's agenda and the lasting effects of students and teachers being in front of a computer for over 7 hours a day will not be known for years to come - and those 7 hours do not take into account time spent on the computer outside of the school day completing and preparing assignments. As if that was not reason enough,

stuck behind screens, students are feeling more disconnected than ever from their learning environments and their mental health is suffering because of it.

The recent funding for education announced with the Budget, clearly shows there is no interest from this government in investing to recover learning losses incurred under emergency learning and no interest in protecting the incredible world-renowned system that we have developed in Ontario over the years. It is so important that we prepare for next year's election. It is so important that we get ready to do more than just vote. It is so important that we get ready to play an active part in the leadership race for Premier of our amazing province. Ontario, our students, our schools, and ultimately ourselves cannot withstand another 4 years with this government.

A woman with voluminous, curly brown hair is shown in profile, facing right. She has a wide-open mouth, showing her teeth and tongue, as if she is screaming or shouting. She is wearing a plain white t-shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey and white gradient.

Screaming into a Hurricane

Karen Ebanks
Recording Secretary & Release Officer

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February 2021, OECTA drafted a *Pre-Budget Submission to the Ministry of Finance* to note education concerns and priorities before the budget dropped. The full report can be found [here](#). This submission called for *Quality Publicly Funded Education for All* and *Social and Economic Justice*, with an urge to the conservative provincial government to act and invest for the betterment of students and teachers. Here are some highlights:

Consultation and Collaboration

Governments can successfully reform publicly funded education when guided in policymaking with evidence and experience provided by teachers. On the front lines in classrooms, teachers possess firsthand knowledge of educational policy in action in the classroom, and know which methods yield the highest level of student success. Genuine, regular, open, and constructive dialogue with teachers and teacher unions to inform policy and decision-making is needed.

Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the shortcomings in Ontario's mental health system as many students do not know where to turn for help and wait times are long. Eliminating EQAO could reduce student anxiety and allow savings to be invested into schools to support mental health. The Canadian Teachers' Federation reported that 70% of teachers

are concerned for their own mental health and well-being. 99% of OECTA members surveyed do not feel they are being supported by the Ministry of Education as they struggle to meet both personal and professional obligations.

Special Education

Special Education has been underfunded in Ontario for too long. 80% of school boards are spending more on Special Education than they are fiscally allotted by the province. Movement through the Identification, placement, and review process can be slow, leaving students going long periods of time without their needs being met as they wait for therapists, psychologists and case workers. Catholic Teachers urge the government to immediately implement and properly fund a needs-based autism program to support students with autism.

Safer Schools for All

Health and safety focus has recently centered around preventing the spread of COVID-19, but violence against teachers is concerning. 85% of OECTA members surveyed say incidents of violence against teachers are increasing; 80% say incidents are becoming more severe. These conditions make teaching difficult. Investments are needed to support the social, emotional and behavioural needs of students. An approach to deal with the

needs of both victims and perpetrators of bullying is needed.

Infrastructure and Technology

The backlog for school repairs continues to climb. This is not a new problem, and the PC government has pledged less funds to address the issue than previous governments. Persistent lack of funding in technology, lack of consistent internet connectivity, lack of access to technology-related professional training for teachers, and lack of access to technology for students have been detrimental. No one should be forced to work or learn in buildings with leaking roofs, poor ventilation, or mold.

“Talking to this government is like screaming into a hurricane.”

*Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association
President Liz Stuart*

Full-day Kindergarten

The full-day Kindergarten (FDK) program is preparing children socially and academically, leading to better outcomes in future primary years, with particular benefits seen in immigrant families, low-income families and families where English is not the first language. The model of both an early childhood educator (ECE) and a teacher in the classroom works

well by combining knowledge about early childhood development with assessment skills. Ontario's FDK program is a ground-breaking, world-leading initiative. More needs to be done to reduce class sizes and reduce split classes.

Indigenous Education

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission drew attention to issues in education, including the importance of integrating Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum and ensuring accurate reflection of Indigenous history. Catholic teachers were disappointed that one of the government's first actions in office was to pause planned curriculum resource writing sessions. Significant gaps have been identified: schools with high proportions of Indigenous students compared to other Ontario schools see lower than average access to guidance teachers, teacher-librarians, and music and physical education programs. Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is one of the most urgent and fundamental issues for Ontarians - government funding is far below what is necessary to achieve this.

English Language Learners

Currently, funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) programs is based on census data and immigration statistics, and does not reflect

the needs of learners based on proficiency. A lack of oversight and transparency means some school boards might not be spending the funds on programming for students who need support. Many learners require additional supports or extra assistance. Teachers often depend on nonverbal gestures to understand and be understood. The move to remote learning has made this more difficult, raising concerns that these learners may suffer from additional learning loss once the pandemic is over.

Adult and Continuing Education

Adult and continuing education programs are funded at roughly two-thirds the level of regular day school credit programs. Since coming into office, the Ford government has made consistent cuts to adult and continuing education budgets. In many cases adult and continuing education programs are being delivered to new immigrants or students who have been marginalized from the regular day school credit program. As a result of much funding being directed only at day programs, adult or continuing education students who have significant needs often experience large class sizes, different classes being delivered in one room, and a lack of early intervention processes, while teachers are often employed from contract to contract with substandard salaries, working

conditions, and rights.

Professional Development

Teachers are dedicated lifelong learners who continually upgrade knowledge and skills on their own time and at their own expense. Thousands have taken opportunities to upgrade skills in math and technology voluntarily. The government has recently implemented a math test for incoming teachers. A more beneficial method would be to ensure that teachers have the resources and supports necessary to deliver math content in the classroom. Teacher-led and teacher-directed professional development is the most efficient and effective form of professional learning.

Publicly Funded Catholic Education

Serving almost 650,000 Catholic and non-Catholic students, publicly funded Catholic schools have made significant contributions to the overall excellence of Ontario's world-renowned education system. In addition to teaching literacy, math, and science, we develop students' character and commitment to the common good, and encourage them to be discerning believers, creative and holistic thinkers, self-directed learners, caring family members, and responsible citizens. It is a common misconception that merging Ontario's school systems could save significant funds, but reports have found that there are more costs to merging large school boards/organizations than

savings. Shared facilities and shared services could better serve student and community needs, save some funds and make efficient use of school spaces.

A Strong Public Response

Millions of Ontarians have lost work, seen cuts to wages/hours, or been forced to make tough decisions between health concerns and family responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ontario Federation of Labour has noted: the deregulation of health and safety standards, the rollback of workers' rights and protections, the erosion of progressive taxation, the retrenchment of welfare state programs, the privatization and underfunding of public services, and the disregard of equity-seeking groups – much of which the Ford government has participated in – have all led us to this point. Paid sick leave for Ontario workers must be legislated immediately.

Early Childhood Education and Care

It has long been known that affordable, accessible, high quality early childhood education and care increases equity in outcomes at school, creates a strong foundation for lifelong learning, and improves labour force participation particularly among women which boosts household incomes and reduces poverty. For every \$1 spent, \$6 of economic benefits are yielded. When the public

health emergency forced most childcare centres to close, the additional care burden in the home fell predominantly on women. The labour force participation rate of women has fallen to its lowest level in decades. Affordable, accessible, high quality child care funded by the provincial government can play a threefold role in recovery from the COVID-19 emergency.

This ends the highlights of the *Pre-Budget Submission to the Ministry of Finance*, detailing education concerns and priorities, dated February 2021. Just as if the Ontario government was paying extremely close attention to submission contents, on February 26, Deputy Minister Nancy Naylor issued a memo to school boards' Directors of Education indicating that the \$1.6 billion in temporary resources to support the safe reopening of schools, would not be in place next year - school boards were directed to be cautious in their planning and adjust accordingly.

It is as if schools do not continue to find themselves in the grip of rising cases as they move steadily through another wave and another variant. It is as if the Deputy Minister knows for a fact that COVID-19 will disappear by the start of the new school year, and there will be no additional need for pandemic funding. It is as if this government has learned no

lessons on the importance of advance planning. It is as if an underfunded and overstrained education system forced to make emergency learning work under extraordinary circumstances under COVID-19 can right itself on its own.

On March 24, 2021 when Ontario's budget dropped, it held more disappointment and devastation for education. \$1.6 billion in cuts confirmed. Thousands of teachers and education workers will lose their jobs. Future spending increases are so minute that they will not keep up with the rate of inflation. Maintaining the quality of publicly-funded education pre-pandemic is a distant thought. Recovering the learning losses suffered during the pandemic post-pandemic appears an impossible feat.

It is as if that was not enough...

On March 25, 2021 the Globe and Mail reported that a leaked memo stated that the government was considering making remote learning permanent for the next school year. This consideration amidst reports that student and teacher mental health is at an all time low with the pandemic, isolation, too much screen time, and high levels of disconnection from learning in remote environments. If we can destroy the quality of publicly-funded education in Ontario, we can widen the path on the road to privatization.

The "Option" of Permanent Online Schooling?

Michael Oyston, Councillor

After the release of the Ontario Spring Budget, a report surfaced claiming the Province of Ontario is currently considering a move to make online learning a permanent part of publicly funded education in Ontario. If enacted, this would allow parents to enroll their children in remote learning even after the COVID-19

Pandemic has ended. In addition to e-learn courses, the government will mandate school boards to provide online learning during snow days (as has been introduced by the YCDSB) as well as other days where an emergency school closure would be warranted.

The Ministry has proposed that the implementation of this program could be offered using 3 models:

Option 1:

Full-day synchronous online learning for students of all ages, which would be run by the school boards and would be "useful for students who cannot or prefer not to access the physical school environment."

This option presents many concerns as it opens the door to full time hybrid learning. Our teachers are currently using this method and it presents a host of

challenges including issues with attendance, lack of access to technology, issues of academic integrity, and teacher burnout. This model does not indicate if a student would be required to commit to fully synchronous

learning year round, for one term only, for a week or even a day here or there. It sets an incredibly unrealistic expectation for educators who would be delivering this model. As teachers who are currently living this, we know that the disadvantages clearly outweigh any positives that the government will attempt to promote.

Option 2:

Individual high-school-level classes, taught online by teachers and run by school boards, that take place at a dedicated slot in the student's timetable.

This option currently runs in the YCDSB with students taking courses delivered by YCT OECTA Teachers who have this

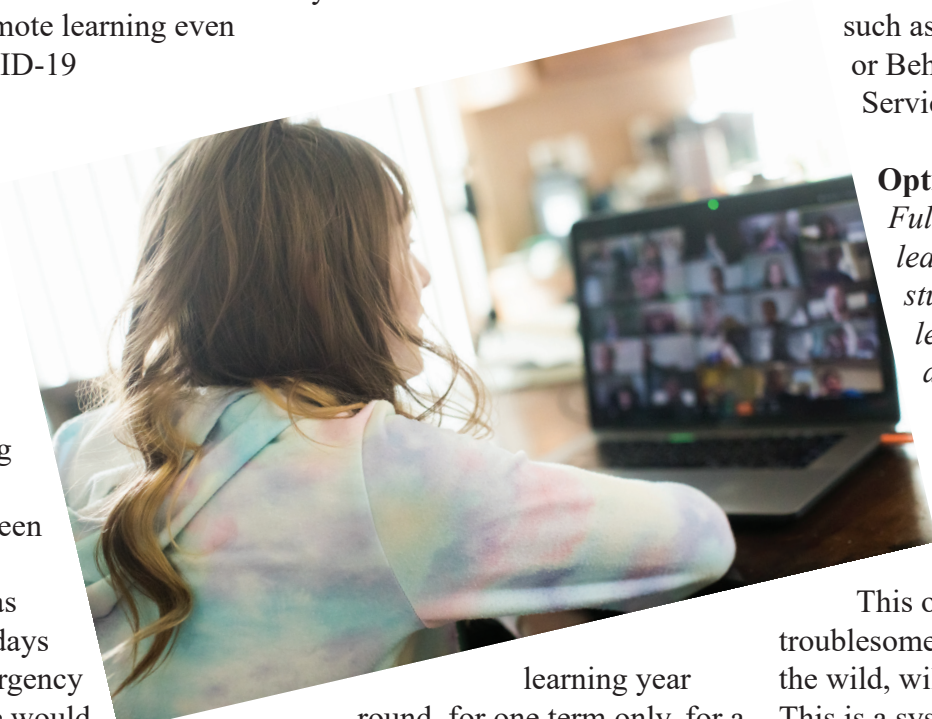
as a dedicated period in their timetable. This model allows teachers to communicate with the homeschool of the students, provides an administrator to deal with discipline issues that may arise, and allows teachers to connect to Board supports such as Special Education or Behaviour Resource Services.

Option 3:

Fully independent online learning for high school students who "prefer to learn asynchronously and at flexible hours." This option would be run by TVO and would require the school board to pay a fee.

This option is the most troublesome as it really is akin to the wild, wild west of education. This is a system in which students are farmed out to a service provider who assigns tasks for the students to complete and in turn, are granted a credit. There is zero accountability as to who is on the other side of the screen. A parent who would like to speak to the "instructor" would have no such luck as there is no indicator of the identity of the instructor or where they are located as these courses have the potential to be outsourced-nationally or internationally. Students who have special education needs would not be able to readily access their supports, and students in crisis will go unidentified, as the caring adult may be replaced with an algorithm which will

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only monitor spelling, grammar, time logged on screen, etc. There is also the issue of substantial academic dishonesty which is bound to arise. As students have the flexibility to complete the courses on their own time with little to no accountability, this enables credit mills to become more prevalent and grant credits to students who have the means to purchase them.

“Sadly, option #3 is the option of choice for Minister Lecce and the Ford Government...”

Sadly, option #3 is the option of choice for Minister Lecce and the Ford Government as these independent online credits have not been reported to have class caps, therefore allowing for massive enrollment. This will be a huge cost saving measure for a government that has already taken over a billion dollars out of the education budget. In addition to saving costs, it is the intent of the government to turn a profit from these courses by packaging

them and selling them to various jurisdictions around the world. Unfortunately, our Ontario students will be tasked with solving the inherent issues in the system before they are polished up and sold off.

A rebuttal may be that no matter how awful option #3, a student and their family will simply not elect to choose it. Unfortunately, they may not have that choice. For example, a Secondary school may have enough students enrolled to require 14 sections of Grade 9 English. However, with money being taken out of the system through cuts and “bribe” payments to families, the school may only receive funding for 12 sections of English, forcing students who require an English credit as a graduation requirement, to gravitate to option#3. Decisions may fall to guidance counsellors as to who is eligible to take classes in the building and who will learn from a screen. Inevitably, families won’t tolerate the online option and will start to explore alternative options such as switching school Boards, or the preferred route of Minister Lecce - a move to the private school system.

These options are being presented by Minister Lecce under the guise of “choice.” This is clearly laying the groundwork for privatization. Turning our students into clients so that private providers can sell off our kids to the lowest bidder.

Currently these options are not in legislation, however, the government has only confirmed that they are consulting and engaging with stakeholders on maintaining this choice for parents and making sure that it is available for September. As teachers, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, we are stakeholders in education. Minister Lecce has made his disdain for teachers clear time and time again. We know that he does not want to consult with his education partners. This is why it is so important that you reach out to your local MPP and let them know that publicly funded education is important to you. Let them know that as a constituent you are vehemently opposed to privatization of our children. Now more than ever, you need to make your voices heard and your vote matter.

What to look for when buying a car seat

Keeping your child safe while driving is extremely important. A car seat or booster seat is a crucial piece of safety equipment that, when used correctly, greatly reduces the risk of injury or death in the event of a collision. Read on for frequently asked questions about purchasing a car seat to learn what to look for to best protect your child while in the car.

Learn more at www.otipinsurance.com/article109.



OECTA'S PROVINCIAL LTD PLAN

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

Most members are in a highly vulnerable financial position when they are confronted with a loss of income during a lengthy or permanent disability. The OECTA provincial long-term disability (LTD) insurance plan provides a safety net that will replace a percentage of your salary and provide pension plan protection if you are unable to work because of an illness or injury.

This being said, it is possible to terminate your LTD coverage, in which case you will no longer have premiums deducted from your pay.

Three scenarios

There are three scenarios in which you might be able to cancel your LTD insurance:

- 1) You are eligible for a 60 per cent unreduced service pension, or will be within the latter of either: the next 110 working days, or the expiration of your sick leave credits.
 - To qualify for an unreduced pension you must have the “85 factor,” meaning your age and years of qualifying service add up to 85.



- To qualify for a 60 per cent unreduced pension, you must meet the above criteria with 30 years of credited service.
- 2) 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.
 - 3) Your retirement date is within the next 110 working days, and you have notified both the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and your school board.

Eligible until retirement

You should know that you are not required to terminate your LTD coverage simply because you have notified your board of your intention to retire. You are still eligible for coverage up to the date of your retirement, and you have the right to make a claim if you become disabled prior to this date. If approved, LTD benefits would be payable until: you recover, you become eligible for a 60 per cent unreduced service pension, or you reach the end of the month following your 65th birthday (as long as you were not receiving Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan benefits).

You might have sound reasons for cancelling your LTD coverage and discontinuing your premium payments, but you should carefully consider your options. You likely do not want to be in a situation where you are unable to work and are not receiving sufficient income.

Also note that coverage cannot be cancelled retroactively.

If you wish to terminate your LTD coverage, you should complete an Application for Coverage Termination. Submit the completed application to your local OECTA unit office at least two months prior to the desired cancellation date to ensure the board stops deducting LTD premiums on time. Be sure to include the required supporting documentation.

Your LTD benefits plan is sponsored by OECTA Provincial and administered by the Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan (OTIP). Please do not call your school board for assistance; direct any questions to your local OECTA unit office.

What is OTIP?

The Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan (OTIP) is a not-for-profit insurance advocate that is part of the education community. OTIP is governed, led, and inspired by the four education affiliates and their local leaders. OTIP's products and services include a full range of group and individual insurance from your group benefit plans and long-term disability coverage to individual insurance products such as your home and auto coverage.

The information for this article was provided by the Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan. To learn more, visit otip.com.

Application for LTD Coverage Termination

Patricia Chiarella, Acting 2nd Vice President

If you are a York member who falls within one of the **three scenarios** listed in the accompanying article,

- i/ Have accumulated 30 credited years of service or have reached your 85 factor,
- ii/ Have reached the end of the month in which you turn 65, or finally,
- iii/ Are within 110 working days of your scheduled retirement date,

you are eligible to complete an Application for LTD Coverage Termination by following these steps:

1. Sign in to your online account at www.otpp.com/members using your account number and password.
2. Once signed in, click on “Your Pension” toward the top of the screen.
3. **Service Record:** Once you are in “Your Pension”, please locate the “Service Record” section and either download/print a copy of this statement which confirms the number of credited years you have accumulated. You will be required to submit a copy of this statement to the Board of- fice with your application for LTD termination.
4. **Annual Pension Statement:** Also through “Your Pension”, please locate the “Document Centre” where you will find a list of PDFs which house each of the annual pension statements you have received over the course of your career. Please locate the appropriate statement which displays the date you will be or were eligible for an unreduced pension. A copy of this statement will also be required with your application for the Board.
5. Your final action will be to access the LTD Coverage Termination Application located [here](#). Once you have completed and signed the form, please submit the application along with a copy of your Service Record and Annual Pension Statement to Tiziana.Marcellitti@ycdsb.ca

YOU'RE DONE!

If you have any questions or require assistance with this process, please contact me at the Unit Office at 905-508-2008 or email me at PatriciaChiarella@yctoecta.com.



YORK CATHOLIC
TEACHERS

Budget 2021 - \$1 Billion CUT from Public Education Michael Oyston - Councillor

On Wednesday March 21 the Ontario Conservatives released their Spring Budget, and to say that it is devastating to publicly funded education would be an understatement. A very quick summary of the budget reveals that education funding will fall by approximately \$800 Million. This figure does not include the \$381 Million grant that was provided by the federal government at the start of the school year. Additionally, the \$1.6 Billion that was added at the start of the pandemic will not be renewed. It is also important to note that many school boards were forced to deplete their reserves in order to offset COVID related costs, including lowering class caps in elementary schools when the Ontario Conservatives refused to fund smaller class sizes. The depleted reserves were spun as Conservative funding, when in actuality it was money Board's would be allocating to future uses. It also must be noted that the education spending that the Ford Conservatives are touting over the next three years will fall well below the rate of inflation during that same time period. In summary, this government is not chipping away at public education funding, they are taking a sledge hammer to it.

This budget should come as no surprise to anyone as the Ford agenda from day one has been to undermine public services like health care and education so that the only outcomes are to destabilize the system and set the stage for privatization. This push

towards privatization can be seen in the bribe money that Minister Lecce is offering to parents instead of putting it back into classrooms. In an effort to purchase votes, the Conservatives will be offering \$400 for every school aged child, \$500/child for Students with Special Education needs. These payouts will not be needs-based tested. This means that the family who makes \$30,000/year, receives the same support as a student whose family makes \$300,000/year or even \$3M/year.

“ \$1.6 Billion that was added at the start of the pandemic will not be renewed. “

This money is public tax dollars, and is not exclusive to families who choose public education. This money also goes to parents who place their children into the private system. Money that was allocated to support public education is being siphoned out to support families who choose private schools. What the Conservatives are championing as \$1.8 Billion back into parents' pockets is money that has been taken out of your classrooms. With this new round of money that the Conservatives are offering, \$400/child in a class of 25 students is the equivalent of taking \$10,000 out of that classroom. Just imagine what a classroom teacher could do with a budget of that magnitude. This support for parents would take

\$400,000 out of a high school with 1000 students. These are monies that are being directed to private school families. These figures do not include the previous payouts of \$200/student that the Conservatives previously passed out. The government is trying to misdirect close to \$1 Billion in cuts with \$400 cheques. This is money that belongs in already underfunded classrooms where students would benefit from it the most.

With the budget that the Conservatives presented, it is clear that they have no intention of addressing the issues of the pandemic that will linger well into the future. Learning loss, mental health, and school health & safety are issues that will be even more prevalent in September 2021. When funding our classrooms will be even more important, this government is focused on cuts and bribes. With a Provincial election looming in June 2022, it is imperative that our members mobiize to ensure that the Ford government is removed from office. An education-friendly government, a government that invests, not cuts from education, must be elected to lead the province in 2022 and beyond. As always, contact your local MPP and let them know that education money belongs in the classroom where students need it most.

An Update from Your OTRO, Anna Polisco, Occasional Teacher Release Officer

Due to COVID and a shortened 2020 AGM last year, the following Action Directive approved by York Unit was not considered. This year, we hope to bring all York Unit 2020 and 2021 resolutions to the floor of AGM 2021, including the following resolution:

Action Directive

(OTBU Regional Reps to COP, Simcoe Elementary and Secondary, and York)

That the Association, through the Canadian Teachers' Federation, lobby the federal government and Service Canada to remove the employment insurance exceptions for all occasional teachers, which prevent them from receiving employment insurance benefits during non-teaching periods.

Rationale: *During the July and August non-teaching period, occasional teachers who have a long term occasional contract scheduled for the*

beginning of September are not able to collect employment insurance benefits. Long term occasional teachers' contracts can end at any time, leaving them without income. These teachers should be considered "casual" workers and entitled to employment insurance benefits. The exceptions under the Employment Insurance Act wrongfully penalize long term occasional teachers and adversely affect their livelihood during non-teaching periods.

Over the last 2 years, I have been working tirelessly to better the rights and working conditions for all occasional teachers. Occasional teachers are working just as tirelessly yet are unable to collect employment insurance benefits during July and August if scheduled for a long term occasional job in September, leaving them without much-needed income. By bringing this resolution forward, we call on our membership to recognise the in-

justice of the system, and solicit their and the Provincial body's help to rectify yet another wrong that the government has imposed on us.

I would like to thank the following 15 occasional teacher delegates for giving up part of their spring break to support this and all York Unit resolutions: Theresa Byer, Christine Choma, Luana Ciccone, Patricia Dabrowski, Natasha D'Amelio, Nancy Falcao, Daniel Fiore, Loredana Foti, Daniela Fraietta, Amanda Gervasi, Patricia Graham, Julie Pauletig, Anna Polisco, Stephanie Rea and Maria Santella. Each delegate will represent over 100 York Unit occasional teachers at AGM 2021.

As always, should you have any questions, feedback, or concerns, do not hesitate to reach out to me – I am only an email or phone call away. I look forward to continuing to work with you. Stay healthy and safe!

Workplace Harassment vs Workplace Conflict Michael Totten, President (Acting) & CEO of Elementary

Workplace Harassment:

- Defined by the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act(OHSA) as “engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.
- It comprises objectionable act(s), comment(s) or display(s) that demean, belittle, or cause personal humiliation or embarrassment, and any act of intimidation or threat.
- It also includes harassment within the meaning of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (i.e. based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability and pardoned conviction).
- Essentially, the definition of harassment means that **more than one act or event is needed** in order to constitute harassment and that taken individually, this act or event need not constitute harassment. It is the repetition that generates the harassment.
- In other words, harassment consists of repeated and persistent behaviours towards an individual to torment, undermine, frustrate or provoke a reaction from that person. It is a behaviour that with persistence, pressures, frightens, intimidates or incapacitates another person. Each behaviour viewed individually may seem inoffensive; it is the synergy and repetitive characteristic of the behaviours that produce harmful effects.
- However, **one single incident** can constitute harassment when it is demonstrated that it is **severe** and has a **significant and lasting impact** on the complainant(i.e sexual harassment)
- If each element above is not present in the case or cannot be proven, there will not likely be findings of harassment.
- Usually on-going

Young Authors/Jeunes Écrivains 2021

Alison Misa, Chair & Councillor

The Young Authors/Jeunes Écrivains writing contest is hosted by OECTA Provincial, and held annually. Teachers across all OECTA units are invited to submit their students' written submissions in the categories of short story, poetry, non-fiction, and plays. York students and teachers always participate enthusiastically! Along with everything else over the course of the past year, the Young Authors Contest faced a major change. The contest moved to a digital platform, where all entries were received and judged online.

As Chair, I was apprehensive about the logistics of the contest, including making sure that all digital entries were received and acknowledged. Similar to last year, when we were embroiled in labour strife, the entries were slow to trickle in. However, the Young Authors inbox began to fill rapidly as the February 19th deadline approached, and by the scoring evening on February 25th, we had received 51 English (41 elementary and 10 secondary) and 16 French (6 elementary and 10 secondary) submissions. In comparison, the 2019/2020 contest yielded 58 English (42 elementary and 16 secondary) and 27 (11 elementary and 16 secondary) French submissions.

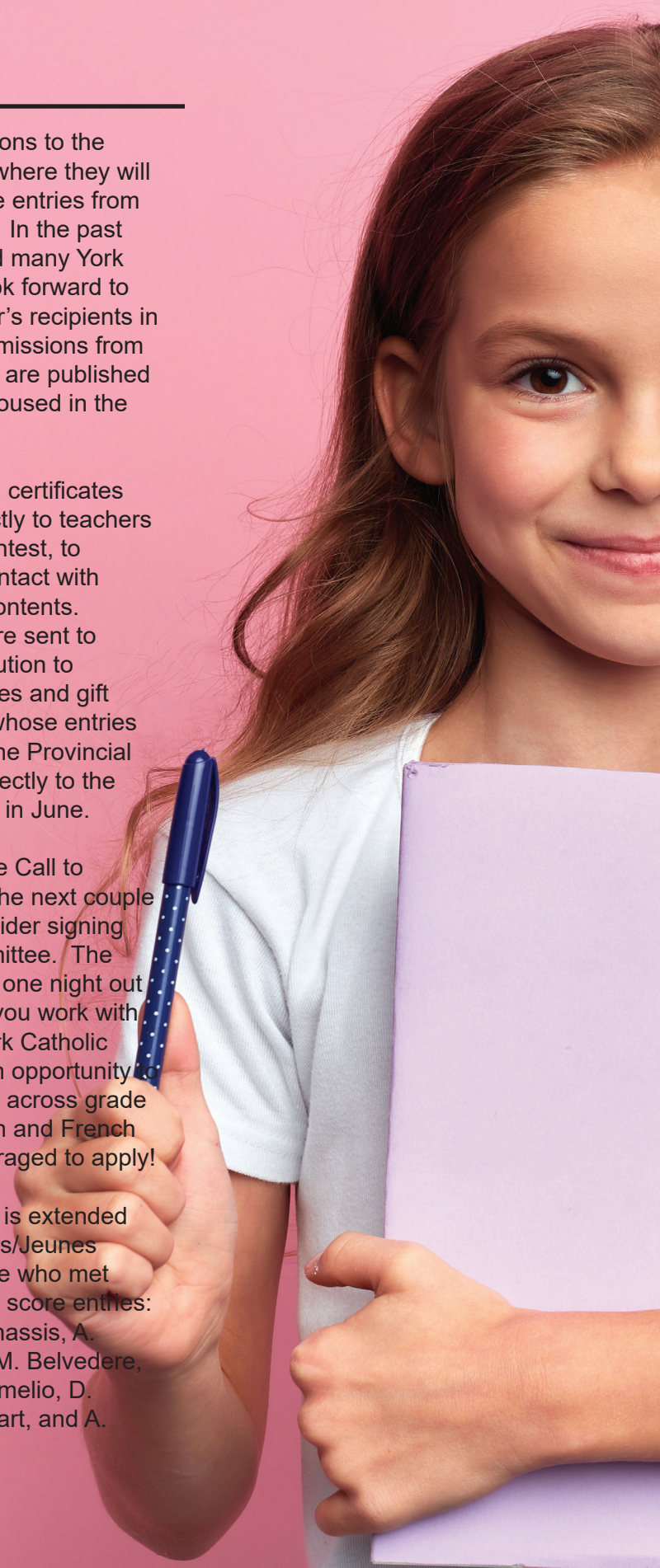
Despite all the challenges York Catholic Teachers have been enduring this school year, they rose to the occasion to highlight and celebrate their students' writing. Congratulations to all who entered this year's contest! The Young Authors/Jeunes Écrivains Committee is pleased to have forwarded 15 English and

13 French submissions to the Provincial contest, where they will be judged alongside entries from all other local units. In the past we have recognized many York winners, and we look forward to celebrating this year's recipients in June. Winning submissions from across the province are published in a book, usually housed in the school library.

In schools this year, certificates are being sent directly to teachers who entered the contest, to minimize human contact with the envelope and contents. Previously, they were sent to staff reps for distribution to teachers. Certificates and gift cards for students whose entries were submitted to the Provincial level will be sent directly to the classroom teachers in June.

Please watch for the Call to Committee flyer in the next couple of months and consider signing up to join the Committee. The commitment is only one night out of the school year, you work with a great group of York Catholic teachers, and it's an opportunity to read student writing across grade levels. Both English and French teachers are encouraged to apply!

A special thank you is extended to the Young Authors/Jeunes Écrivains Committee who met virtually to read and score entries: M. Marcello, H. Manassis, A. Ricard, C. Phillips, M. Belvedere, M. Dametto, N. D'Amelio, D. Dimney, S. McTaggart, and A. DiBenedetto.



Why am I paying union dues?

Karen Ebanks - Recording Secretary & Release Officer

In my 20 years of teaching, I have never seen teachers so frustrated, angry and exhausted as they are today under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford. The days of OECTA's provincial strike are a distant memory. I would happily go back to those strike days if it meant we were not held hostage by the lack of leadership of this government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As frustration, anger and exhaustion mount, many teachers are demanding to know - *what is OECTA doing? Why am I paying union dues? Why can OECTA not protect me?* My union is the defender of teachers, the advocator of students and the guardian of fair working conditions. So why is it that when teachers need the union the most, there are such feelings of abandonment?

Teachers are working longer days with less preparation time than they are used to, while finding creative ways to support students. Teachers are the reason students are able to have some semblance of normalcy in this time of emergency learning among the lunacy of the hybrid model. Yet teachers are consistently attacked by Education Minister Stephen Lecce for absenteeism rates, while he postpones the much-needed mental health break that March

Break provides.

How is it possible that Lecce can do this? Do we not have a collective agreement? Why is the union not putting a stop to this?

Our Collective Agreement is negotiated based on existing provisions in Ontario Laws, including the Education Act. For example, Regulation 298 of The Education Act states that "A teacher's interval for a lunch break shall not be less than forty consecutive minutes." The right to a 40-minute uninterrupted lunch break was not always in The Education Act, and has not always been a part of our Collective Agreement. Regulation 298 was amended in 2001 to reflect that provision bargained and won. Collective agreements are informed by law, and laws can be amended by the government of the day.

"If there is one lesson we have learned since Ford has been in office, it is why political action is so important."

The Education Act also states that "every school year shall include a minimum of 194 school days." With enough votes, the government can amend the Act, eliminate March break, and make the school year 199

days. All with the stroke of a pen.

Doug Ford's PC government has passed its share of bills into laws that have been problematic in this province, many of which have been met with harsh criticism and mass resistance. These laws trample widely on the democratic process of elections, the rights of public sector workers and the requirement to be guided by teaching experience when leading education.

In 2018, teachers may remember Doug Ford threatening to invoke the not-withstanding clause when Ontario Superior Court Justice Edward Belobaba ruled that the province was out of order when it introduced legislation reducing the number of wards in Toronto from 47 to 25 in the middle of a municipal election.

In 2019, Bill 124 which capped the total compensation for public sector workers at 1%, was passed. Critics of the bill labeled it unconstitutional, citing the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which guarantees the rights of trade unions to negotiate collective agreements including compensation. Public sector unions across Ontario, including OECTA, have launched legal challenges against the govern-

ment on these very grounds. It will be years before there is resolution.

In 2020, Bill 197 "COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act", was passed with amendments to the Education Act. It removed the requirement that directors of education must be supervisory officers that are qualified as teachers. Lecce positioned this amendment as a move to widen the hiring pool with an aim to increase diversity in school board leadership. The York Catholic District school board trustees chose to interpret this amendment quite differently because nowhere in the bill nor in any memo nor in any policy/program memoranda are school boards directed in writing to act accordingly.

Unions can certainly pressure

the government, but cannot force the government to act in a way that supports teachers. And if unions are successful winning a challenge based on the ruling of law, there is nothing to prevent the government from amending the law when they have a majority government as Doug Ford's PCs do.

What can OECTA do? OECTA can prepare its membership to participate in the upcoming Provincial Election and encourage teachers to use their collective power. If there is one lesson we have learned since Ford has been in office, it is why political action is so important.

In 2018, Doug Ford's PCs swept all MPP seats in York Region. Teachers can make a real difference in the next election by

talking to friends and family about issues in education, assisting in election campaigns and ensuring that they get out the vote.

Where do we start? Visit <https://domoreford.ca/> to join OECTA's campaign to push Doug Ford to do more. We can start by increasing pressure on this government to invest in education and work to recover the learning losses our students have incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. And when they ultimately fail to rise to the challenge, we know what we will have to do.

We have to get to work. Election Day June 2, 2022 will be here before we know it.

With continued restrictions in place on travel and social gatherings, many Canadians are looking for ways to make the most of their April break while keeping themselves and their communities safe. We've rounded up a list of eight staycation ideas that you can safely do together at home this spring break.

Learn more at www.otipinsurance.com/article108.



4% OF YOUR DAY - YOU ARE WORTH IT!

Mary Marcello, Councillor

The normal rhythm of the school year has been disrupted by COVID-19. And although we thrive in an environment of certainty and predictability, we have not had that. Schools are open, but this has not been a “business as usual” type of school year.

Our stress is unique this year. With the additional protocols in place, we are struggling with teaching curriculum and meeting student needs. We question often: Am I doing it right? Am I doing enough? How can I sustain this?

Students are learning in a different environment from what they are used to during a normal year. We are telling them to do things that are unnatural and counterintuitive, which in turn is very stressful. Unlike health care professionals, we are not used to dealing with these extreme measures and added responsibility for everyone's safety. At the same time, stakeholders are still expecting EXCELLENCE in teaching.

We are all feeling fatigue and frustration. Trying to sustain the hybrid model and maintain a well balanced lifestyle is impossible. Teachers are burnt out. And yet, some stakeholders will remind us: Count your blessings. Keep yourself healthy. Be kind to yourself. These instructions leave us wondering - How? When? Where?

I recently read a thought-provoking phrase: “Let us not dwell or launch into toxic positivity.” This statement could not be more on point! We cannot maintain the

belief that we should carry on with a positive mindset while living through a pandemic. For many, this can be crippling. Instead, let us invest in what we can control. Each one of us have struggles and are dealing with the pandemic in our own way. We are not alone or unique in dealing with these everyday challenges that the pandemic has brought on. There is no perfect balance between the pressures of life and work – only what's right for you.

Last month, York Unit OECTA introduced Mindful March to encourage its members to set aside time to:

- try and unplug from devices
- take deep breaths and stretch
- eat as well as possible
- exercise regularly
- get enough sleep
- make time for hobbies
- learn ways to manage stress and build resilience.

Yes, there still remains a level of deep frustration with the decision makers; however, we need to stop obsessing over what we cannot control and zero in on what we can control. The days can be long, hard, and exhausting with no breaks and little sleep. We cannot allow being worried, exhausted and overwhelmed by the challenges we are facing to be considered normal in this world of uncertainty. Members who participated in the Mindful March initiatives learned the importance and benefits of investing 4% of your day in YOU! Make the time - 1 hour out of 24 is just 4% of your day. It's DOABLE!

March may be over but your commitment to yourself and well-being should not be. There is no greater investment than investing in yourself. You are WORTH IT!

Collective Agreements? Meet Pandemic! Reg Shepherd, Grievance Officer & Councillor

This past year has been a tumultuous one for all of us. So many uncertainties, unexpected changes and an ever-unsettling work environment. Moving into the Unit Office this year and becoming Grievance Officer has been a real awakening, as things move at an unmatched speed.

“Why don’t we go on strike, when our rights are so clearly being violated?”

The biggest challenge I have found in this position is explaining to members as they call in distress, while their Collective Agreement is being violated, that there is little to no recourse. *The injury occurred today. Resolution is hoped to be achieved by tomorrow.* Explaining to members that we will file a grievance does little to assist them in their day to day challenges, as this process can take years to complete. The inequities in how each member is being affected is another concern: *“Why am I losing all my preps due to an open position? Why is my colleague getting them all?”* These are the issues that haunt us day by day. While we may understand and see the problem, the inability to find a solution in our current climate is the *REAL* issue.

Often I am asked: *What can we do about it?* The answer is not a simple one. As the Board violates the Collective Agreement we have

one legal recourse, which is to file a Grievance. This process starts with informal discussion with the Board for a solution, where we attempt to work together to find common ground. When this cannot occur, it moves through the grievance process where eventually both the Board and Union lawyers present to an arbitrator, who rules on what the outcome is. Getting an arbitration date is what usually holds up the process. A grievance is filed when the Employer and Union disagree on the interpretation of the Collective Agreement, specifically how an article reads. For example, currently staff are being directed to work on quarantine. Quarantine is captured under article 9.13 of the Local Collective Agreement, which falls under Paid Leaves. It is the position of the Union that if a member is on paid leave, the member is not to be working. The Employer disagrees with this position. The interpretation will be left up to an arbitrator to decide, unless a local resolution can occur.

Often teachers ask: *“Why don’t we go on strike, when our rights are so clearly being violated?”* A legal strike can only occur when the Collective Agreement has expired and negotiations are at an impasse.

If we were to go on strike when the Board violates the Collective Agreement this would be considered an illegal strike, also known as a wildcat strike. Also, when the grievance does go to an arbitrator, they would see such actions as counterproductive to the process, which would not bode well in our favour. This is also why the Union needs to ensure we are always following the Collective Agreement, even if at times it may feel counterproductive given how our well-being as workers has been disregarded.

It is our job to make sure we are following the Collective Agreement, even when the Employer does not. Their choice is not our choice. One negative action should not lead to another. Taking the high road and ensuring we are following the rules in a respectful manner will allow us to show we are working within our agreement. This decision speaks to our professionalism as teachers and builds us capital when our grievances go before arbitrators. As this year progresses and more challenges are brought forth, as a Union we need to continue to uphold our hard fought Collective Agreement to ensure our rights are always enshrined, no matter what the future holds.



ANNOUNCEMENTS



Births & Adoptions

Jackie Abate, Daily OT on the birth of her son Isaiah.

Amanda Cardone, OT on the birth of her son Matthew.

Alessia Di Iulio, teacher at St. Mary Immaculate on the birth of her son Francesco.

Maria Di Re, teacher at Canadian Martyrs on the birth of her son Massimo.

Laura Fata Walker, teacher at Holy Name and Light of Christ on the birth of her daughter Alexandra.

Sara Fuda, OT on the birth of her daughter Sofia.

Christina Glover, teacher at St. Brendan on the birth of her son Felix.

Andria Ieraci, teacher at St. Angela Merici on the birth of her son

Matthew. Meredith Ivory, OT on the birth of her daughter Evelyn.

Angelica (Cerrone) Perpetua, teacher at St. Margaret Mary on the birth of her son Jack.

Alessandra Romero, teacher at St. Peter on the birth of her son Noah.

Deanna Tari, OT on the birth of daughter Valentina.

Cathy Torchia, teacher at St. Mary of the Angels, on the passing of her uncle.

Kimberley Wilkinson, teacher at Prince of Peace, on the passing of her father.

Access free online mental health resources

As a part of the Ontario Education Community, you have access to FeelingBetterNow, an e-mental health platform for assessment and treatment. This platform uses evidence-based e-mental health technologies to help you improve your mental health, allowing you to confidentially identify mental health issues early and take immediate action.

Learn more by watching this [FeelingBetterNow](#) informational video and sign up for your confidential and anonymous account at <https://www.feelingbetternow.com/otip>.





Condolences & Sympathy

Jackie Abate, Daily OT, on the passing of her sister-in-law.
Joyce Amadio, teacher at Holy Name, on the passing of her grandmother. Laura Bagnara, teacher at St. Stephen, on the passing of her uncle.
Tammy Baldin, teacher at Blessed Trinity, on the passing of her mother-in-law. Diana Belvedere, teacher at Canadian Martyrs, on the passing of her grandmother. Rose Bilic, teacher at Guardian Angels, on the passing of her grandmother.
Donna Bishop-Pfundt, Program Consultant at the CEC, on the passing of her mother. Petra Bradica, teacher at Prince of Peace, on the passing of her father.
Duana Carinci, teacher at St. Mary Immaculate, on the passing of her grandfather and uncle. Gino Costanzo, teacher at St. Jean de Brebeuf CHS, on the passing of his mother-in-law.
Annalisa Day, teacher at Canadian Martyrs, on the passing of her father. Melissa Fonseca, teacher at St. John Paul II, on the passing of her father. Andrea Ghassemian, teacher at St. Joseph-Markham, on the passing of her aunt.
Oscar Ginjo, teacher at St. Jean de Brebeuf CHS, on the passing of his father-in-law. Tania Giordano, teacher at St. Joseph the Worker, on the passing of her grandmother. Carmela Minicucci, Daily OT, on the passing of her father and father-in-law.
Franca Mongillo, teacher at St. Brigid, on the passing of her mother-in-law. Jennifer Neves, teacher at St. Mary Immaculate, on the passing of her grandfather. Wendy Nunes, teacher at St. Jean de Brebeuf CHS, on the passing of her uncle.
Dario Perhat, teacher at St. Clement, on the passing of his father.
Gianna Pasquariello, teacher at St. Gabriel & St. Catherine of Siena, on the passing of her mother. David Pellegrino, OT teacher, on the passing of his grandmother.
Mary Pollock, teacher at Canadian Martyrs, on the passing of her mother. Fortunata Racco, teacher at St. Jean de Brebeuf CHS, on the passing of her father. Eugenia Romano, LTO teacher, on the passing of her uncle.
Rosina Romano, teacher at St. John Bosco, on the passing of her father. Lisa Rossi, teacher at Guardian Angels, on the passing of her grandmother. Tasha Schmidt, LTO teacher, on the passing of her aunt.
Loredana Scocco, teacher at St. Charles Garnier, on the passing of her brother-in-law and her father-in-law.
Laura Simone, LTO teacher, on the passing of her grandmother. Pat Spensieri, LTO teacher, on the passing of his mother.
Bruno Tassone, teacher at Sacred Heart CHS on the passing of his father and father-in-law of Paula Vittiglio, teacher at Sacred Heart CHS.
Matthew Thompson, teacher at Our Lady Queen of the World CA, on the passing of his mother.
Cathy Torchia, teacher at St. Mary of the Angels, on the passing of her uncle. Kimberley Wilkinson, teacher at Prince of Peace, on the passing of her father.