

FEBRUARY 2023 ISSUE

Catholic Teacher

MAGAZINE of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

**Honouring the
contributions of
Black Catholic
teachers**

PLUS:

All-members survey results
The fascinating and scary world of AI
Addressing violence in the workplace
Understanding the notwithstanding clause



Classroom Management

Co-operative Education

First Nations, Métis, and
Inuit Studies



French as a Second Language

Guidance and Career Education

Integration of Information and
Computer Technology in Instruction

Kindergarten

Mathematics Grades 7 and 8

Mathematics Primary/Junior

Reading

Religious Education in Catholic Schools

Special Education

Student Assessment and Evaluation

Teacher Librarian

Teaching English
Language Learners

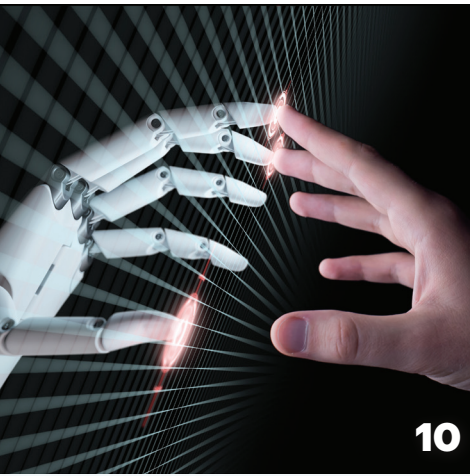
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Communication Needs: Autism

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Amidst the challenges of the past year, Catholic teachers and the broader labour movement certainly made waves in 2022, through legislation and in the streets. The successful protests against Bill 28, the *Keeping Students in Class Act*, and the court ruling declaring Bill 124 – which froze public sector salaries and wages – unconstitutional, will go down in labour history. Much of our efforts in recent years have been aimed at countering government repression, as we must always resist assaults on workers' rights and protect the freedom of collective bargaining.

As we continue to contend with a round of provincial bargaining, our efforts to protect and propel the rights of our members remain paramount. These are uncharted times, on the heels of a pandemic and Premier Ford's use of the notwithstanding clause for blatantly political purposes. We remain vigilant and steadfast in our efforts and advocacy.

I often remark that community is at the heart of the work that we do as Catholic teachers, be it in our classrooms, our compassion against injustice, and our consideration of others. This is part of our fabric as Catholic teachers.

It is no surprise that with less than a month before Christmas, OECTA members across the province rallied together to raise an astonishing \$54,273 for food banks and Ontarians in need, reaching and surpassing our Christmas charity drive goal. I am proud of our members for their kindness and generosity. By championing community, Catholic teachers came together to lend a hand and help those who need it most.

While the Association continues to make strides in its pursuit of social justice, as we champion accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity (AIDE) in our classrooms and beyond, it is my hope that this work continues at this year's Annual General Meeting (AGM). Over the course of three busy days, delegates representing Catholic teachers from across the province, will take time from their March Break to debate and vote on numerous policy-setting motions, address equity and human rights matters, and set the direction of our Association.

This will mark the Association's 79th AGM, and the first in-person AGM since 2019. There is a lot to look forward to amidst the long-anticipated return to meeting in person and the progress that is made when OECTA members come together to share ideas, debate issues, and reaffirm our values as Catholic teachers. Delegates will also participate in elections for members of the Provincial Executive and Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) Governors at AGM 2023. All positions are up for election this year, each for a two-year term. It is my hope that this long-awaited return to meeting in person ignites our passion and carries the Association through the many challenges and opportunities of this year.

I take this opportunity to thank each of you for your commitment to our profession, your students, and fellow OECTA members. Our collective strength lies in our connectivity with this community, and our unwavering engagement and support that strengthens our spirit and activism.

In solidarity,

Barb Dobrowolski
President

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

If you would like to connect with us to share your thoughts, ideas, or concerns, please reach out to us at publicaffairs@catholicteachers.ca.
There is no voice more important than a member's voice.

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Cover: *Renée Kerr is a high school teacher at Loyola Catholic Secondary School in Mississauga, and a member of the Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit.*

Events

INBOX

/ Catholic teachers raise \$54,273 in support of food banks

Catholic teachers never shy away when called on to help – whether in our classrooms, supporting our students, or in our communities, fighting for a better Ontario.

This Christmas season was no different. In just one month, the **Catholic Teachers' Christmas Charity Drive** raised an extraordinary \$54,273 for food banks and Ontarians in need, reaching and surpassing our charity drive goal of \$50,000 – with all donations going to Feed Ontario, and the 125 food banks and more than 1,100 hunger relief organizations it supports province wide.

This is an amazing feat. With the cost of food, rent, gas, and other essentials at a 30-year high, families across the province have been struggling, and the generous donations made by Catholic teachers and our communities will do so much to help those in need.

Feed Ontario's cross-province network, and equitable program, will ensure that the donations are allocated where they are needed most, from Thunder Bay to Windsor to Ottawa, and to the large and small towns in between, including remote fly-in communities in northern Ontario.

Thank you for coming together in the Christmas spirit, to champion the OECTA Prayer, which calls on us all to "choose community over isolation." Catholic teachers' kindness and generosity, for the Christmas charity drive and other local unit initiatives, have helped to make a real difference for the people who need it most.



/ Parents #KnowMore

Over the past few months, the Association has been proactively engaging with parents from different areas of the province to ask them to tell their stories, to share their concerns about pandemic learning disruptions, and to discuss what supports their children need to succeed.

Using these [gripping testimonials from real parents](#), the Association has launched the second phase of our revamped, province-wide campaign under our existing **#KnowMore** banner, with new ads and community-focused shareable content.

The ads, which leverage authentic conversations with parents, highlight why parents and teachers alike are calling for smaller class sizes, more one-on-one time with students in the classroom, and more meaningful government collaboration with educators.



These new ads will run alongside existing content, highlighting the voices of Catholic teachers on social media platforms, radio, newspapers, and billboards, as well as an expanded array of ad platforms to increase our reach, including newspapers, transit, and streaming services.

We continue to hear from our students, parents, families, communities – *everyone* – that they want the government to listen to their concerns and those expressed by teachers. These new testimonials from parents, concerning their children's learning experiences over the past several years, continue and grow our long-term **#KnowMore** campaign, adding another strong voice to demand that the Ford government listen to teachers' concerns and invest in the resources and supports that students deserve.

Watch for new and exciting ways to get involved, and to share your classroom experiences and what students need to succeed, as our **#KnowMore** campaign continues to take action.

Visit [KnowMore.ca](https://knowmore.ca)!

/ Catholic teachers call for broad investment in public services and respect for workers in pre-budget submission

Each year, as the government develops the provincial budget, the Association provides feedback on key priorities and areas in need of investment, on behalf of 45,000 Catholic teachers.

As many Ontarians look ahead to a post-pandemic society, and attempt to recapture a sense of normalcy, the Association used this year's pre-budget brief to urge the Ford government to find a "new normal" – and to abandon the longstanding emphasis on fiscal austerity, haphazard decision-making, and presenting false or misleading statements to the public.

As to be expected, much of the brief focusses on publicly funded education, and the need for proper investments from the government to ensure students have the resources and supports they need to recover and thrive. From lowering class sizes, to taking concrete steps to address violence in schools, to developing a comprehensive learning recovery plan, and more, the brief outlines a number of areas where the government can build upon Ontario's world-class publicly funded education system. Central to this is the need for genuine consultation with educators and other stakeholders, which the government has largely ignored in its policy-making to-date.

The submission harnesses Catholic teachers' strong sense of social justice and advocacy to make a series of recommendations to the government that would make society healthier and fairer for all Ontarians. In addition to a comprehensive discussion of publicly funded education, this year's pre-budget brief includes discussions of:

- The government's shameful disrespect of workers and public services and the consequences of the Ford government's wrongheaded priorities, which benefit the wealthy few at the expense of the many.
- The vital role that early childhood education and care plays in Ontario's society and economy, now and in the future.
- The desperate need for the government to improve equity in employment and redress the gaps that exist in our social safety net, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The ongoing and worsening climate crisis that requires immediate and drastic action, and which the Ford government has largely dismissed.

Click [HERE](#) to read the Association's Pre-budget Brief.



MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AWARDS

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The communications and activities of local OECTA units are integral to the engagement of you, the member, within the Association. The Member Engagement Awards program recognizes achievement among OECTA units for their unique and innovative approach in engaging members, creating inclusive spaces, and celebrating our amazing Catholic teachers. Recognized activities also provide examples or best practices for other units to emulate or replicate.

As members, your input in what activities should be recognized as best practices is vital!

Know any great engagement activities that should be recognized?

1. Pick a Category

- Best Practices in Member Engagement
- Innovation in Engaging Equity-Deserving Members
- Outstanding Promotion of Catholic Teachers and the Value of Catholic Education

2. Tell us About the Initiative

3. Submit by April 17

Click [HERE](#) to learn more and make a nomination.

CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

Black History Month

- 2-3 Winter Council of Presidents' Meeting
- 10 Deadline for Teachers to Submit Young Authors Awards Entries to OECTA Association Representatives
- 20 World Day of Social Justice
- 20 Family Day
- 21 Deadline for Schools to Submit Young Authors Awards Entries to Local OECTA Units
- 22 Ash Wednesday
- 22 National Human Trafficking Awareness Day
- 22 Pink Shirt Day

MARCH

Women's History Month

- 6 Provincial Level Deadline for Young Authors Awards Entries
- 8 International Women's Day
- 11-13 Annual General Meeting
- 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 25 Earth Hour (8:30 - 9:30 p.m.)
- 28 Spring Mini-Courses Registration Opens
- 31 OTIP Teaching Awards Nominations Close

APRIL

- 1 Scholarships & Fellowships Application Deadline
- 7 Good Friday
- 10 Easter Monday
- 12 Day of Pink
- 22 Earth Day
- 24 Spring Mini-Courses Registration Closes
- 28 World Day for Safety and Health at Work

INBOX

UP FRONT

AGM 2023

AGM 2023 will once again be held in-person at the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel in Toronto on **March 11 to 13**.

The *Resolutions and Nominations* booklet is available in the Members' Area at **catholicteachers.ca**. This booklet includes all proposed policy, procedural, and by-law changes to be debated at this year's AGM. Contact your local unit office to find out how you can provide input regarding the AGM resolutions.

Members who wish to observe the AGM virtually will be able to access portions of the meeting via livestream in the Members' Area at **catholicteachers.ca**.

Click [HERE](#) to access AGM materials in the Members' Area.

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

Do you know any educators who bring economics into the classroom in new and engaging ways? Nominate them for the Bank of Canada Museum's Award for Excellence in Teaching Economics – open to teachers from Grades 6 to 12 who have creatively explored economic concepts or topics in the classroom. The awards honour one teacher working in Grades 6 to 9, and one teacher working in Grades 10 to 12.

Whether you teach history, economics, business, math, or languages, there are many ways to introduce economic concepts. Topics may include early trade in Canada, financial markets, the future of work, inflation and interest, the green economy, or another connected topic.

Nominate someone today! Applications will be accepted until **March 12** at 11:59 p.m.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more, to see the eligibility requirements, and for how to submit a nomination.

STARLING MINDS – UNPLUG AND UNWIND WITH MINDFULNESS

Starting February 21, our partners at Starling Minds will be offering a four-week workshop entitled Unplug and Unwind with Mindfulness to help members learn mindfulness techniques for better mental clarity, presence of mind, and calmness through the power of breath, meditation, and more.

Sessions will run weekly on Tuesday evenings at 7 p.m., from **February 21 to March 24**.

In this free and confidential workshop, you will learn to:

- expand your window of tolerance to stay calm under stress;
- understand the impacts of your thoughts and change your internal dialogue;
- become more compassionate and kind towards yourself and others; and
- live a more easeful and peaceful life with mindfulness.

Fact: mindfulness has been proven to significantly lower feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more and register.

OTIP/OTF TEACHING AWARDS

The OTIP/OTF Teaching 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 in their first five years of teaching. Winners receive \$1,000 and a Certificate of Recognition for both themselves and their schools. Nominations will be received until **March 31**.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more and submit a nomination.

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LANGUAGE:

the link between human and machine

By Phil Kim

As we increasingly integrate digital spaces and interfaces into our day-to-day lives, the volume of written material that we come across and process is almost incalculable. Thus, we stress the significance of critical thinking and reading skills for both ourselves and students, asking fundamental questions such as, “who wrote this, and why?” But what if the question we should be asking ourselves, and asking students to consider, is not “who” but “what”?

Welcome to the fascinating – and perhaps scary – world of artificial intelligence (AI) language.

AI language models are machine learning models that analyze bodies of text data to determine the probability of a given sequence of words occurring in a sentence. We actually interact with AI language models quite regularly in our daily lives – sometimes without even knowing it.

Parsing tools like spell check rectify many easily-missed typos, while information retrieval language models, such as Google, are now our externalized storage devices for information and knowledge. Speech recognition AI assistants, such as Google Home and Alexa, are either great additions to improve our at-home desire for convenience, or the most frustrating foes dedicated to misinterpreting our requests. “Ugh, for the third time, Alexa, I said play

‘Spotify.’” AI is already well integrated into our daily lives, and some cynics are fair to exercise caution about the implications of becoming more enmeshed with technology.

Despite the technological advances, we are quite far from a holistic, artificial sentence. Yes, AI today are alarmingly advanced in cognitive processing, with the ability to absorb an inhuman number of inputs to create an even-more-than-inhuman number of outputs. But the desired outputs are neither the most consistent nor reliable. Look no further than Apple’s Siri, a speech recognition voice AI assistant that comes standard with most Apple phones and computing products, which is probably better known for its clumsy and comedic interactive blunders than as a precursor to Hal from 2001: *A Space Odyssey*.

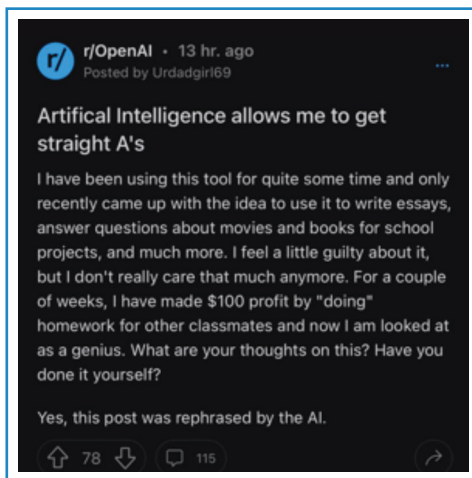
We have a long way to go before AI can process or understand the nuance of *feelings* – the idiosyncratic building blocks of the human experience and communication practices. But with the rise in prominence and the efficacy of AI, specifically language models that write, it is important to be aware of these rapid developments to help situate our expectations for: (1) how technology will continue to adapt; and (2) how we can prepare ourselves for these changes.



”

Now, more than ever, we must ensure we remain focused and connected as critical digital citizens, not to get lost in the symbolic noise of our brave new digital world.

The technology is already rapidly evolving. ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer), which launched in November 2022, is a sophisticated and versatile AI language chatbot, which has the capability to write almost anything, from essays, to songs, to even computer code. In the few months since its release, the program has quickly amassed more than a million users, and has been hailed in the media from everything from “groundbreaking” to “scary,” for its detailed and human-like responses. If you teach in a secondary school, chances are you have already had instances of students using AI language models, such as ChatGPT, to complete essays and homework assignments. At the university level, it is not unheard of for some students to pay other students to use the models to write their essays for them. Many universities, colleges, and school boards in Ontario have raised concerns, reporting that they are actively seeking ways to combat AI-based academic plagiarism, while investigating how the technology can be harnessed for student learning.



AI language models, when given the right inputs, can now passably emulate written, human communication. And this is but a small glimpse into the world of AI technology and its possibilities. In fact, many news articles today are written by AI. The *Los Angeles Times* has a bot that writes breaking news about earthquakes. *Wired* magazine published an obituary for Marvin Minsky written by a bot.

AIs still struggle with complex storytelling, and require user handholding for more complicated assignments, both in terms of the initial input parameters, as well as refinements to the end product. What these news organizations and university students have mastered are the necessary inputs and parameters to guide the AI language model to produce writing assignments and breaking news updates.

Though it may seem foreign, the skill set here is one that we already use on a regular basis, when trying to find the correct, disjointed phrases and keywords that will produce the relevant product reviews online or the answers to mundane medical questions on Google.

Developments in AI technology naturally produce responses and reactions, though there is usually a lag. For instance, following the release of ChatGPT, a Canadian developed an app that claims the ability to detect AI-written essays, having studied this field as a student at Princeton University. It will take time for this technology to be refined and released for mass use. Almost inevitably, others will attempt to stay ahead of the game, creating even more sophisticated software and apps that write AI-generated content.

If language models continue their progress, we may reach a point where writing itself is just a foundational step to the skill of setting parameters for these writing bots. And maybe these bots will learn to write and communicate based entirely on how we behave – whether for our future social media (maybe even virtual reality) avatars or for any future work we do that incorporates digital communication and writing.

This is a fascinating inquiry. What are the implications of a possible future where most of the words on our screens and social media are generated by AI? When the thoughts, propositions, and ideas we encounter in digital spaces are iterated by something less human? Does it even matter that the messenger is not human if the receiver *feels* the message to be “human” and, above all else, *real*?

Regardless of the specifics of what the future may hold, our discernment and judgement of language will carry us through these imminent changes – whether we are the ones using these language models to digitally communicate, or the ones consuming such communications. Now, more than ever, we must ensure we remain focused and connected as critical digital citizens, not to get lost in the symbolic noise of our brave new digital world, and to provide students with the knowledge and critical thinking skills to do the same.

Phil Kim is Social Media Assistant in the Government Relations and Public Affairs department at OECTA Provincial Office.



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UNDERSTANDING OTPP'S INVESTMENT IN FTX

*And why it won't affect
your pension or retirement*

By Chris Cowley

As we enter 2023, the world economy faces major headwinds. Energy prices, the war in Ukraine, and high inflation, to name a few, are all putting pressure on a fragile COVID-19 recovery. These factors have led to the equity market's worst performance since the 2008 financial crisis. As a result, institutional investors, such as pension plans, are having to dig deeper to find asset classes that can produce returns to pay pensions.

The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) has an impressive track record for finding investment-grade assets around the world. Recently, however, OTPP found itself on the losing end of a risky endeavour, with the collapse of FTX Trading's cryptocurrency exchange. This was one of the major business stories of 2022 and highlighted the risky nature of investing in cryptocurrency and related holdings.

What is cryptocurrency?

Cryptocurrency is any form of currency that exists digitally or virtually, where cryptography – which uses computer code to protect information – is used to secure transactions. Cryptocurrencies do not have a central issuing or regulating authority, instead they use a decentralized system to record transactions and issue new units. The first cryptocurrency was Bitcoin, which was founded in 2009. Much of the interest in cryptocurrencies is to trade for profit, with speculators at times driving prices skyward, similar to how the stock market operates. Since its inception, other cryptocurrencies have emerged, but Bitcoin remains the dominant and most well known.

How does cryptocurrency work?

Cryptocurrencies run on what is called a blockchain, which is a record of all transactions updated and held by currency holders.

Units of cryptocurrency are created through a process called mining, which involves using computer power to solve complicated mathematical problems that generate coins. Users can also buy the currencies from brokers, then store and spend them using cryptographic wallets.

If you own cryptocurrency, you do not own anything tangible. What you own is a digital key that allows you to move a record or a unit of measure to another person without regulatory oversight.

In the global banking system, regulation is what ensures that its users' money is safe. Such safeguards do not exist with cryptocurrency. It is for this reason that many institutional investors stay away from direct investment in the currency itself. What many view as a safer investment option are the blockchain technologies and exchanges that have emerged that help crypto work.

Enter FTX Trading. FTX is (was) a major, highly sought after cryptocurrency exchange platform, founded in 2019, with many global investors. As the third-largest cryptocurrency exchange in the world, it was considered a solid investment, with good returns and stable corporate management. We now know it was a business model built on lies.

Although the downfall of FTX is extremely complicated, put in its simplest terms, in November 2022 it was revealed that FTX and its affiliated trading firm, Alameda Research, had significant solvency concerns, and lacked government-backed currency to

pay its high debt. The publication of this news created a sell-off panic among investors, which precipitated a liquidity crisis. Over the coming weeks, as news emerged about the scope of deceit, FTX founder and ex-CEO Sam Bankman-Fried was arrested in the Bahamas and extradited to the U.S., where he has been indicted on fraud charges.

OTPP was one of many investors in FTX, including numerous pension plans, such as Caisse de Depot, which manages several of the largest public pension plans in Quebec and had invested \$150 million.

What does this mean for OTPP?

The total amount OTPP invested in FTX was \$95 million. This represents less than 0.05 per cent of the pension plan's total net assets.

This will not affect OTPP's funded status or your retirement. The investment in FTX was through Teachers' Venture Growth (TVG), which was established in 2019 to invest in emerging technology companies, raising late-stage venture and growth capital. Investments, such as the one made in FTX, are structured to provide OTPP with returns commensurate with the risk undertaken and to provide proprietary insights that inform investing elsewhere across the plan.

In short, although the investment failed, it was within the risk parameters that are set for TVG and does not have a material impact on your pension plan, which has more than \$242 billion in assets under management.

This case highlights the institutional risks that come with making these types of investments in high profile (and untested) asset classes. OTPP has a sterling global reputation and the demise of FTX is an example of why strong investment screens and governance principles need to be employed when dealing with potentially volatile capital and chasing elusive returns.

The lesson learned by the plan from this case is that the world of crypto assets is still too volatile. Without proper financial regulation, the chance of a solid return within the crypto space is a (bit)-coin flip.

Chris Cowley is OTF Table Officer on the OECA Provincial Executive.

LOUD AND CLEAR:

Catholic teachers make their voices heard with overwhelming response to all-members survey

By Mark Tagliaferri

Following several years of pandemic disruption, the Association has redoubled our commitment to engaging you – our 45,000 Catholic teachers – in a variety of ways, to better understand your thoughts and perspectives so that we can continue to best meet your needs.

As part of these efforts, the Association recently partnered with Pollara Strategic Insights, a leading research firm, to develop and launch an all-members survey. The survey explored a range of issues, from your mental health and well-being, to your thoughts on current events, to your preferences on what and how the Association communicates with you, and more.

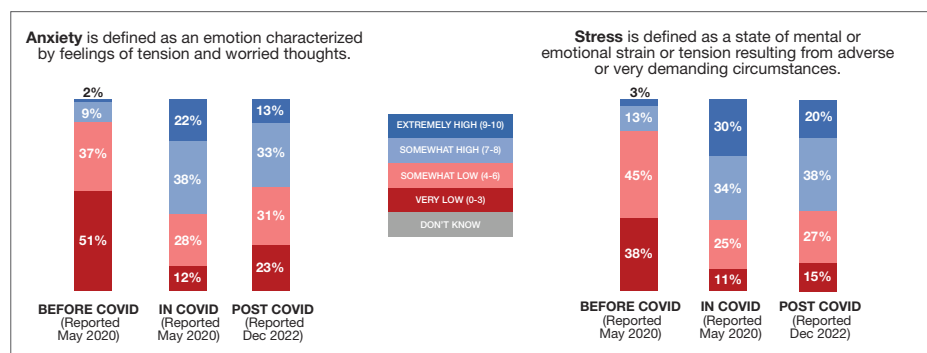
Every Catholic teacher for whom the Association has a personal email address was invited to participate in the study, which remained in the field from November 23 to December 15. As we have seen so often, Catholic teachers always step up when called upon – and this survey was no exception: 5,729 members completed the survey. All responses were anonymous and reported in aggregate.

To provide even more texture and nuance to the data, and to better understand how Catholic teachers' perceptions have changed over time, a number of survey questions were identical to those asked over the past several years in previous Association surveys.

Some of the more interesting areas of exploration and broad key findings include the following.

State of mind

Despite optimism for this school year, and a general hope for a “return to normalcy,” it is clear that Catholic teachers are still feeling heightened levels of anxiety and stress. While this has improved compared to levels felt at the start of the pandemic, responses are still markedly different to pre-pandemic levels reported by Catholic teachers.



While only a small number of respondents rated their pre-COVID-19 anxiety and stress levels as high (11 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively, rated it between 7 and 10, as reported in May 2020), this increased to almost two-thirds (60 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively) within a few months of the pandemic outbreak (reported in May 2020). Now, almost half (46 per cent) consider their anxiety to be high, while almost three-fifths (58 per cent) say the same for their stress.

It is clear from the data that mental health remains a key consideration for Catholic teachers, and the Association will continue to provide resources to members, and will advocate strongly to government to ensure proper funding for teacher and student mental health and well-being supports and initiatives.

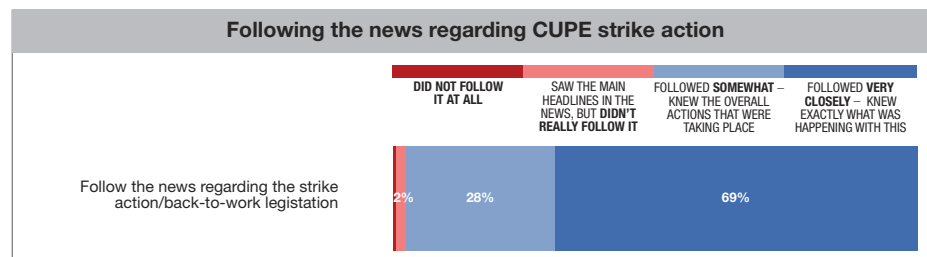


Catholic teachers demonstrated unwavering solidarity and support during the CUPE education worker situation.

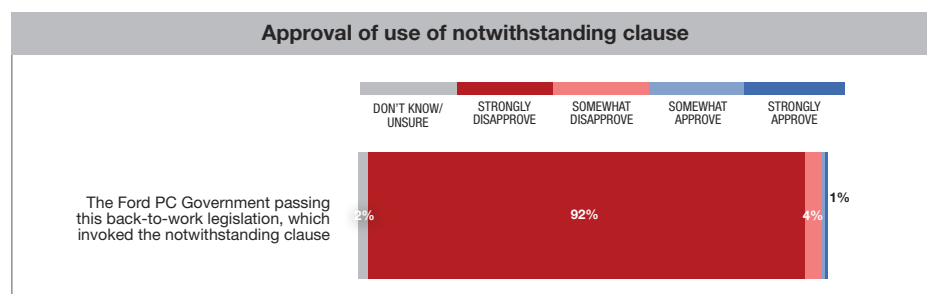
Solidarity with CUPE education workers

Much of the news in November was dominated by the government's shameful actions toward CUPE education workers, including the passing of Bill 28, which prohibited job action and imposed a substandard contract on CUPE education workers, while pre-emptively invoking Section 33 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* – the so-called “notwithstanding clause.”

Unsurprisingly, Catholic teachers were well aware of the situation, and strongly supported their CUPE education worker colleagues. A miniscule number said they “did not really” follow the news regarding CUPE education worker strike action, with almost all (97 per cent) of survey respondents following it to some degree, including 69 per cent who followed it more closely.



Almost all respondents disapproved of the Ford government's conduct toward CUPE education workers, including the invocation of the notwithstanding clause as part of Bill 28 (95 per cent), with the vast majority of these (92 per cent) “strongly opposing” the government's actions.

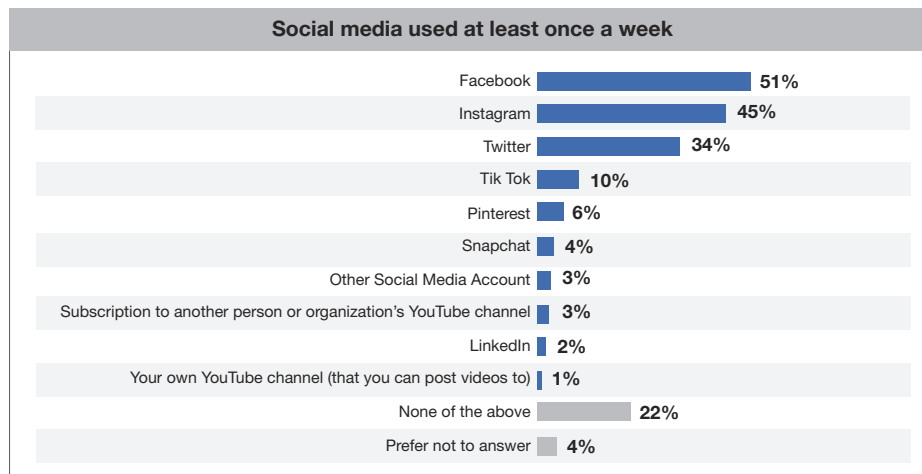


Catholic teachers demonstrated unwavering solidarity and support during the CUPE education worker situation. This show of unity across the labour movement and wider communities was critical in forcing the Ford government to rescind its draconian Bill 28 and use of the notwithstanding clause and return to the bargaining table. The survey data, including additional anecdotal comments, make clear that Catholic teachers strongly support the rights of public sector workers and would stand up again in solidarity against Ford government violations in the future.

Sources of information and communication

Communication is an art and a science. The Association – in particular the Government Relations and Public Affairs department at OECTA Provincial Office – goes to great lengths to provide important, trustworthy, and relevant information to Catholic teachers on a variety of platforms, to meet you where you are.

To help continue to refine these practices, the survey explored the communications preferences of Catholic teachers. As to be expected, Catholic teachers report using social media with high frequency and amounts, with Facebook being most commonly used, followed by Instagram and Twitter.

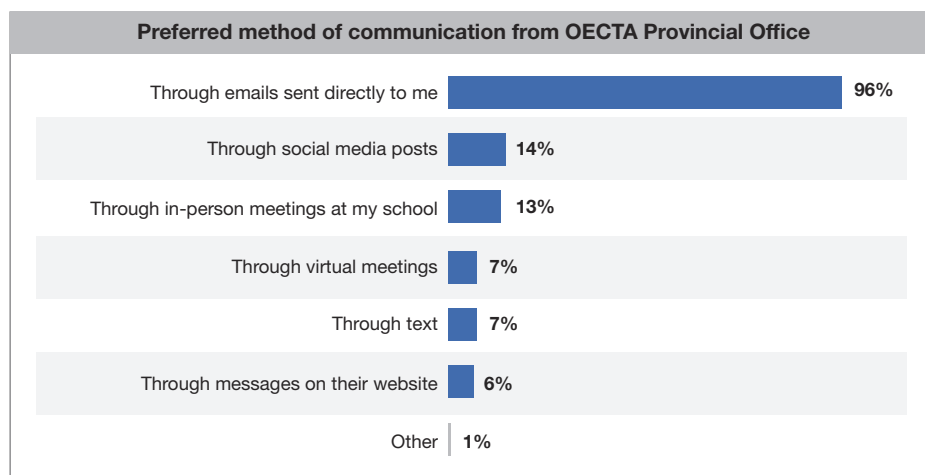


Respondents note that they are still most likely to get their news from traditional sources, such as TV or radio, or from online newspapers. However, new trends have emerged over the past several years, as there have been significant declines since 2018 in television (13 per cent decrease), radio (15 per cent decrease), and friends/family (nine per cent decrease) as the source of news consumption – while use of Twitter has increased significantly as a news source (11 per cent increase).

Turning to communications from OECTA Provincial Office, it is heartening to learn that almost nine-in-ten respondents indicate they read at least part of these communications, with one-third (36 per cent) saying they read all or most in detail. Additionally, respondents were largely satisfied (62 per cent) with the frequency of communications from OECTA Provincial Office. In terms of platform, email remains the most preferred method of communication by which to distribute important news and information.



Email remains the most preferred method of communication by which to distribute important news and information.

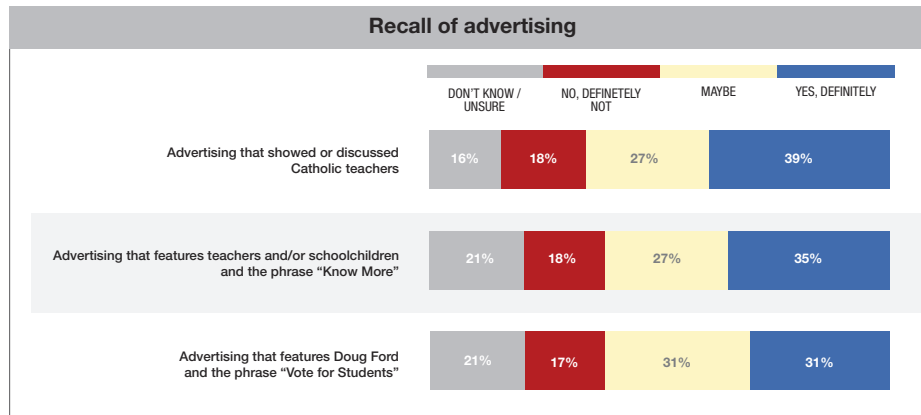


Know More / Vote for Students: ad recall

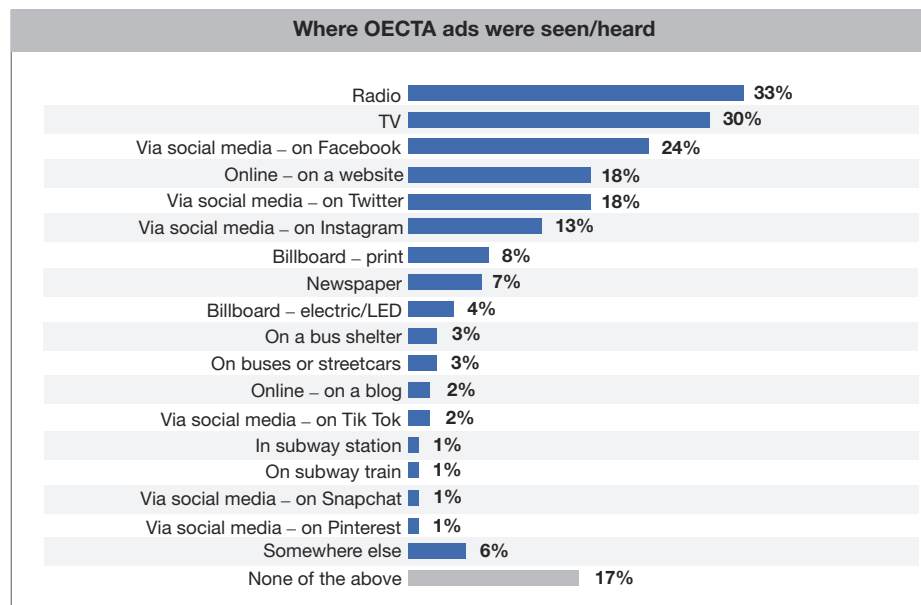
While the 2022 Ontario provincial election did not produce the result progressives hoped for, the Association managed to distinguish itself through its election-related campaign.

In advertising, “recall lift” refers to the percentage of people who remember seeing ads from a group or organization, and can remember something about the ads (i.e., a slogan or catchphrase).

Among general public respondents, a successful ad recall lift benchmark is often around six per cent. That percentage tends to be higher when surveying an organization’s membership, as members may be predisposed to better recall their organization’s advertising. Even with this, our Association’s efforts broke through the election noise, as 66 per cent of member-respondents indicated recalling Catholic teacher ads during the election period.



What is more, Catholic teachers engaged with this political advertising on a variety of platforms.



While Ontario’s progressive political parties clearly have a great deal of internal work to do ahead of the next scheduled election in 2026, the Association will continue to be a strong beacon of progressive ideals in the public sphere, and will continue to advocate for the interests of students, educators, and all Ontarians.

Thank you!

The data collected from this survey will be invaluable to the Association, as we continue to refine our practices, programs,

and offerings, to provide Catholic teachers with the most relevant opportunities and information. A sincere thank you to the more than 5,700 Catholic teachers who participated in this study. If you did not have the ability to participate this time, rest assured that the Association is planning many more opportunities to engage you, to gain your thoughts and perspectives.

Mark Tagliaferri is a Communications Specialist in the Government Relations and Public Affairs department at OECTA Provincial Office.

DEAR BLACK CATHOLIC TEACHERS: **You are seen and not alone**

By Tia Duke

This piece is dedicated to the Catholic teachers who self-identify as Black. This article represents my reflections as an individual, and I do not speak for any other self-identifying Black Catholic teacher. Though I believe that it is beneficial for all Catholic teachers to read this piece, and the experiences described may be relatable, my intention is to centre an appreciation for Black Catholic teachers, as we celebrate Black History Month and beyond.

I have often shared that my motivation for becoming a teacher is connected to the fact that I never had a Black teacher throughout my Kindergarten to Grade 12 experience in the publicly funded Catholic education system. I recognize that this experience is my truth, but I am also mindful of how erasure functions in systems. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that Black teachers, even if smaller in numbers, have a powerful legacy of positive contribution to publicly funded Catholic education.

As a teacher, I have connected with Black educators that I have had the pleasure and privilege to work with and learn from. I have encountered teachers representing the entire African Diaspora, from a variety of nations within the continent of Africa, across Caribbean countries, and those who are first, second, or third generation Canadians. I have met Black teachers whose ancestors have been in this country now known as Canada for more than a century – much longer than the Canadians who inevitably ask them where they are from. I have encountered Black teachers who navigate in their experiences as biracial, and those whose identities layer and intersect.

I admit, I am always excited when I meet other Black Catholic teachers from across the province. My excitement is grounded in the whispering when Black students see you, a Black Catholic teacher, for the first time walking down the hallway. It is a knowing smile or head nod from parents, guardians, or caregivers of Black learners, showing you that they see you and appreciate your presence. It is the excitement and exhaustion when thinking of planning Black History Month events and initiatives that provide a narrative that has not always been represented.

I will not pretend to have in-depth knowledge of the nuanced experiences of the educators I have met over the years. But I can say, through both experience and observation, that being a Black teacher is both rewarding



Photo: Tia Duke

and extremely challenging.

The challenges come from the conversations with learners who ask you not only how to navigate anti-Black racism, but also from seeing them experience various forms of discrimination within the school system. It is experiencing anti-Black racism and leading initiatives, while having to convince both peers and administrators of your leadership abilities. It is being an occasional teacher for a decade or for one's entire career, despite guiding colleagues in "culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy" (CRRP). It is starting initiatives, implementing programs, writing curriculum, and receiving little to no acknowledgement for your contributions. It is having your work co-opted or stolen, and entering a support role knowing there is no support for you. It is having colleagues enter your classroom without asking or knocking, or disciplining your students without speaking with you first. It is joining committees, councils, and advisory roles to make sure there is representation. These are the experiences of Black educators, and this article is to let you know that you are seen,

and you are not alone.

Being a Black teacher can look like constantly overthinking how and what you are communicating, or being an assertive communicator and to be labelled aggressive or angry. It is advocating for change, only to be pushed out. It is longing to represent only yourself. It is balancing the pride and burden of being the embodiment of representation. It is the career-stifling stereotypes and doing the risk-reward assessment before applying to a different school. It is doing more when there is no more left to give, and feeling guilty for not saying "yes" because of the impact of your "no." It is the too many micro-aggressions to recall. These are the stories of Black educators, and this article is to let you know that you are seen, and you are not alone.

Being a Black teacher is being an agent for change. It is the joy felt when Black students say they want to be a teacher, ask you how you became a teacher, apply to a faculty of education, or return as a colleague. It is the winks and nods, and special handshakes at graduation. It is the thank you cards, letters, emails, and returning students who show appreciation. It is the courage to leave a space to prioritize your peace and health. It is the pressure to keep going and hold it all together. It is the community we find in each other and our families, who hold us up. It is the humour we use to cope with the hurt. It is our faith and hope for change for the better. These are the narratives of Black educators, and this article is to let you know that you are seen, and you are not alone.

I want Black Catholic teachers across Ontario to know that you matter. Your presence in any educational space matters. My hope and prayer for you is that you continue to prioritize your health and wellness, this Black History Month and beyond, because what you do is not easy, but the impact is far reaching.

Tia Duke is a Staff Officer in the Professional Development department at OECTA Provincial Office.

Click [HERE](#) to access the Black History Month resources curated by the Association.

Learning about the diverse experiences of Black people, both past and present, serves to enrich the lives of students in Ontario's publicly funded schools. There are amazing Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum resources that are available to support teachers, as they prepare for lessons and units that focus on both historical and contemporary contributions of Black people.

Dismantling anti-Black racism in schools starts with centring the lived experiences and contributions of people who identify as Black in the province, the country, and the world. Teachers should centre the humanity of Black people in the curriculum all school year, but it is especially important to do so during Black History Month. As teachers, it is our responsibility to know the impact that erasure, colonial narratives, and centring whiteness has had in shaping learners' understanding of themselves and the world around them.

If you are taking a learner-centred approach, collaborating with community partners, and accessing curriculum resources and content created by Black educators using an anti-oppressive approach, then you are well on your way.

Some considerations for lesson and unit planning:

- Reflect on and acknowledge your position, power, and privilege as a teacher based on your identity and lived experience.
- Remember that you do not have to be an expert. Taking a learner's stance and a collaborative approach is best. It is a wonderful experience to learn along with your students.
- Your curriculum should uphold the humanity of Black people by centring joy, family and friendship, leadership, innovation, intersecting identities, love, life, successes despite barriers, working in community and the diversity among Black people in culture, history, heritage, languages, and experiences.
- Language awareness matters – educate yourself on policy and your professional obligations.
- If teaching about the history of the enslavement of Black people in Canada, ask yourself: does this have to be your entry point for Black History Month? Are you framing the enslavement of human beings as the history of those people or more accurately as the history of the nation and the political and imperial leaders of the time?
- Connect with partners in education (i.e., community groups, faculties of education, libraries, subject associations, and Black history organizations). There are opportunities to connect in-person or virtually.
- Use credible age-appropriate own-voice sources for curriculum, and credit Black content creators.



Workplace violence – incident reporting and members' rights

By the OECTA Provincial Health and Safety Committee

If you have seen the news recently, you may have noticed a rise in stories about violent incidents, suggesting a disturbing mood change in society. As we struggle to recover from COVID-19, stress and unease is manifesting itself in everyday interactions that explode into inappropriate verbal outbursts, aggressive behaviour, threats, and acts of violence.

Frontline workers everywhere – and even their employers – are reporting increased verbal abuse, racist taunts, harassment, misogyny, homophobia, vandalism, threats, and sometimes acts of physical violence against individuals or property.

Schools are experiencing the same. The Association is hearing daily stories from Catholic teachers about violence and verbal abuse in our schools – incidents that are increasing in frequency and intensity.

Since the pandemic, some students are still struggling with the day-to-day rules, the social expectations, and the rigors of readjusting to in-person learning. Some are having trouble in congregate settings – displaying their frustration in inappropriate ways, sometimes putting themselves, other students, teachers, and education workers at risk.

The pandemic necessitated a transition to emergency online learning. Ever since, the government has tried to increase online learning requirements for students, as a cost-cutting measure. Beyond the negative pedagogical and learning consequences this has for students, it has also blurred the lines between teachers, students, and parents.

For instance, it is not uncommon for a teacher to report receiving emails at all hours from both students and parents.

Too often, these emails are laced with unwarranted and inappropriate criticism, demanding special consideration and exceptions to the most basic of academic requirements, and threatening dire consequences, negative reports to administrators, and/or complaints to the Ontario College of Teachers if their demands are not met. The increasing frequency and the toxic maliciousness of online harassment and intimidation experienced by some Catholic teachers, through the misuse of social media is also a growing concern.

When workplace violence and abuse occur, physical and mental harm can result for all who are exposed. It is essential for you to understand how the workplace violent incident reporting system *should* work.





When workplace violence and abuse occur, physical and mental harm can result for all who are exposed. It is essential for you to understand how the workplace violent incident reporting system should work.

Your school board and administrators' responsibilities

- » School boards and administrators are required to investigate and deal with all reports of workplace violence and serious student incidents.
- » School boards and administrators cannot direct you not to complete an incident report.
- » In response to the filing of a "Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form – Part I," your school administrator must investigate the reported incident and provide you with a written acknowledgement using the "Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form – Part II."
- » School boards and administrators are required to conduct risk assessments and to reassess risks of violence at your school, as often as necessary, to ensure that you are protected from potential harm.
- » School boards and administrators are required to put in place measures and procedures to control identified risks. In the school setting, these steps may include, a safety plan, a behaviour plan, appropriate staffing, and other supports as required.
- » Opportunities must be made available for students and staff to learn to recognize the various forms of bullying (such as, racial bullying, or bullying based on religion) and understand the actions that can be taken by those witnessing the behaviour.
- » Opportunities must also be made available for students and staff to participate in equity and inclusive education, bullying prevention, and leadership initiatives within their school.

Your responsibilities as a teacher

- » Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)*, you have a duty to report workplace violence and harassment using the Online Incident Reporting Tool.
- » Under the *Education Act*, you have a duty to report serious student incidents. These duties are further described in Ministry policies PPM 144 and PPM 145, and require a member to complete the "Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form – Part I" to report serious student incidents.
- » At your discretion, you may report violent incidents to the police.
- » Should workplace violence cause an injury or illness, you must complete a "WSIB Form 6." You may also be required to complete a school board accident/injury/illness report. Note: it is just as important to seek medical attention for psychological and emotional harm as it is to seek assistance for physical injury.
- » Your duty to report workplace violence and serious student incidents is not limited by student age, grade, special needs, or other mitigating factors.
- » If you are having difficulty accessing, completing, or filing the required reports, contact your local OECTA unit as soon as possible to get the support you need.

Workplace violence and harassment policies and programs have been required in school boards for more than a decade. It is critical that your school board not only meet its legislated responsibilities related to workplace violence and harassment policies and programs, but also must actively communicate these expectations to all stakeholders (including parents/guardians and students).

It is also crucial that your school board take all necessary steps to enforce all policies in order to protect employees and provide safe workplaces. Finally, school boards and the various worker employee representatives must regularly review these policies and programs to ensure proper enforcement, and that board policies remain appropriate, effective, and relevant.

The Association is aware that in some school boards, there is a lack of communication with stakeholders and a lack of compliance by some employers when it comes to workplace violence policy and program requirements. This lack of compliance has resulted in the suppression of worker reporting. When reporting is made difficult, or when it seems like nothing is being done to address the issues, workers become discouraged and may stop reporting workplace violence and other serious student incidents. But this under-reporting only makes the situation worse, as school boards use the lack of incidents/reports to deny the severity of the problem.

If you have been a victim of, or witness to, a violent incident in the workplace (including parental and student harassment or online intimidation) you must use your school board's online incident reporting tool to report the incident.

School boards must be held accountable for the enforcement of their policies and the legislated programs designed to protect students, teachers, education workers, and all board employees – and using the reporting tool is the first step!

Workplace violence and workplace harassment can have long-lasting and devastating effects on workers and their families. More work needs to be done to ensure the protection of workers in the workplace. The Association continues to press the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association to ensure that school boards improve online incident reporting systems and encourage the development of a stronger, more accountable, frontline-worker-focussed health and safety culture in school boards.

Lastly, if the workplace violent incident reporting system is not working as it should, you are encouraged to contact your local OECTA unit and your worker health and safety representative, so that appropriate steps can be taken to address the shortcoming(s) of the existing process(es) in your school or school board.

Scan the QR codes to access the resources

- **Workplace Violence in School Boards: A guide to the Law** was specifically developed to help workplace parties in school boards understand the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) workplace violence requirements. The guide provides leading practices for developing violence policies and procedures, the assessment and reassessment of the risks of workplace violence, the reporting of violent incidents, and the haring of information with workers.

Click [HERE](#) to access the guide.

- **Violence Risk Re-Assessment Checklist for Elementary and Secondary Schools** complements the *Provincial Workplace Violence in School Boards: A Guide to the Law* document. The checklist could be used to assist members involved in reassessing and/or updating the safety protocols in schools where there is a risk of a recurrence of workplace violence.

Click [HERE](#) to access the checklist.

- **Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form**

Click [HERE](#) to access the reporting form.

- **Workplace Violence in Education – Creating Safe Workplaces and Learning Environments**
The Public Services Health and Safety Association (PSHSA) is working closely with Ontario's education sector to address workplace violence within the school community. As part of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development's mandate to reduce and eliminate violence in the workplace, PSHSA has engaged with various key stakeholders within the school community to understand their needs with respect to workplace violence prevention. As part of this process, PSHSA has determined current gaps and identified leading practices to address these needs. Based on these consultation efforts, PSHSA has developed a "Workplace Violence Risk Assessment Toolkit for the Education Sector (School Boards)."

Click [HERE](#) to access the toolkit.

- **The Health and Safety section in the Members' Area of catholicteachers.ca** has many helpful resources, including:
 - Protecting Yourself: MLTSD Complaints and Work Refusals Resources for Members
 - Refusing Unsafe Work: A Quick Guide
 - Health & Safety Protocols and Work Refusals: What You Need to Know
 - Health and Safety Town Hall (video)
 - A Teachers' Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act
 - A COVID-19 Health and Safety Rights Guide for Education Workers
 - Know Your Rights to Safe Work in Schools
 - Work Refusal – Stage 1 and 2

Click **HERE** to access the Members' Area at **catholicteachers.ca**.

The 2022-23 OECTA Provincial Health and Safety Committee members include: Peter Sciacca (Chairperson), York Unit; Lina Brunone, Windsor-Essex Secondary Unit; Mike Hamilton, Eastern Unit; Erin Paczek, Ottawa Unit; Joseph Skrak, Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit; Michel Derikx, Provincial Executive; Katrina Wheaton and Rose Procopio, Staff Officers in the Bargaining and Contract Services department at OECTA Provincial Office.

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WEB EXPERIENCE



TEACHERS' AID

OFFERING THE WORK OF OUR DAY TO GOD

By Shannon Hogan

*“Lord, teach
us to pray.”*

Luke 1:1-4



The beauty of prayer is that it takes as many forms as there are people who pray.

I believe that prayer, which is connected intentionally with the God of our lives, is the most intimate human act in which a person can engage.

The beauty of prayer is that it takes as many forms as there are people who pray. My mother Virginia's daily prayer was offering up to God everything she did that day, dedicating her daily work. We used to say that prayer with her each morning, as we rushed to school and as she rushed to begin the mountain of work she faced each day to run our household.

The idea that prayer can come in forms other than at Mass, or by saying the rosary and other formal methods, was with me from a young age, thanks to my mother.

Recently, a friend told me about a homily in which Pope Francis spoke – a parable where a rich man encounters a leper at the gates of a home where the man was going to dine. In the parable, the rich man takes pity on the leper and gives him some money.

Typically, we see this parable as a reminder of God's preferential care for the poor, that we should be mindful of what we have, and the imperative to share with those who have less.

Pope Francis, in his homily, turns the mainstream understanding of this parable upside down. He suggests that as we pray over this passage, we identify with the leper – the poor man begging at the gate. He asks us to enter the experience of this man – and connect with the places within ourselves where we are poor. Where we are begging for comfort and care. To always assume the place of the wealthy man, as in this parable, keeps us separate and apart from the point of the story. To displace our comfort and remain in the hunger and loneliness of the leper, we begin to see more clearly the hidden poverty of the world, and in our lives.

One of my favourite forms of prayer when using scripture is borrowed from the Jesuits – and come to think of it, Pope Francis is a member of that congregation!

To start, I choose a passage from scripture, usually one that is suitable for the liturgical season, although any passage will do.

During Lent, I often choose the scene of the Crucifixion. The scene is busy. There are people milling around – people related to and loved by Jesus, watching his crucifixion. There are Roman guards, nailing Jesus to the cross. And Jesus' mother, Mary, and young

John are there at the foot of the cross.

I choose one of those characters, or a group of people, and try to enter their experience. I look at the sky, smell the sand and dirt, and hear the cries as they watch Jesus die.

With all these options, I can use my energy to be present as Mary or, if I have little energy, I can simply watch from afar with the crowd or alone. This imagining works with the psalms as well – where I am often the lamb or the shepherd.

In our busy days, when we “don't have time to bless ourselves,” as my mother used to say, it may be of help to simply offer the work of our day to God. And if we can think of a parable or scenario we can turn upside down, it may add some depth to our day, our prayer, and our lives.

Shannon Hogan is a retired Catholic teacher and former Staff Officer at OECTA Provincial Office.

IN CONVERSATION WITH DIVERSITY ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER **CLAYTON JOHNSON**

By Michelle Despault and Clayton Johnson



Photo: Clayton Johnson

Clayton Johnson is a Catholic teacher in Toronto, a member of the Association's Diversity Advisory Board (DAB), and a member of the Toronto Secondary Unit. As a member of the DAB, who identifies as an individual with a disability and as a 2SLGBTQIA+ member, the Association reached out to Clayton for a Q&A to share his unique perspectives, as well as to provide guidance and support to other Catholic teachers fighting bias in their school board or seeking an accommodation.

The following is an edited summary of the Association's conversation with Clayton.

► **Why did you apply to serve on the DAB?**

I am a person with a disability and, as a gay man, I am also a sexual minority. The cross-section of my identities provides me with unique experiences that I thought could be relevant to the DAB. As well, I have a background in theology, with a particular interest in liberation theology, and the global economic perspectives that brings. With the convergence of these identities and interests, I thought I might have something to contribute to the work of the DAB. I was pleasantly surprised when I was notified that I had been selected, as there were likely many other worthy applicants.

► **It has been a few months, what has been your experience with the DAB so far?**

One of the central focuses of the DAB is how to realize a more inclusive environment so that all members, including those from diverse and equity-deserving backgrounds, feel supported by, and comfortable engaging with, our union. This requires taking a hard look at our members' human rights, workplace accommodations, and other related topics, and having these important and necessary conversations.

We focus on equity-deserving groups, including Black; racialized; 2SLGBTQIA+; First Nations, Inuit, and Métis members; and members with disabilities, but one of the other marginalizing factors that is easy to overlook is that of class or economic status. For us to be a progressive advisory body, we need to continue to remember the role of class, and how we, as teachers and our communities, can be impacted by these economic realities. Minorities (ethnic and sexual) have disproportionate levels of poverty, depression, and anxiety – we as teachers see this reality with the students we serve every day, as well as in our extended families and broader communities. I am trying to help ensure that we also consider the role of class and the impact it has when we think of those members we are trying to reach and engage.

► **What impact has being a person with a disability had on your teaching career?**

I was first hired by a school board as an occasional teacher in 2009, but I did not get my first long-term occasional (LTO) placement until 2013. In that time, I was granted only three interviews for LTO placements, despite positive reviews of my daily occasional work. A couple things happened that helped change my trajectory. Regulation 274 (fair hiring) was

introduced in 2012, which helped to eliminate some of the barriers to hiring, and after some encouragement from members of my community, I started to identify as a person with a disability.

I was officially neuro-psychologically diagnosed as a person with a disability and followed the process to receive an accommodation that would enable me to better participate in the interview process. Together, these helped to lift some of the barriers that prevented me from being able to show how capable I was, but they did not necessarily address the bias I was facing.

I recall how one principal told me he was going to hire me, but I did not get the position; when I inquired as to why, the principal explained that he was impressed by another candidate's "yearbook experience" – something wholly unrelated to ability to do the job. Something was preventing me from receiving a permanent position. I felt like I was experiencing bias towards my perceived disability and sexuality. I brought my concerns to the Association, which filed a grievance. Only after that, did I receive my first permanent position in 2018.

The process and journey I took to get to a permanent position was not easy. There is a great deal of stigma in the community at large around perceived disability. And even though I had an accommodation, it was not consistently applied – a lot depended on who I was dealing with, and people changed over time. Just having the accommodation did not mean that my self-advocacy had to stop – it is always a constant in my life.

► ***So, having an accommodation has truly assisted you. Did you encounter any pushback on having an accommodation?***

As a permanent teacher now, I continue to receive an accommodation to enable me to fulfil my role to the best of my ability. My colleagues and administration are supportive; however, when I recently changed schools, I had to re-advocate for myself to have my accommodation recognized. I also had all new colleagues to engage. For the most part, people are supportive – more supportive than you might think. Because of the stigma and bias, it is understandable that teachers may be hesitant to acknowledge if they have a disability, even when they could benefit from an accommodation. But teachers need to know that they are not going to upset people because they have an accommodation. Most people accept it as a reality: it is the law and it is supposed to be followed. Relationships do not break down because you have an accommodation – if anything it is the opposite, it helps to foster a supportive community. We can support each other better when we have a sense of the challenges that we face.

Self-advocacy is different for everyone. If there is one thing I have learned, being overly passive and expecting people to proactively understand and respond to your needs is not going



We can support each other better when we have a sense of the challenges that we face.

to get you anywhere, but neither is being overly aggressive. We need to be assertive, ask questions, and make inquiries, but within appropriate boundaries. We all have the right to ask questions and make inquiries, and you may need to follow-up or escalate if there is no response to those inquiries – we should never feel bad about asking the questions that need to be asked.

I think that many of us inherently know and understand that it is illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of a disability or other grounds. For a long time, I believed that this was sufficient to protect me against discrimination, so long as I self-identified. I was not as aware of the role of accommodation as I should have been. I believe this is something that all teachers need to know about at the start of their careers and should be taught in teachers' college – because they may benefit from an accommodation, but also so they can understand and support their colleagues who may have a variety of disabilities and needs.

► ***How did you get involved in the union?***

I became active in my local Toronto occasional unit in my earlier days when I was struggling to get LTO placements. My local unit was a supportive community, who encouraged me to seek an accommodation and supported me in fighting the bias I was facing. The more I engaged, the easier it became to reach out to my local unit on various matters. I also got involved in local elections, doing grassroots work to support the candidates that I thought would do a good job. I am involved with the DAB now, and in the future, I may get involved in the committees in Toronto Secondary Unit. My union involvement has helped me to become more politically astute. The Association is another community of supportive individuals who had a vested interest in my success. I would say that I am on a journey of becoming not only my own advocate but a champion for others as well.

Michelle Despault is Director of Member Communications and Public Affairs in the Government Relations and Public Affairs Department at OECTA Provincial Office.

Clayton Johnson is a member of the Toronto Secondary Unit and represents members with disabilities on the Association's Diversity Advisory Board.

The notwithstanding clause: the good, the bad, and the very ugly

By Peter MacDonald and Filomena Ferraro

The so-called “notwithstanding clause” keeps making headlines. Most recently, the clause was in the news when the Ford government used it as part of its scheme to impose a contract on Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) education workers. That ploy failed, but with the use of the clause – and threats to use the clause – rising in Ontario, and in other provinces across Canada, it is essential that Catholic teachers understand its importance, its power, and its potential danger. With the ability to override *your* rights, the notwithstanding clause is one of the most powerful legislative tools in a government’s arsenal. And the Ford government, and like-minded conservatives, see it as a power to be weaponized.

Understanding the notwithstanding clause

The notwithstanding clause is a purely Canadian creation, born out of a compromise – which, in and of itself, is also very Canadian. The clause, which forms Section 33 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Constitution Act*, 1982, allows federal, territorial, and provincial governments to temporarily override sections 2, and 7 to 15, of the *Charter*. These are the sections of the *Charter* that pertain to our fundamental freedoms, legal rights, and equality rights.

The powers granted by s.33 to governments to override these *Charter* rights are not permanent, and use of the clause lapses after a five-year period. This is colloquially referred to as the “sunset clause.” The five-year expiry is a purposeful inclusion, as it is the maximum time a government may sit before an election has to be called. Thus,

the sunset clause provides a window for citizens, through the ballot box, to decide whether they wish to re-elect a government that suspended their democratic rights.

History of the notwithstanding clause

The history of the notwithstanding clause has its origins in Canada’s constitutional debate in the early 1980s. The original constitution that brought Canada into being was an act of British parliament in 1867, and only Britain could change it. More than a century later, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, as part of the process to repatriate Canada’s constitution from Britain, sought to incorporate a constitutional bill of rights to enshrine Canadians’ fundamental freedoms. This process would produce the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, but its inclusion in repatriation raised many concerns at the time.

The proposal worried several premiers who believed that the *Charter* gave the federal government, judges, and the courts too much power, while restricting the ability of the provinces to pass laws. The premiers wanted a clause that would allow parliament or any provincial legislature to have the power to exempt laws from certain sections of the *Charter*. Initially, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau objected to the inclusion of s.33, but eventually agreed after federal and provincial representatives reached an eleventh-hour deal in a kitchen at the Ottawa Conference Centre that brought enough provincial holdouts on board. This part of our history is aptly named the “Kitchen Accord,” or “The Night of Long Knives” by detractors.

To date, only four provinces (including Ontario) and one territory have passed legislation invoking the notwithstanding clause. The federal government has never used s.33. For many years, its use – or even the threat of its use – was a political “third rail,” which was by design, as it was intended to be used in extraordinary circumstances only. Quebec, which was not present for the signing of the Kitchen Accord, has used the clause the most, including recently in 2019 to pass a law barring public employees from wearing religious symbols. For more than 40 years, no Ontario government used the notwithstanding clause, until Premier Doug Ford came to power.

Weaponizing the notwithstanding clause

With comfortable majorities, the Ford government has repeatedly shown that it will deploy, or threaten to deploy, the notwithstanding clause with impudence, to crush the premier’s political enemies and silence the voices of dissenting Ontarians.

Shortly after winning his first majority government in 2018, Premier Ford threatened to use s.33, after a court ruled the government’s legislation, which reduced the size of Toronto’s city council, to be unconstitutional. The court’s ruling was ultimately overturned by the Ontario Court of Appeal and upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada, negating the Ford government’s need to use s.33.

Four years later, Premier Ford used the clause for the first time, to infringe on Ontarians’ freedom of expression. In the

lead up to the 2022 provincial election, the Ford government used the clause to secure draconian changes to the *Election Finances Act*, which were rammed through the Legislature in April 2021 – changes that the Association and other labour organizations had successfully challenged, and Justice Edward Morgan had struck down as unconstitutional. Premier Ford's shameful use of the notwithstanding clause, to annul Justice Morgan's decision, had the desired effect: to insulate the government from legitimate criticism from unions, workers, and *all Ontarians* ahead of the election.

In these first two cases, there was no significant public outcry. The public's reaction to Bill 28, the *Keeping Students in Class Act*, was different, and simultaneously unprecedented and surprising.

Passed as pre-emptive back-to-work legislation in November 2022, in response to the announcement from CUPE education workers that they would begin legal strike action, the Act imposed a woefully-substandard contract upon education workers, predominantly women, who are already some of the lowest paid in the publicly funded education system. And if that was not oppressive enough, Bill 28 pre-emptively invoked the notwithstanding clause, barring CUPE education workers from challenging the law's constitutionality in court or launching labour or human rights' complaints for five years.

Premier Ford argued that the use of the clause was necessary to prevent school disruption. The labour movement and Ontarians saw it for what it was: an attack on democratic rights.

A teachable moment

In response to Bill 28, unions and labour activists swiftly mobilized, and Ontario was rocked by protests and demonstrations within days of the government's announcement and Premier Ford's popularity dropped.

So, why did the public – and even conservative supporters – oppose the use of the notwithstanding clause this time?

The pre-emptive use of the clause stripped CUPE education workers of their *Charter* rights, to challenge the Ford government's back-to-work legislation, and the draconian contracts it imposed, in court. The government's abuse of power hit a nerve with Ontarians – with workers everywhere wondering if they might be the premier's next target.

The outpouring of support for CUPE education workers was unprecedented. Unions, parents, students, and concerned Ontarians from across the province immediately challenged the Ford government's weaponization of the clause for petty partisan gain, standing up for education workers' – and all workers' – right to bargain freely and fairly. Even Prime Minister Justin Trudeau weighed in, responding to the misuse of the clause, criticizing the Ford government while warning other premiers not to do the same.

The ultimate blow in this match of political wills was the historic press conference held on November 7, when unions and federations, of all stripes from across Canada, joined in solidarity to denounce Bill 28 and the use of s.33. The demonstration of solidarity, combined with the looming threat of a general strike, caused Premier Ford to repeal the bill, just 12 days after it had passed.

In this battle of wills between Premier Ford and organized labour, Ford blinked.

Moving forward

Governments should be reluctant to invoke s.33. This was a clause intended for exceptional circumstances only. Unfortunately, the Ford government has shown that it has a low bar on what "exceptional" means, so we, as citizens, must be vigilant. And as Catholic teachers, we must be even more cautious, as twice now Premier Ford has weaponized the notwithstanding clause to blunt the power of workers.

With Bill 28, the Ford government overplayed its hand. Imposing a contract on CUPE education workers was bad enough. That extra step, the use of the clause to protect the government's back-to-work legislation from challenge and to strip workers of their right to challenge

the law in court, was seen for what it was by Ontarians: naked, partisan self-interest. Ontarians saw this injustice and they made a choice. They chose to stand with workers.

Recently, Bill 124, which capped wage increases for some public sector workers, including teachers, at one per cent per year, for three years, was struck down as unconstitutional in a court challenge led by the Association. The Ford government had the option to use the notwithstanding clause to overrule the courts decision, but chose to appeal the ruling instead. Is the Ford government still smarting from the Bill 28 fiasco? Possibly. But we cannot let our guard down.

The clause has the power to override some of our most fundamental freedoms, legal rights, and equality rights. The Ford government has shown that it does not care. The clause is not sacred. Our rights are not sacred. Premier Ford is ready and willing to use and abuse s.33, if he thinks it will protect him, his cronies, and their schemes.

Perhaps now is the time for the federal government to consider opening discussions on a constitutional amendment to repeal s.33. The federal government already has the powers of disallowance and reservation, which give it the constitutional mechanism to overrule provincial legislation. However, those powers have not been used in decades, and their use today may be seen as federal overreach – a power grab that could be viewed as equally egregious to the initial misuse of the notwithstanding clause. Constitutional debate is fraught and difficult, but perhaps this situation calls for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to step in, to strengthen Canada's constitution, and continue his father's work.

Peter MacDonald is Department Head, and Filomena Ferraro is a Staff Officer, in the Government Relations and Public Affairs department at OECTA Provincial Office.

'Tis the season for reading

By Gian Marcon

A few years ago, it was strongly suggested that I refrain from purchasing any new books between Thanksgiving and Christmas. This “request” was made to help me avoid purchasing books I might receive as Christmas gifts.

As I sit down to write this column in early January, I have just finished reading one of the books I received as a gift this Christmas. Spending the time between Boxing Day and New Years’ Day, luxuriating with a brewed coffee in my favourite reading spot with a newly received book remains one of my Christmas season traditions. The comfort derived from this familiar ritual is truly good for both my mind and soul. And New Years’ Day, in particular, usually affords me a full day to immerse myself in a fresh book.

This year I received two from my list: *The Winners* by Fredrik Backman, and *The Whisper on the Night Wind* by Adam Shoats. I have read books by both these authors before and thoroughly enjoyed their respective works.

The Winners is the third book in the Beartown Trilogy, which is about the lives of the residents of a small, rural town in

Northern Sweden. The town’s life and existence are inextricably entwined with the junior hockey team that plays in the top Swedish junior league, despite the town’s small size. The first two books in the series, *Beartown* and *Us Against You*, are compelling reads that have caused me to become heavily invested in the characters that Backman has created. I have just cracked open the final book in the series, which promises to do what many good books do – both warm and also break my heart.

The Whisper on the Night Wind is the latest piece of non-fiction by Canadian author Adam Shoats. The book is only 235 pages and its compelling content makes for a quick read – such that it consumed my New Years’ Day and provided a most satisfying reading experience.

Shoats, upon discovering stories of a white-maned creature terrorizing the environs of Traverspine near the Churchill River in the early part of the 20th century, recruits a high school friend to drive from southern Ontario to the remotest part of Labrador to explore further. Once there, they endure various hardships before they discover and

explore the area purportedly haunted by the creature, including the ruins of the original community of Traverspine. Through seemingly impassable bogs, aspen thickets, and rapids, the author and his companion slog their way to the ominously imposing Mealy Mountains in an attempt to unravel the mystery at the root of the persistent local myth.

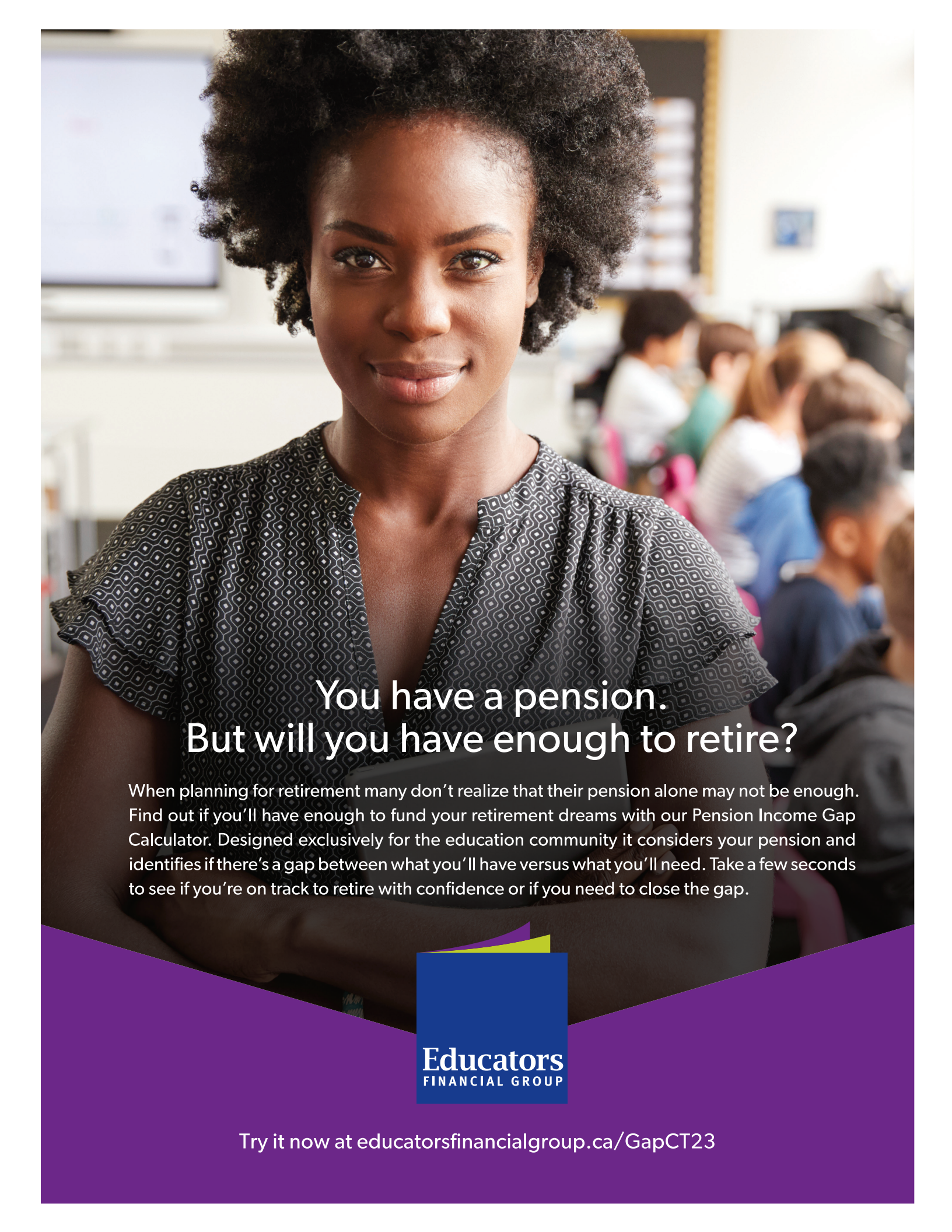
In his straightforward style Shoats, who is an experienced explorer and gifted historian, expertly relates the feelings of sheer isolation and eeriness experienced when he embeds himself in the same locale where the settlers from a by-gone era first encountered the fabled beast. It is here that he realizes how dangerous and desolate places can be fertile ground for myths and legends. In addition, his observation that most legends are at least in part based on a modicum of truth and actual experience, is particularly revealing.

As the book progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that whether evidence of the creature is discovered or not is secondary to the process, which the author and his friend are experiencing. Notwithstanding this, Shoats does present a credible and well-thought-out theory on what was experienced by the denizens of Traverspine more than a century earlier. In the end, one is left with a sense that the journey – both the physical and intellectual – is at least as important as the destination.

So, as I get set to embark on my next reading adventure, I can only hope that your personal reading experiences are equally as satisfying and, if you are looking for a quick, compelling, and thought-provoking read you may want to consider giving *The Whisper on the Night Wind* a try.

Gian Marcon is a retired Catholic teacher and former Staff Officer at OECTA Provincial Office.





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