



Background

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) was established in 1996 under the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*. A large majority of the almost 190,000 College members are classroom teachers from the publicly-funded school system. To maintain an Ontario teaching certificate one must be a member of the College.

It is the view of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation that the College of Teachers should be self-regulatory and have a clear majority of classroom teacher members on its Governing Council.

Regulating the profession in the public interest

Truly self-regulating colleges are almost invisible to the vast majority of their members. They carry out their essential, legislated, regulatory functions (licensing teachers, accreditation of professional education faculties, and discipline of members) and protect the public interest while maintaining the support of their professional members and the public.

Unfortunately, the previous government used the College to control and punish teachers for its own political agenda. Members became so disenchanted that only 4.4% participated in the 2003 Governing Council elections, down from 33% in the first election.

Accountability

Teachers expect to be held to a high-level of accountability. And, indeed they are. Teachers are held to account through their employment relationship with their school boards and by the *Education Act* and its regulations. The College is merely one more layer of accountability. No other profession faces so many layers of control.

Disciplining the profession

The public interest is not in danger if classroom teachers form the majority of the Governing Council of the College. The Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) was entrusted with disciplining teachers before the College existed, and revoked essentially the same number of teachers' certificates (about 12-15 per year) as the College did in its first five years. Only teacher union members participated in these pre-1996 discipline hearings without public representatives, yet the public interest was served.

Teacher members of the Council fully supported and have continued to enforce one of the most detailed regulations on professional misconduct of all Ontario professions. Over the past four years, approximately 100 to 150 formal investigations each year have led to 40 to 50 discipline hearings – all of them fully open to the public. Investigation and discipline matters are governed by the legislature through the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*. This will not change if the number of teacher members on the Governing Council is increased.



Classroom teachers must be in the majority

Currently the OCT Governing Council has 31 members: 17 elected and 14 government appointees. Only 13 of the 17 elected Councillors, however, represent classroom teachers in the Ontario public system, six from regional voting and seven to represent the various education systems (public, separate and francophone). All other professional colleges follow a purely regional system of voting.

Four OCT council positions were segregated by the previous government and may be elected only by members of that group (principals, supervisory officers, faculties of education and private schools). This provision in the Election Regulation was enacted against the wishes of the College – yet another example of government interference in the OCT that it never exercised for other colleges.

Because of the segregated positions, council representation is extremely unbalanced. In the 2003 elections, for example, the faculty representative was elected by only 26 members, and the private school representative by 119, compared to thousands of classroom teachers electing each of their regional councillors. The segregated councillors have tended to vote with the Conservative government appointees. The segregated positions should be eliminated. If the government wishes to protect special interest groups, they can be appointed.



On April 22, at an education conference in Richmond Hill, Premier McGuinty made a passionate plea for public education. He described teaching as “one of the highest callings” and proclaimed his respect for teachers. He urged teachers to work together with his government to improve education outcomes for students.

Good faith and trust works both ways. Establishing a truly democratic governing structure for the College of Teachers will go a long way to restoring faith in the relationship between Ontario’s teachers and the provincial government.

It is time to put a stop to eight years of government interference with the Ontario College of Teachers. The teachers of Ontario expect the government to act quickly and demonstrate trust and respect for classroom teachers by giving them a significant majority of positions on the College Governing Council.

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EDUCATION WATCH

Restructuring the Ontario College of Teachers

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