

JUNE 2024 ISSUE

ONLINE  
VERSION

# Catholic Teacher

MAGAZINE of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

## **EYES WIDE OPEN: TEACHERS AND AI**



### **PLUS:**

Back to basics, back to dignity

Education funding – new look, same old cuts

Reflections from DPSU's first Equity-deserving and Indigenous Members Forum

Celebrating National Indigenous History and Pride months

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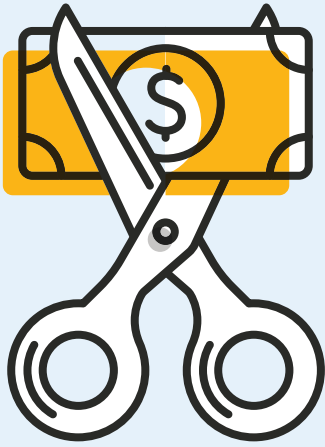
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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Every day, teachers champion a better future for children and Ontario. You dedicate yourself in ways that are often undervalued by some, including our government. You persevere with the struggle for hope that Catholic teachers started long before us.

Eighty years ago, Catholic teachers across Ontario joined together with determination, courage, and optimism to establish an organization that represented their voices, and to cement its role as a significant stakeholder in Ontario's publicly funded Catholic education system. These teachers, our fellow members, sought to shape the future that they imagined. This is part of our union history, the fabric of who we are as members of OECTA, and the basis upon which we continue to evolve.

“And now that we are organized, let us march on together for union brings success.”  
- Margaret Lynch, first OECTA President, 1944-45

As Catholic teachers, a commitment to advocacy and social justice is at our core. While we continue our work to ensure OECTA represents the voice and experience of our diverse members, we also play a broader role in fostering awareness and respect of others, preparing students for the modern world, while giving every student entrusted to our care the tools and knowledge to manage relationships and well-being. By creating safe, inclusive, and welcoming working and learning environments for teachers and students, we can advance the causes of equity and human rights, both within our Association and beyond.

This has been particularly challenging to achieve in the last six years amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and with the Ford Conservative government's disdain for teachers and refusal to properly invest in publicly funded education. We cannot carry on like this any longer. To realize the best possible schools for our members and the students we teach, we need to elect a government that values the common good in the next provincial election in 2026. This is the first step in our next round of bargaining, and part of our ongoing mission to work toward a socially just society for all Ontarians.

In recent years, our notion of collectivism, both as OECTA members and in our broader communities, has been challenged by world events, a global pandemic, widening socio-economic disparities, 24/7 access to technology and social media, and an enhanced emphasis on fear and division.

Amidst these challenges, our members are expressing a desire for OECTA to fight further to defend their classrooms and the community. They are frustrated by the Ford government's expensive and exhaustive political messaging, which attempts to portray values of unity and progress, while actually seeking to divide and polarize our province.

The care teachers put into every school day and every child is realized as members raise their voices, encouraging OECTA to do more to counter these inequities alongside a yearning for our fundamental values of empathy, dignity, and respect. We hear you and we are making plans so



that we can amplify our voices together. Our members are ready to help us organize ways to shape our future, rather than respond as it happens to us. This will not be easy, and it must involve all levels of OECTA, from classroom teachers, Association Representatives, local units, and leaders. As a provincial organization, we can accomplish so much more together. In the words of Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.”

Teachers’ unions have always been on the frontlines advocating for progressive social change. Challenging the status quo through social justice, the teachings of our faith, empowerment, and action. Engaging in the difficult work of negotiating for our collective, rather than individual, needs. It is through this lens of deeply held and commonly shared values that OECTA has evolved into who we are today, and what we strive to achieve going forward.

So long as we continue to engage in the difficult work of negotiating for our collective needs, challenging the status quo and pushing for social progress, our goals for the future remain hopeful. This is what solidarity looks like. OECTA’s story is built on a long history of solidarity up to and including the recent Bill 124 victory. There is reason to hope.

For now, it is my hope that you can find the time to rest and nurture your well-being this summer. May you find peace, serenity, and renewed hope for the year ahead.

*“Bring peace to your past, purpose to your present, and hope to your future.”*

In solidarity,



René Jansen in de Wal  
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](mailto:publicaffairs@catholicteachers.ca).

*There is no voice more important than a member’s voice.*

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# CALENDAR

## JUNE

National Indigenous History Month

Pride Month

Right to Strike Month (OECTA recognized)

- 17 Summer AQ Registration Closes
- 20 World Refugee Day
- 21 National Indigenous Peoples Day
- 27 Canadian Multiculturalism Day

## JULY

- 1 Canada Day
- 2 Summer AQ Courses Begin
- 3 Book Club Launch Meeting: *Brother*
- 4 Book Club Launch Meeting: *Love Lives Here: A Story of Thriving in a Transgender Family*
- 14 International Non-binary People's Day

**JULY 29 TO AUGUST 9**  
PROVINCIAL OFFICE CLOSURE

## AUGUST

- 5 Civic Holiday
- 9 International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
- 12 International Youth Day
- 12 Fall AQ Registration Opens

## SEPTEMBER

- 2 Labour Day
- 8 International Literacy Day
- 8 Fall AQ Course Registration Closes
- 22-28 Gender Equality Week
- 30 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation/Orange Shirt Day

# UP FRONT

## OECTA SUMMER BOOK CLUB

Join us for a unique learning opportunity this summer with **OECTA's Summer Book Club**, as we explore two award-winning, best-selling titles:

- ***Brother***, by David Chariandy, is a coming-of-age story that follows the life of Michael and Francis, sons of Trinidadian immigrants in Canada. This novel captures their struggles and aspirations, highlighting the complexities of their lives marked by their father's absence and their mother's relentless work ethic to secure a better future for them.
- ***Love Lives Here: A Story of Thriving in a Transgender Family***, by Rowan Jetté Knox, offers an inspirational glimpse into the lives of a family that embraces the transitions of two transgender members. This memoir showcases the power of leading with love and acceptance in the face of societal challenges.

Book Club participants will meet twice, initially for a brief launch meeting in early July prior to starting the novel, and then again in early August after finishing. Participants are required to obtain their own copy of the book in advance of the launch meeting.

**Registration is required and space is limited.**

Click **HERE** to learn more and register.





## 9-8-8 SUICIDE CRISIS HELPLINE

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), in partnership with the federal government and other organizations across Canada, recently launched the **9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline**.

When someone calls or texts 9-8-8, they will reach a responder at one of nearly 40 local, provincial, territorial, and national crisis lines that co-deliver the service. 9-8-8 partners include: Hope for Wellness, which offers specialized support for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, and Kids Help Phone, which specializes in supporting youth.

Help spread the word about 9-8-8. Visit [988.ca](http://988.ca) for free resources and information on how to talk about suicide safely.

## REGISTER FOR FALL AQ COURSES AND CLIMB THE GRID!

Did you know that staying at A3 on the salary grid could cost you \$50,000 over 10 years? Register for some of the best professional development available to Catholic teachers and climb the salary grid! AQ Course topics include equitable and inclusive schools, religion, reading, math, special education, and so much more.

Do not miss out on these amazing opportunities to learn more and potentially earn more!

Visit [catholicteachers.ca/AQ](http://catholicteachers.ca/AQ) for details on how to apply. Registration for the fall session opens **August 12**. Courses begin October 7 and end December 13.



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# Events

## / OECTA's Association Representatives continue to RISE up

When you think about the Association, and how you interact with our union on a daily basis, who comes to mind first – your Association Representative, right?

Association Representatives are essential to our union. They are the eyes and ears in our schools, advocating for Catholic teachers and defending your rights every day. They are a critical liaison between your school and local unit, bringing Catholic teachers' concerns forward to ensure that all voices are heard. They are educators and communicators, keeping you informed about key updates and news from your local unit and Provincial Office. They are also a source of knowledge and expertise, answering questions about the collective agreement, benefits, health and safety, and your rights.

The importance of our Association Representatives cannot be understated, which is why their continued training is a core component of OECTA's ongoing support for active members through our RISE: Professional Development and Training Program for Catholic Teachers.

Under the RISE banner, staff from OECTA Provincial Office, working closely with local units, delivered more Association Representative training

sessions this school year, engaging hundreds of participants from across the province.

At each session, Association Representatives took part in workshops focusing on three key areas: best practices for being a representative and how to champion members' rights; communicating with an accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity lens; and engaging (and re-engaging) members to build our union power.

As we look forward, to build on the success of the RISE program, OECTA will continue to offer new and varied training opportunities to our Association Representatives. From this, we hope to give Catholic teachers who volunteer their time in this essential position, the direction, guidance, and support they need to fulfil their role to the best of their abilities.





## / Congratulations to Dr. Yvonne Runstedler!



The Association would like to extend our most heartfelt congratulations to the newly minted **Dr. Yvonne Runstedler**.

Last month, Yvonne, who is a Staff Officer in the Administration department at Provincial Office, with an AIDE-focused assignment, completed her dissertation defence at Wilfrid Laurier University. The title of her dissertation is: “From the Invisible Man to Cozy Closets: Transgender Students’ Narratives in Ontario Catholic Schools.”

The dissertation committee not only granted her a PhD for her tremendous work studying the inclusion of transgender students in Catholic schools, but also recommended her for the university’s Medal of Academic Excellence – Doctoral Level (Gold Medal). This award is reserved for students who achieve the highest academic standing in their degree program.

**Congratulations Yvonne!**

## / pACT: Catholic teachers unite to elect an education-friendly government



*pACT members meet with Galen Naidoo Harris, the Ontario Liberal Party candidate in the Milton by-election.*

This year, Catholic teachers, OECTA local unit presidents, local Political Action Committee (PAC) chairs, and unit executive members from across the GTA joined forces to create a new action group dedicated to electing an education-friendly government. Meet **Political Action Catholic Teachers** (or **pACT** for short).

Most recently, pACT members took action in the Milton by-election, with a strong contingent of Catholic teachers canvassing for Galen Naidoo Harris, the Ontario Liberal Party candidate. Members were out in force, meeting with hundreds of community members to champion publicly funded education and the need for a government that invests in what students and teachers need to succeed. Although the results of the by-election were disappointing, pACT members are now turning their attention to gearing up for the 2026 provincial election.

### **Take action in your community!**

Contact your local OECTA unit office or your local’s Political Action Committee to get involved in pACT. Together, we can elect an education-friendly government that recognizes the need to invest in schools!

## / Catholic teachers celebrate National Indigenous History Month and Pride Month

June marks the celebration of both National Indigenous History Month and Pride Month, providing a vital opportunity for Catholic teachers to honour the diverse histories, cultures, and contributions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

We have a duty to continue to work toward creating more inclusive classrooms that celebrate the diverse histories of our students, and to create safe spaces for them to explore their identities and culture. Transforming our school systems requires action. This June, we encourage you to work collaboratively with your students, fellow teachers, community members, local elders, and knowledge keepers towards this goal.

As an Association, we are committed to providing a wealth of resources to assist teachers in their classroom activities and beyond.

Remember, these practices should be embraced year-round, not just in the month of June.

### Resources on Indigenous histories and celebrating First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples' cultures and heritage

As teachers, we have a responsibility to take action in our classrooms and communities to champion the message that every child matters. As part of this commitment to action, Catholic teachers have an important role in fostering inclusive classrooms and school environments that celebrate diverse Indigenous cultures and provide the learning space for Indigenous students to thrive.

In collaboration with Indigenous knowledge keepers, local elders, and consultants, you can create inclusive spaces for Indigenous youth identification and expression. Celebrations can

include highlighting the contributions of Indigenous Peoples in a history class, having books written by Indigenous authors in your classroom, or inviting knowledge keepers to your school. To support you in your learning and instructional practices, and as part of our shared commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, the Association has put together a **collection of resources** – including lesson plans, workshops, and access to Indigenous speakers and cultural events – to promote a deeper understanding and respect for Indigenous communities, ensuring that their rich heritage is acknowledged and celebrated in our schools.

» **Exploring Indigenous Histories, Cultures, and Heritage**

» **Indigenous Catholic**



## Celebrating Pride Month and 2SLGBTQIA+ resources

As Catholic teachers, you model your professional obligations and duty of care by fostering safe and inclusive environments for your students and peers.

During Pride Month, consider the numerous ways you can celebrate in your classrooms and communities. Celebrations can include flying the Pride flag in your classroom, displaying Pride-positive door knockers or posters, holding space for 2SLGBTQIA+ students through a GSA (gay-straight alliance), and learning from first-person accounts of gender diverse people.

We can celebrate their histories and accomplishments, while also challenging homophobia and transphobia via book clubs, speaking events, and participating in local Pride parades and festivities. Visit the [Ontario Federation of Labour's Pride events webpage](#) to see the Pride activities and events taking place in your community in June and throughout the summer.

For a selection of Pride-related classroom resources at varying grade levels, review the resources from the [Canadian Pride Historical Society](#) and [Egale Canada](#). Also, visit [Outreach](#) for news, essays, resources, and community supports for 2SLGBTQIA+ Catholics.

To support the inclusion and celebration of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities, the Association offers various resources, such as professional development workshops, inclusive curriculum guides, and access to supportive networks. These are designed to help teachers create affirming and inclusive classrooms where all students feel valued and respected.

- » [2SLGBTQIA+ and Coming Out – A Guide for Catholic Teacher Leaders](#)
- » [Gender and Sexuality – Glossary of Terms](#)
- » [Coming Out as Transgender](#)



# FORD'S FUNDING FAILURE

## The government's education funding has a brand new look, but the same old cuts

By Mark Tagliaferri

In the world of politics, there is a tactic known as the “Friday news dump.”

Put simply, when a government has a bad news story, or a document that will potentially cast them in an unfavourable light, they sometimes choose to release the information on a Friday afternoon. The thinking behind this is that it minimizes scrutiny – the public's attention naturally wanes as the weekend begins, and typically, there are fewer journalists and formal news outlets actively covering breaking stories over the weekend.

Keeping all of this in mind, it just so happens that on a Friday afternoon in April, the Ford Conservative government quietly released the **education funding figures for the 2024-25 school year**.

You would be forgiven for having missed the news release – it was not only posted on a Friday afternoon, but was immediately overshadowed by a more sensationalist announcement delivered two days later at a rare Sunday press conference, the government's so-called **classroom cellphone ban**.

It is an open question as to whether the funding announcement was an intentional “Friday news dump,” but one thing is certain; dozens of articles were published about the cellphone ban and almost nothing was published about the provincial education funding numbers.

This is unfortunate, because in many respects one could argue that the education funding grants are more directly consequential to student learning. These figures outline what

every student will receive in terms of resources, supplies, and supports at an *individual* level; and when the figures amount to cuts, they form the basis of teacher surplus and job loss, program cancellations, and a weakening of the ability of teachers to meet students' increasingly diverse needs.

So, it is worth putting down our cellphones for a minute and delving a bit deeper into the education funding figures for the next school year. Doing so shines a light on the government's continued and chronic underfunding of education, as well as the shell games and accounting tricks that the Ford Conservative government employs to conceal their sustained assault on publicly funded education in Ontario.



### A funding rebrand

The most dramatic change to education funding for 2024-25 has more to do with letters than with numbers.

For years, education funding was presented in a document called the Grants for Student Needs (GSNs), which included 18 grants and 77 funding allocations. However, as part of a government rebranding exercise, the document is now called Core Education Funding, and is comprised of six funding “pillars” and 28 allocations.

The government claims this was done to make education funding simpler and easier to understand by the public – and as far as objectives go, this is fair enough. Unfortunately, the reality is that the government has produced a document that makes it far more difficult – and in some cases impossible – to track funding.

For instance, core per-student funding that traditionally had been presented in one easy-to-read table has been broken apart, with different sections in different places of the document – forcing readers to reconstruct the tables in order to make apples-to-apples comparisons. At the same time, several funding “envelopes” (that is, obligations for school boards to spend funds on a particular item) have been eliminated, removing a key feature of school board accountability. And finally, in a number of places, the government has simply



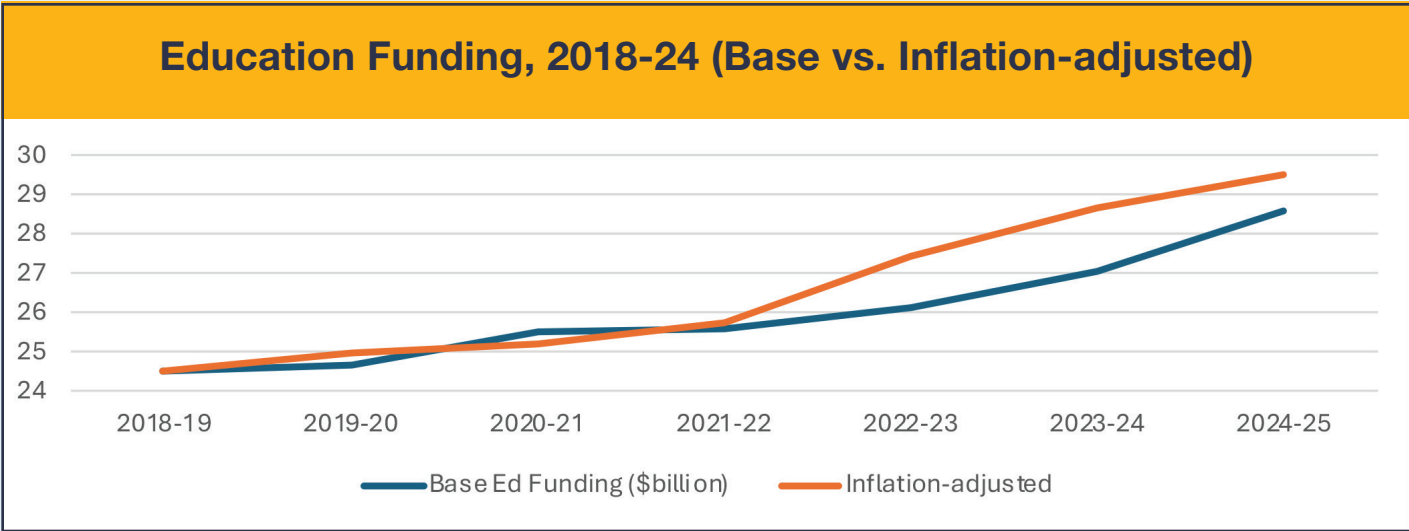
stopped including funding amounts for specific program components, making it impossible to determine what is *actually* being provided.

Far from improving transparency or simplicity, the rebranding of Core Education Funding seems designed to make it more difficult to know where and how monies are being directed and spent.

**New name, same cuts**

For the sixth straight year since taking office in 2018, the Ford Conservative government framed their education funding announcement as a “historic investment.” And for the sixth straight year, when you strip away the non-classroom items and account for inflation, the government has made deep cuts to education funding.

Overall, Core Education Funding is projected to be \$28.6 billion for the 2024-25 school year, which is a 2.7 per cent nominal increase over last year. However, when you compare this funding to what the previous Liberal government invested in the 2018 GSNs, and adjust for inflation, next year the Ford government is underfunding education by \$860 million.



Source: Government of Ontario, education funding documents, 2018-2024.

It is worth reiterating that, even in a hypothetical world where the government addressed the \$860 million shortfall, this would still do nothing more than *maintain* funding at the rate of inflation since 2018. In reality, given the diversity and complexity of students' needs, and as many still grapple with learning loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the actual funding amount that would be required to provide students the necessary resources and supports likely far exceeds inflation.

Taking a more granular look at per-student funding for 2024-25, we can refer to several tables from different sections of the Core Education Funding document to produce a reliable year-over-year funding comparison:

Per-pupil Funding	Increase from 23-34 (nominal %)
Kindergarten	2.1
Elementary (Grades 1 to 8)	1.2
Secondary (Grades 9 to 12)	0.9

Using the most recent publicly available enrolment data from the Ministry of Education (2022-23 school year), we are able to gain a better sense of the Ford Conservative government's deep inflationary cuts across all divisions of the publicly funded education system for next year:

Per-pupil Funding	Inflationary Gap
Kindergarten	-\$14,118,170
Elementary (Grades 1 to 8)	-\$103,483,800
Secondary (Grades 9 to 12)	-\$75,575,448

In every respect, students and teachers will once again be forced to do more with less, as funding continues to fall well short of inflation. This extends right down to pencils and paper – next year, schools in Ontario will receive less than \$1 per day, per student, for classroom supplies.

On top of this, the Ford Conservative government continues to cut teaching positions. As Ricardo Tranjan from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has calculated, since 2018 the **Ford Conservative government has cut almost 5,000 classroom staff positions** from schools across Ontario. This trend continues for next year: **online observers** have identified that, in secondary schools for next year, the government has decreased the number of teachers per 1,000 Average Daily Enrolment (ADE) students, from 54.91 to 54.74. This 0.17 change roughly translates to one teacher position that will be cut per 5,000 students.

### Performative policies

At seemingly every opportunity, the Ford Conservative government professes a stated commitment to supporting students and improving equity. Such was the case with the introduction of de-streamed courses for Grade 9. The Association has **long supported the policy of de-streaming**, provided that the government invest sustained and stable funding and supports to ensure its success.

Last year, the government committed \$103.69 million toward de-streaming supports for students, in what was then called the “Supporting Student Potential” program. This year, under a new fund name (“Supporting Vulnerable Students”) the Ford Conservative government is committing \$3 million for student supports. This is a \$100 million cut that removes 97 per cent of the funding compared to last year. The numbers do not lie – this is not the actions of a government that is seriously committed to supporting students or equity.

A similar shortfall is evident in the newly created Special Education Fund. Taken together, special education under the Ford Conservative government will suffer a \$130 million inflationary funding gap next year, when compared to the Liberal government’s 2018 GSNs. With a staffing formula that translates to one Child and Youth Worker for every 2,437 students in Ontario elementary schools,

it is no wonder that waitlists for students to access professional and para-professional staff are now measured in years.

### Know More about education funding

It may not always lend itself to click-bait news headlines, but understanding education funding – and more importantly its real-world impact on your students – is essential if we are going to sustain and grow our advocacy efforts in the months and years ahead.

The Association will continue to provide you with information and resources, such as through our **Know More campaign**, so that you are prepared and confident to get involved and raise your voice in support of publicly funded education. Because when it comes to investing in education and our students’ futures, cutting dollars just doesn’t make sense.

---

*Mark Tagliaferri is Director of Research in the Government Relations and Public Affairs department at OECTA Provincial Office.*



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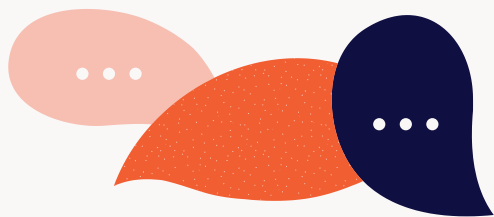
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# Back to basics, back to dignity

## The new language of equity and inclusion

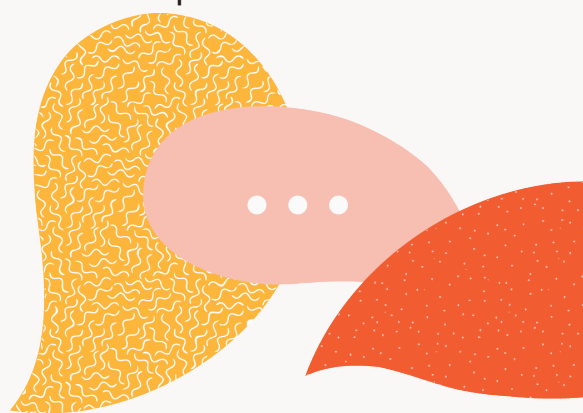
By Amanda Gonsalves

As the government pushes its “back to basics” approach, we cannot lose sight of the fact that human dignity, which is intricately tied to fundamental human rights, is a “basic.” Thus, an authentic “back to basics” approach must be rooted in anti-oppression. True “basics” go beyond academic skills, encompassing a profound understanding of each student’s unique needs and identities, which are pivotal in unlocking their full potential.

Gloria Ladson-Billings, a pedagogical theorist and teacher, delineates three pillars of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy crucial to student success. These pillars form the bedrock of a true “back to basics” ethos: prioritizing high academic achievement, fostering cultural competence, and nurturing critical consciousness. These elements, though often perceived as discrete, are deeply interconnected, shaping responsive education. Central to

this ethos is the recognition of every individual’s inherent dignity, a cornerstone of human rights and at the heart of Catholic education.

High academic expectations necessitate recognizing and addressing biases, fostering an environment of openness and continuous learning. Teachers must become aware of the ways our own preconceptions show up in our



classrooms, and in our expectations of students who have a different lived experience from our own. We must critically interrogate our assumptions and adapt instructional strategies to honour students' diverse backgrounds, abilities, languages, learning styles, interests, and experiences to fully celebrate the achievements of the students we serve.

Next, cultural competencies entail understanding the complexities of identity and social dynamics to meet students where they are. Educators must assess the dimensions of their own identities and employ an intersectional lens to uphold the dignity of all. Our Catholic social teaching encourages us to explore how intersectionality can exacerbate experiences of discrimination and oppression, as well as consider how aspects of students' identities might be influenced by systems of oppression and intergenerational trauma.

Lastly, critical consciousness entails recognizing systemic barriers and advocating for fair education, akin to the work of Christ challenging oppressive systems. Teachers must emulate this by actively challenging colonial curriculum approaches, dismantling Eurocentric narratives, and fostering inclusive learning environments. In doing so, they honour Christ's mission by valuing diverse perspectives, deconstructing power dynamics, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities deserving of equity.

As Catholic teachers, we are called to uphold the inherent dignity of all children made in the image and likeness of God. Ultimately, this call to action resonates with the teachings in Micah 6: 8: "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." Embracing "back to basics" principles means recognizing the inherent worth of every individual, dismantling systemic barriers, and reimagining education as a catalyst for empowerment and equity. From teachers, it demands continuous reflection, unlearning, and relearning, rooted in a profound respect for human dignity and a commitment to transformative change by going back to basics.

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*Amanda Gonsalves is a member of the Halton Secondary Unit, and a Curriculum Consultant – Equity and Inclusive Education with the Halton Catholic District School Board.*





# Striving to achieve work-life balance

By Amy Brillinger-Tuka

One of my husband's favourite television programs is "Street Outlaws" on the Discovery Channel. The cast have powerful vehicles and race a "quarter mile" against other drivers. Often, they do a "burnout" before starting the race. A "burnout," for those who may not be aware, is when a driver purposefully

spins a car's wheels while stationary, using the friction of the rubber against the road to heat the tires up, causing them to smoke.

According to TopSpeed.com, "burnouts are a great pastime for any guy (or person) who has had a car with a little bit of power, and a necessary

evil for those who like to hit the quarter-mile strip on the weekend. It seems pretty easy, right? Slam the gas, let the wheels break loose, steer the car, and hope people stay out of your way. Unfortunately, it is really not that simple."

This is a metaphor I apply to being a wife, mother, union advocate, and



teacher. The feeling – of spinning my wheels, heating up, and having smoke come from my ears – has only increased over the past few years. Then when I do “get going,” I sometimes forget what I have to do and have difficulty concentrating – my thoughts race and I worry. I worry about everything: my family, my job, the quality of my work, my children and their schools, my students and their families, my colleagues, what is being said about teachers in the news, the Ministry of Education, etc. And I have heard many of my teacher colleagues say the same thing when sharing their own personal experiences.

When you are a teacher, achieving any kind of work-life balance is a constant struggle. Burnout is a real concern. It needs to be taken seriously by each and every one of us, and especially by our employers.

**Psychology Today** defines burnout as “a state of chronic stress that leads to exhaustion,

detachment, and feelings of ineffectiveness.” These are symptoms being felt by more and more teachers as work becomes more difficult, demanding, and all-consuming.

“Teachers are usually high achievers who work hard and are always looking for ways to improve. These traits are commendable but can mean that educators fall prey to perfectionism and don’t leave enough time for rest and recuperation,” reports **Western Governors University**. Being a teacher has always been about more than just delivering curriculum to students, assessing their progress, and determining in a measurable manner if they have met the requirements to pass a grade or a course.

Teachers *care* – sometimes too much! They recognize how important their role is in a student’s life – you may never know exactly what your impact has been, but you know that from before the bell rings until those students go home

– and well beyond that time – that you have had an influence on their life. That means that being a teacher goes beyond just providing supports for academic success. Yes, that is one very important part of being a teacher, but being a teacher often involves a number of additional things – scheduling the day, coaching teams, supervising clubs, taking care of scrapes, mending hurt feelings, managing outbursts, teaching social skills, and communicating with students and their families. Being a teacher also means that sometimes you have to be a nurse, therapist, food bank, clothing store, social worker, and disciplinarian.

And yet, **teachers cannot always be superheroes!** The lack of support, coupled with limited resources and systemic underfunding, continues to exacerbate the challenges being faced in schools. Teachers know that the systemic and administrative responses are all too often inadequate.

Simply put, there are not enough trained

professionals available in schools to provide all the supports students (and teachers) need – there are not enough guidance teachers, not enough child and youth workers, not enough special education services, not enough support workers, and not enough resources to keep some students from falling through the cracks – none of which is your fault!

Teachers should not be trying to fill in as psychologists, nurses, or social workers just because these trained professionals are not available in schools.

Many teachers are over-extended and overwhelmed by students' needs, parental expectations, and administrative demands, and sometimes (which is even worse), they feel undermined by school administrators and other school board staff as they attempt to fill the gaps. But how can you not? No one wants to see a student suffer.

It is impossible to support each and every student. So, what do we do?

Some try even harder, push more of their own

needs aside, and ignore their own families and friends. Added pressure comes from administrators, school boards, and other agencies asking teachers to do more, to take on more, and to give more. There is always another “ask” on top of new curriculum, assessments, implementation of tiered interventions, and all the other workload downloaded on teachers daily.

There is a disconnect between what the duties and responsibilities of teaching are and what is becoming an increasing amount of social work and counselling. Of growing concern is how to protect yourself as a professional. Developing anything but a strictly professional relationship with parents and students is a slippery slope (especially in this judgmental social media world) and teachers need to be very aware of the public scrutiny and take steps to guard themselves against it. If you have not done so already, I strongly recommend that you review the Ontario College of Teachers' [resources on professional boundaries](#).

Then, after an eight to 12 hour work day, teachers go home to their family, their personal life, and their other responsibilities, and they are expected to miraculously shut down all these thoughts and worries, so they can have a private life.

When I recognized the symptoms of burnout in myself, I knew I had to do something. I set out to find ways to help myself.



**We're trying all the time, to do and be all the things everyone demands from us. And we will try anything – any green smoothie, any deep-breathing exercise, any coloring book or bath bomb, any retreat or vacation we can shoehorn into our schedules – to be what our work and our family and our world demand.**

- *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*, by Emily Nagoski and Ameila Nagoski

The most effective action is always to get rid of whatever is causing the burnout-inducing stress, but this is rarely easy for teachers, whose sources of burnout cannot be easily



removed. Nor is it easy for a person with impossibly high standards, long to-do lists, and a calendar crammed full of deadlines and obligations. We are teachers because of who we are – we are *givers* and we love working with students. We cannot always stop and we cannot just give up. Nor can we get rid of the legal requirements of the job, the planning, all the different types of assessments, the reporting, the general paperwork, and the day-to-day work of being the instructor and the supervisor of 15 to 30-plus students.

So, what do we do to take care of ourselves? We all know what we should do: say no to the extras, mitigate the pressures, expect a little less of ourselves, realize that perfection is an illusion, disconnect from work when the day is done, and find some work-life balance in whatever way works best.

I am just starting to understand that “no” is not a bad word. I am learning that I do not have to say “yes” to every challenge, every opportunity, or every



request. I cannot please everyone. I am slowly learning to choose when I say “yes” and when I say “no,” because I am starting to understand that saying “yes” to someone, will, at some point, require me to say “no” to someone else.

I have come to realize that saying “no” is about self-preservation. I am trying to be more selective, recognizing my priorities, my limits, and doing what I need to do to keep myself safe. Sure, there are times when I must focus my energies on work-related tasks, but even then I know that I need to leave some

free time for myself and my loved ones. I am also starting to recognize and accept when I may need help.

I am writing this to share with others that you matter too – your family matters, your friends matter, and having a life outside of school matters. You are not alone.

And I also walk out of the room when my husband is watching the burnouts on “Street Outlaws.”

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*Amy Brillinger-Tuka is Elementary Vice-President of the OECTA Waterloo Unit and a Kindergarten teacher. She is also a member of the provincial and her local Health and Safety committees.*

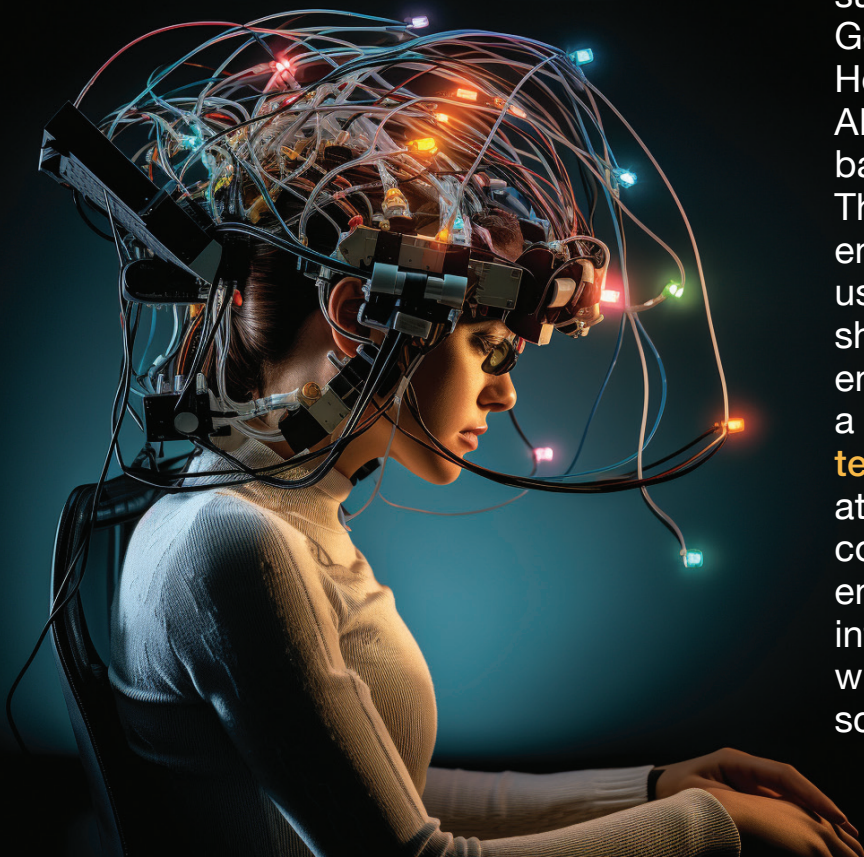
# When it comes to AI, teachers need to go in with *eyes wide open*

By Anthony Carabache

The sudden surge in development of artificial intelligence (AI) has been a boon for powerful technology companies; many of which are driven by shareholder profits, brand recognition, and brand legacy. This surge has initiated a global AI arms race of sorts that seeks the

undivided attention and control of its consumers. Despite the large-scale interest, the major players investing billions of dollars in this technology boil down to a small number of heavy hitters.

Today's AI experience is based on the latest Large Language Models (LLMs), such as OpenAI's Chat-GPT4, Google's Gemini, and Microsoft's Copilot. However, humanity's first contact with AI was the **rudimentary algorithms** baked into social media in the 2010s. These algorithms analyzed how people engaged with online content, and used that data to optimize what was shown to them on screen to maximize engagement. This led to the advent of a field of study known as **persuasive technology**, dedicated to changing attitudes and behaviours via hard-coded persuasion and social influence, ensuring the general population's interactions with AI were designed with intent – to keep eyeballs glued to screens. This powerfully persuasive





technology, wielded by companies driven by profit and power, has caused **great anxiety and social dilemmas that continue to confound to this day.**

Is AI a threat to teachers or other professions at-large? Some experts suggest that **AI first needs to surpass human intelligence.** This moment in time is known as the “technology singularity,” or “takeoff,” and AI would thereafter be called “Artificial General Intelligence.” In contrast, technology ethicist Tristan Harris has stated that AI only needs to surpass human weakness. If this is true, then the use of AI in social media has already demonstrated that capability.

Alongside tech giants, governments and private enterprise are quietly using AI to test the boundaries of replacing, or even managing, human workers. Amazon, for example, is a global leader in the use of AI for employee recruitment and management. The tech-retail giant currently uses AI to track worker productivity, **leading to the firing of workers deemed inefficient.**

### **Privatization of education via AI “innovation”**

In the education sector, AI’s incursion into the field of tutoring is growing exponentially. Khanmigo and SchoolAI are established AI tutoring services in the United States. Sal Khan, who is the founder of the Khan Academy, which has 150 million subscribers globally, has been piloting Khanmigo with users 18 years old and above to test its AI

deployment, while SchoolAI is open to everyone.

In Canada, Ottawa’s AI Tutor is one of 76 AI education startups, according to **Tracxn’s Innovation Tracker.** Until funding sources for these companies are made clear, the monitoring of public funds dedicated to innovation in the education sector must be scrutinized.

School systems around the world are already being invited to use AI-based attendance systems for students. GeniusEDU boasts the use of AI and facial recognition to track students while in the building, and is one of thousands of products that combine biometric identification with AI.

Students are not the only focus either; **PunchClock AI** is a British company that uses facial recognition to provide real-time data on teacher attendance and their activities. Their website boasts the promise that “institutions can maintain a safe and efficient learning environment while ensuring that teachers are at their posts when needed.”



## AI is just a tool

Sorry – no, it’s not.

The use of a tool is asymmetric between power and authority – a tool and its user. The user is in complete control and can wield the tool to suit their goals. In terms of the balance of power, AI is powered by technology that *uses the user* in ways that were never possible before. The argument that AI is a tool is not applicable to the modern field of AI because the balance of power is now in the hands of the AI and its creators.

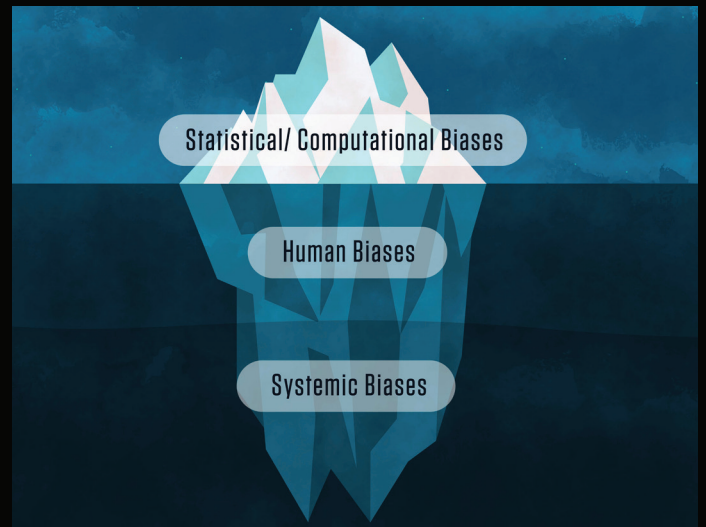
When teachers, or any other professional, embrace the use of AI in their work, they open the door to powerful entities who seek entrance into the education-sector marketplace. As AI performance improves in areas of creativity, communication, and problem solving, the line between human-to-human and AI-to-human interaction begins to blur.

What it means to teach – to be empathetic, compassionate, patient, and forgiving – to be human – is being eroded by a lack of a regulation and corporate greed. This process is also being turbo charged by governments set on privatizing publicly funded education, potentially robbing students of human contact and turning them into just another commodity.

## Bias and oppression

The phrase “garbage in, garbage out,” is common in the world of AI. Translation: AI is only as strong as the data that feeds it. If that data contains

oppression, bias, or bigotry, those elements will end up in the output. An example of the garbage-in-garbage-out phenomenon played out for the world to see in 2016 when Microsoft released Tay, an AI chatbot. As the AI fed upon hateful rhetoric on social media, it began posting messages that were racist, sexually charged, and even denied the Holocaust. Microsoft tried to shun responsibility by blaming the offensive behaviour on Twitter (now called X) users, labelling the disaster “a debacle of a well-meaning experiment gone wrong.” Microsoft shut Tay down just two days after its launch.



When profit and power are the drivers of AI innovation, we must approach with suspicion. What is “right” or ethical is not considered. Wealth, power, and knowledge in the hands of the few threatens the balance, safety, and well-being of everyone. AI is unlike any other technology introduced before. Technology tools of the past, such as calculators, basic computation,



advanced algorithms, digital libraries, the early internet, and major aspects of the modern internet, were tools to be used by people. The development and release of complex AI has reversed the power dynamic between tool and user.

The argument that AI needs surpass the most intelligent of humans to become a threat ignores all of human history and the dehumanizing events that came about because of human weakness, not human strength.

At this point in time, AI is not regulated or ethically coded. Actors in the industry have little-to-no impetus to abide by ethical standards for the creation and implementation of the technology. There is no regard for the impact of well-intentioned innovation, which can be painful to individuals and corrosive to the fabric of a free-thinking society.

Teachers have a precious responsibility: to teach future generations to think independently, to solve problems, and to reflect values that demonstrate care, compassion, empathy, and love for others. We must be vigilant when school boards, employers, or governments attempt to introduce AI-driven technology for management, training, or student use. We must fight for the recognition of accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity. The Association must be ready to act when systems of oppression are implemented to manage members. Finally, we must defend the noble idea that teachers hold authority over their professional judgment. It is

enshrined in our profession and defines human traits that cannot be emulated.

Never has the world witnessed development of a technology of this nature. Advocates will tout a robust list of benefits, but reality will reveal a greater list of wrongs, some yet to be identified, that can cause a greater harm than ever imagined. Organizations that defend the greater good, the interests of people in a free-thinking, educated society, must be vigilant and ready to defend what it truly means to be human.

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*Anthony Carabache is a Staff Officer in the Professional Development department at OECTA Provincial Office.*

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**Teachers have a precious responsibility: to teach future generations to think independently, to solve problems, and to reflect values that demonstrate care, compassion, empathy, and love for others.**

# DPSU hosts their first Equity-deserving and Indigenous Members Forum

By the DPSU Diversity Advisory Board

In April, Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit's (DPSU) Diversity Advisory Board (DAB) held its first Equity-deserving and Indigenous Members Forum at the unit office in Mississauga.

This forum provided members from Indigenous and equity-deserving groups the opportunity to network, share stories and experiences, and ask questions of Provincial Office staff and local representatives. Guests included: Caroline Chikoore, Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (AIDE) Lead at Provincial Office; Yvonne Runstedler, a Staff Officer in the Administration department at Provincial Office, with an AIDE-focused assignment; as well as local executive representatives Jessica Jakab and Anna Mather.

Participants were also greeted by OECTA President René Jansen in de Wal, who shared the Association's strategic plans to champion AIDE in all that we do and support Indigenous and equity-deserving members.

One participant expressed, "It is really nice to get together in a safe space and talk about our experiences, knowing that the others in the room can undoubtedly relate on some level."

"I love the opportunity to meet new people in education, and when they come from a marginalized group like me, the conversations become even more rich," said another.

Members were provided lunch, followed by ice breakers and introductions, before engaging in the afternoon's main discussions. Discrimination in hiring and promotional practices soon took centre stage, as several members recounted their struggles getting into the board, and subsequently into positions of leadership, such as department headships and administration, as well as the difficulty of getting diverse guest speakers into schools and classrooms due to an intense vetting system that does not appear accessible or inclusive.



**I love the opportunity to meet new people in education, and when they come from a marginalized group like me, the conversations become even more rich.**

Other members spoke of the difficulty of receiving accommodations that are guaranteed in Ontario's *Human Rights Code*.

DPSU Vice-President of Equity, Allison Parsons, expressed her concern, as well as her desire, to see our Association and the board work together to find solutions to the challenges and barriers that equity-deserving members face. "No one should have to beg for accommodations to help them do their job properly; nor should they be denied employment or promotion based on anything other than their education, experience, and ability," said Allison at the event.

The DPSU DAB hopes to see this event held annually, and to grow it so that more members have the opportunity to attend, and more discussions can occur, in the hopes that actionable solutions may be implemented to ensure that all members are treated fairly and offered equal access to all opportunities.



Allison Parsons, DPSU Vice-President of Equity.



Participants at the Equity-deserving and Indigenous Members Forum.

DPSU DAB members: Alana Cerjual, Genevieve Guerra, Micheal Marshall, Allison Parsons, Lyanda Pugliese, and Mel Seymore.

# Forum participant reflection

The DPSU DAB's first Equity-deserving and Indigenous Members Forum is something many of us have been waiting for. I am a second generation DPSU teacher, but please do not get this twisted, this is not a family story of a legacy job "inheritance." My dad, Peter Guerra, came to Canada as a qualified, experienced teacher from Pakistan in 1976.

He was told by the Qualifications Evaluation Council of Ontario (QECO) that he would have to requalify in order to teach in the Ontario school system. He endeavored to fulfill this requirement and faced racist roadblocks – going in for interviews where no one looked like him and having them ask questions about his Catholic faith, where he had to simplify his answer so they could grasp it. All of these inherently biased interviews meant that he was an occasional teacher for almost nine years.

During this time, he went on to obtain his Master of Divinity from the University of Toronto in 1991. Even after obtaining his Master, it took him six years to land a permanent teaching position at St. Joseph's Secondary School. It was an unnecessarily long and stressful journey filled with racism. I remember waking up early in the morning and anxiously hoping to hear the phone ring with an occasional job, since it meant my dad would get paid for that day. Those years, where my dad was on the occasional list, were extremely painful for me. Watching him have to go to random schools where he was nervous, not knowing what he would be dealing with. However, his teacher heart never swayed. He kept at it, occasional

teaching at many different schools, waiting for the day he would have a permanent position.

My high school education experience at Holy Name of Mary Secondary School inspired me to teach, as I never felt seen in the curriculum or by the staff that taught me. By my last year, I was exhausted by all that I had witnessed and I desperately yearned for a curriculum that was more meaningful and representative.

I distinctly remember my Grade 12 English class where we were learning the canon, and I looked at the list of choices and quickly approached my teacher, because it was desperately lacking in diversity of thought and lived experiences. My teacher had no suggestions for a racialized author to study, but consoled me and told me that if I discovered a racialized author at the public library that I could study them. Amen! I was off to the Mississauga Central Library and asked the librarian for suggestions of a great racialized author, and without hesitation the South Asian librarian took me to the section where I discovered Rabinder Tagore.

To this day, I am grateful to that librarian for expanding my horizons. That is, in a nutshell, why I got into teaching as a racialized, differently-abled teacher. And why I want my students to be seen and heard every day.

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*Genevieve Gurra is a member of the Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit and the unit's Diversity Advisory Board. She is a social justice and equity, history, and International Baccalaureate teacher at Notre Dame Catholic Secondary School in Brampton.*



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# FINDING GOD ON THE FARM

By Simon Dallimore

It was a beautiful Saturday morning. The sun was out, and the air was starting to warm up. My two dogs were happily sitting in the back seat of the car with their noses out the window breathing in the cool, fresh air. We were on a trip that we had done many times before.

St. Jacobs Farmers' Market in Waterloo is a large, bustling market that is full of local vendors and farmers. It is a busy place on a Saturday, full of sounds, smells, and sights.

We were not heading to the market though. There is a small Mennonite farm just across the road from St. Jacobs. I used to go there once a week to get fresh eggs. Back then, the eggs were kept just inside a door on the side of the barn. You had to bring your own egg cartons, and payment was on the honour system, with a bucket for people to deposit \$2.50 to pay for a dozen eggs.

There was something peaceful about driving up the gravel driveway to the

farm. You could hear (and smell) the cows in the barn. I was often greeted by the friendly farm dog, who walked with me over to the barn.

Recently, the family put up a building closer to the road, naming it "Express Ridge Dairy." I can still buy my eggs fresh from the farm (gathered that morning), but now, I can also buy milk, cream, and yogurt – all fresh from their farm. They also sell homemade cheese curds, maple syrup (from local farms), and some locally sourced cheeses.

Chantel, the person who is usually tending the store, is always so positive and friendly. She has a whiteboard behind the cash register, and each week there is a new Bible verse. I always take some time to read and reflect on the verse that she has chosen, and I usually find that it has relevance to what is going on in my life.

This past week, she had a verse from Matthew neatly written out on her whiteboard:

**“Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

Matthew 11: 28-30

I spoke to Chantel about this verse. She explained that she looks for a different verse each week and tries to find verses that might help people. This week, she wanted to remind people that it is important to take some time to rest and thank God for what we have been given.

I thought that this Bible verse may be very appropriate for the end of June, as we head into summer and a much-deserved rest. It has been a challenging year for many and the summer, hopefully, will be a time for us to rest and recharge our batteries.

The verse in Matthew reminds me that we all need to take some time to rest. We might find that peace in the simple things, like going for a walk, turning off our devices, reading a good book, sitting in quiet contemplation, or spending time with family and friends. Sometimes, it is as straightforward as visiting a dairy farm!

Matthew’s verse also reminds me that we can find peace and rest in prayer. Prayer is a powerful tool and comes in many forms. Prayer can be formal, but it can also be



*Express Ridge Dairy in Waterloo.*

very personal – a quiet conversation with God.

Often, when I have found myself in the midst of chaotic activity, I have stepped back and said a silent prayer. It is amazing the feeling of calm that I find in a quiet conversation with God. I find that it just helps me to slow my breathing, take a break, and to calm my thoughts.

I hope that you are able to find some time this summer to take that breath and find rest. Offer a quick prayer of thanksgiving, or put your faith in God that “you will find rest for your soul.”

And if you find yourself at the St. Jacobs Farmers’ Market, look for the farm across the road and pop in to read the sign. They also have homemade ice cream!

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*Simon Dallimore is a Staff Officer in the Counselling and Member Services department at OECTA Provincial Office.*

# Each teacher type contributes to the school community

By Clayton Johnson

Just like no two school communities are the same, no two teachers are the same. Yet, there are common characteristics shared between schools and teachers that are often recognizable, as diverse school communities go hand in hand with diverse teacher types. These teacher types include: humanists, behaviourists, experientialists, and hard knock paternalists, each of which contributes something positive to the school community.

## / Humanist

Humanist modalities have taken many different forms over the years, informed by figures as widely varied as Margaret Mead, Alfred Adler, Alfred North Whitehead, Maria Montessori, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers, Noam Chomsky, and Abraham Maslow. Ontario's *Growing Success* ministry policy document essentially states that an effective teacher includes the following components:

- Presenting to your students as a caring adult. The caring adult is both approachable and empathetic.
- Engaging in both knowledge and inquiry learning based on the overall curriculum expectations.
- Fairly and responsibly assessing your students. This includes both formal and informal assessment that engage a variety of assessment strategies.
- Effectively managing the learning environment.
- Assisting students in becoming intrinsically motivated to participate actively in the learning process.

The above practices increasingly characterize the overall approach to teaching and learning seen in many of today's classrooms. Both young and seasoned teachers can be found engaging in these practices. However,



Each of these “teacher types” contribute something positive to the school community.



some would assert that expecting every teacher in every school community to always abide by all the above practices is “cookie-cutting.” Further, some would suggest that this could cause outside critics, such as those in favour of privatization, to mischaracterize what is occurring in today’s schools. After all, some of these practices *facilitate* learning activities, thereby not always involving directed teaching. There are a variety of other approaches that make positive contributions to learning communities.

#### / Behaviorists

This approach is defined both broadly and specifically in school communities. It is understood that this was originally a branch of psychology that focuses on how people learn through their interaction with their learning environment. It is based on the idea that behaviours are acquired through conditioning, which is a process of positive and negative reinforcement. Ideally, all students are more likely to conform and comply with behavioural expectations when these

techniques are being employed. A possible criticism of this style of approach is that students are less likely to become intrinsically motivated when teachers rely heavily on punishment and reward systems. Placing significant focus on the students who exhibit behavioural difficulties, likely at the expense of other students who may also have diverse and varied learning needs, also presents potential issues. Still, when applied differentially, these approaches may help to meet the needs of some students.

“ We need all the varying teacher types to relate to the different students we encounter.

### / Experientialists

This approach emphasizes hands-on experiential learning, such as project activities. Many teachers already incorporate these types of activities into their classroom teaching. Experientialists, however, will argue that this should comprise the overall thrust of the learning program, especially when engaging non-academic students in areas such as the humanities, religion, and the arts. The adherents of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* would criticize some aspects of this overall approach as neglecting some areas, such as literacy and critical inquiry. Still, Freire also stressed what is sometimes termed the "gradual release of responsibility." Simply stated, this involves first meeting students where they are in order to take them to where we would like them to be – gradually providing more autonomy. Some students also very much enjoy these types of learning activities.

### / Hard Knock Paternalists

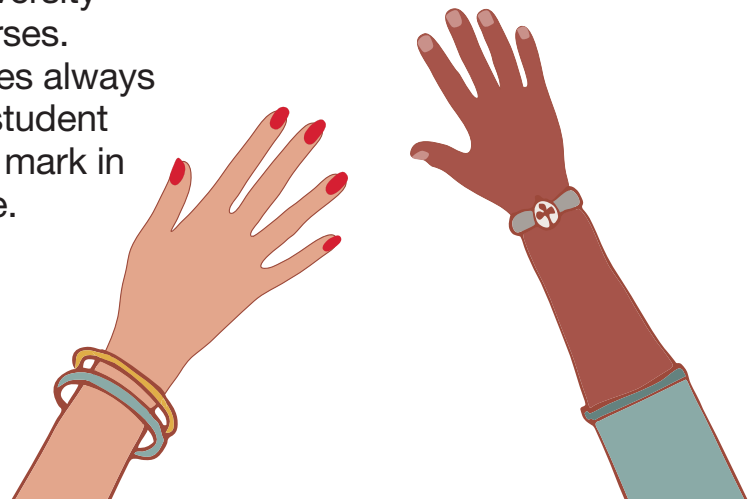
Manufactured bell curve marking is rarely practiced in today's school communities. It has been replaced by criteria-based marking. It also seeks to help as many students as possible reach good or exemplary levels. Even still, while some classes may have high averages, many classes still naturally follow a continuum or spectrum. In spite of these contemporary approaches, some teachers still find ways to teach students "life lessons." Such teachers may incorporate a variety of learning activities, while still adhering to the role of objective marking. Some allow students to retake tests that were poorly completed. Some offer after school help to students. Others effectively communicate to parents the important aspects of college or university preparatory courses. These approaches always ensure that the student has earned their mark in any given course.

### There is no ideal teacher "type"

When it comes to teaching, there is no one-size-fits-all modality. We need all the varying teacher types to relate to the different students and communities we encounter in education, as well as varying kinds of schools (e.g., neighbourhood, magnet, and alternative) with varying approaches to learning. Recognizing these principles is essential as we work toward equity and inclusion in today's learning environment and seek to prevent as many students as possible from "falling through the cracks."

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*Clayton Johnson teaches history/ social science and special education at St. Oscar Romero CSS in Toronto. He is a member of the provincial Diversity Advisory Board and Treasurer at the Toronto Secondary Unit.*





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# Paul Auster: a personal reflection

By Gian Marcon

In my [previous column](#), I referenced the writing process engaged in by celebrated author Paul Auster, wherein he began every one of his projects with a longhand manuscript. On April 20, Paul Auster – my favourite author – passed away at the age of 77.

As part of the process of acknowledging that fact, it occurred to me that while I will continue to derive sustenance and enjoyment from various authors, Auster will always hold a central primacy in my lifelong reading experience.

The establishment of Auster as the author whose works I most anticipated evolved over a relatively short period of time, by the end of which his resonance in my reading and life was firmly established.

I first encountered Auster's writing when I read *City of Glass* – the first book in his New York Trilogy – when I was in my mid-20s. In it, he established his hypnotic narrative voice, as well as some of the key themes that he continued to explore over his five-decade career: coincidence, chance, and fate. It was his treatment of the randomness of life, and his ability to create compelling narratives out of what was seemingly commonplace, that particularly appealed to me.

Auster often spoke of a seminal event at the age of 14 that impacted his world view, and ultimately, his writing. While attending summer camp, Auster and a group of boys set out for a hike in the woods. During the hike, they got caught in a terrible electrical storm and the boy standing immediately next to him was struck by lightning and died. As Auster put it, “the utter arbitrariness of that moment has stayed with me forever.” Not surprisingly, random events that alter and shape his characters' life journeys are a recurring motif in a number of his works.



Illustration by Jillian Tamaki.



Perhaps the best example of Auster's penchant for using a seemingly random event as the genesis of a compelling narrative is in the opening line of the New York Trilogy: "It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not." From here, the narrator's life takes a labyrinthine route towards the unravelling of a post-modern, neo-noir detective story. As a reader, the investment in his stories involves navigating a series of events revealed and developed in such a way that one is enveloped in an atmosphere that is compellingly disorienting and revealing at the same time.

Auster's ability to masterfully and quickly draw the reader into his stories is demonstrated best in these two opening lines of two of his novels:

**"It was the summer that men first walked on the moon. I was very young back then, but did not believe there would ever be a future."**

- *Moon Palace*

**"Six days ago, a man blew himself up by the side of a road in northern Wisconsin. There were no witnesses, but it appears that he was sitting on the grass next to his parked car when the bomb he was building accidentally went off."**

- *Leviathan*

Auster makes it difficult not to get swept up and to continue reading, and while the early momentum eventually ebbs only to surge up again further into the narrative, his sense of timing rarely wanes.

As for his endings, they are often unconventional and challenge the reader. In this way, they are consistent with Auster's concept that narratives and lives are not tidy constructions that neatly transpire and resolve themselves as part of an idealized desire or conventional expectation.

On a personal note, my relationship with the works of Auster has extended over the last 40 years. I have read every one of Auster's novels and much of his non-fiction works as well. The dynamic between author and reader is one in which each reader's experience is unique and particular to that individual. As such, readers that gravitate towards a particular author invariably connect over time in a way that fosters a familiarity and comfort for the reader that transcends the physical act of reading a book. Auster was an author who resonated deeply with me, and I looked forward to his books as they allowed me to re-engage with a familiar acquaintance with whom I felt a connection.

This past Christmas, I received what turned out to be his last novel, *Baumgartner*, which reminded me of why I so relished his writing. Upon hearing of his passing, I was struck with a sense of loss for the end of a shared journey – wherein he provided the content and I experienced the benefits. I will soon be re-reading his works and I look forward to revisiting how he influenced my perspective on both literature and life.

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



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