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OECTA SUBMISSION

ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR

July 2020



The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) represents the 45,000 passionate and qualified teachers in Ontario's publicly funded English Catholic schools, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.01 The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Ministry of Education with respect to professional development and training for the 2020-21 school year.

1.02 Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 emergency, OECTA has urged the government to engage in meaningful consultation with teacher and education worker unions, not only to create a framework that promotes consistency across the province, but also to ensure that decisions comply with collective agreement provisions. The government should take every opportunity to gain the perspectives of those actually tasked with working in schools, and should heed the advice offered by Catholic teachers and other frontline education workers before decisions are made.

1.03 To that end, this document outlines several key priorities and guiding principles the government should follow in developing professional development and training opportunities for teachers. In developing a consistent framework for these activities, the government must:

- Respect collective agreement provisions
- Differentiate between professional development and in-service training, and ensure that both are accessible to everyone
- Develop realistic goals that establish priorities, and promote health, safety, and well-being; and
- Ensure training is flexible, responsive, and ongoing

2. RESPECT COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT PROVISIONS

2.01 As the Association has stated on a number of occasions, it would be inappropriate for the government to interfere in matters related to teachers' collective agreements, or those that might otherwise affect teachers' working conditions. And while the government certainly has an important role to play in providing resources to facilitate professional development and training, many of the issues identified by the Ministry of Education fall within the scope of collective bargaining.

2.02 For example, the government is seeking **input on training related to “Health and safety protocols in response to COVID-19.”** While this is important, the matter relates directly to collective agreement provisions. As such, dialogue about this topic should take place between OECTA and the Ontario **Catholic School Trustees’ Association (OCSTA)**, who are the parties to central bargaining in accordance with the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014*.

2.03 Furthermore, a June 30 memo from the Minister of Education and Deputy Minister of Education authorized school boards to modify the school year calendar, encouraged school boards to start their school year by September 1, and advised school boards to schedule three Professional Activity days prior to the start of student instruction. The Association has been clear that while school boards have until July 24 to submit modifications, any changes to the school year calendar must comply with collective agreement terms.

2.04 As discussion on these topics continues, the government should be working to **remove barriers that might hinder teachers’ and education workers’ representatives** and provincial trustee associations from developing a plan for professional development and training that operates within, and complies with, the terms of collective agreements.

3. DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING, AND ENSURE THAT BOTH ARE ACCESIBLE TO EVERYONE

- 3.01** A document provided to OECTA by the Ministry of Education outlines a series of **“professional development topics” for consideration, as follows:**
- a. Online learning platforms and effective online instruction and assessment practices (including a section on cybersecurity and privacy, and mid-year review)
 - b. Mental health
 - c. Health and safety protocols in response to COVID 19
 - d. Diversity, anti-bullying, and anti-racism
 - e. Fundamental math concepts, skills, and the revised curriculum
 - f. Supporting students with special education needs, including Autism Spectrum Disorder; and

g. Occupational health and safety – including violent incident reporting tool and a health and safety refresher

- 3.02** The Association agrees that these topics are important, and we reiterate that many of these issues relate to collective agreement provisions, and therefore discussions and decisions surrounding them should be made between OECTA and OCSTA. It is **also worth noting that most, if not all of these topics align more closely to “in-service training” than professional development. The distinction is not trivial.**
- 3.03** Professional development is properly understood as the self-directed and voluntary process that teachers use as independent professionals to establish personal goals of professional self-improvement and growth. This encompasses a range of activities related to professional knowledge and skills. By contrast, in-servicing involves the training that teachers receive to implement initiatives that are provincial in scope and application. Given that such training is mandated by the Ministry of Education, in-servicing should occur during the school workday and year.
- 3.04** Reading the above list with these definitions in mind, it is clear that the government is referring to in-service training. These are the tools teachers will need so that **Ontario’s system of publicly funded education can operate. As such, if in-service training is mandatory, as the Minister of Education has suggested on several occasions, that training should be conducted within the regular workday.**
- 3.05** It is possible that professional development topics may result from in-service training, as teachers may want to expand and/or refine their knowledge in certain areas. These professional development opportunities should be provided and made available to teachers once in-service training is complete.
- 3.06** It is also important that in-service training be provided to all educators, including occasional teachers and continuing education teachers. Without the required training, occasional teachers and continuing education teachers will not be able to meet Ministry of Education expectations. Such training will need to be provided and funded by the government.

4. DEVELOP REALISTIC GOALS THAT ESTABLISH PRIORITIES, AND PROMOTE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELL-BEING

- 4.01** Both the Premier and the Minister of Education have said that they will not **compromise the safety of Ontario’s students or teachers. The reality is that until a vaccine for COVID-19 is developed and made available to the broader population, there will be risks associated with any activities that take place in-person and/or on school property. And while it will not be possible to eliminate risks entirely, certain precautions and preconditions can be developed to mitigate those risks.**
- 4.02** Part of this involves determining the key priorities for the types of training that are essential to provide immediately, and what can/should be scheduled for later in the school year. There remain many logistical issues to be worked out with respect to health and safety, and how schools will be organized in September. This will need to be determined prior to the beginning of the school year, and will take time to finalize.
- 4.03** From a practical standpoint, teachers likely will not know until mid-August what publicly funded education will look like in September, and which scenario of delivery has been adopted. Given this, proposing an exhaustive list of in-service training that teachers are expected to complete prior to the beginning of student instruction is both unrealistic and counterproductive.
- 4.04** In determining what should constitute a priority, the government should reconsider what is not an immediate priority; namely, the immediate implementation of the new math curriculum. The Association does not take issue with the content of the new math curriculum; however, the timing of this announcement – in the midst of an ongoing public health emergency, the uncertainty surrounding school reopening, and with only two-months for implementation – was foolhardy and wrongheaded. This is why the Association and others have recommended the government reconsider its implementation schedule and phase-in the new math curriculum over a two-year period.
- 4.05** Although everyone is eager to get back to the classroom and resume more normal ways of teaching and learning, we must recognize that the COVID-19 emergency has

been traumatic. The school closures, while necessary for public safety, have had negative effects both on students and teachers, which will need to be addressed before learning can resume. One cannot simply flip on light switches at schools, and resume delivering curriculum. Before we can focus on the curriculum, we need to ensure that we are managing the social and emotional consequences of the pandemic – “Maslow before Bloom,” as the saying goes.

5. ENSURE TRAINING IS FLEXIBLE, RESPONSIVE, AND ONGOING

- 5.01** The Minister of Education has on many occasions indicated his desire to facilitate a “seamless transition” between in-class and remote learning. While this goal may appear admirable, it ignores the dynamic situation caused by COVID-19. New information regarding the virus arises almost daily, forcing all levels of government to evaluate, and re-evaluate best practices.
- 5.02** For example, in June, as part of their *Recommendations for School Reopening*, SickKids Hospital recommended that masks not be worn by students or teachers in the school environment if physical distancing was possible. However, within two weeks of that submission, several municipalities across Ontario have begun legislating the mandatory use of masks indoors in all public places.
- 5.03** This example speaks to the fluidity of managing the COVID-19 pandemic, and highlights the need for flexibility and responsiveness in scheduling. It will simply not be possible to implement a rigid model of training, or force a comprehensive list of training topics into a limited or set number of days. Instead, teachers and education workers will require access to training on an ongoing basis, throughout the school year. This may require some delays in students returning to a classroom setting, and time throughout the school year where staff can review, revise, and implement different approaches to teaching and learning, as the COVID-19 landscape changes within communities, regions, and across the province.
- 5.04** This need for flexibility in the scheduling and structure of in-service training should also allow relevant stakeholders to revisit, collaborate, and revise training offerings as the year progresses. The reality is that the consequences of schools reopening is unknown: in some jurisdictions it has resulted in relatively few new positive cases; in

other locations, reopening schools has led to a renewed outbreak and second wave of COVID-19. In the latter cases, an entire country's education system has had to transition back to remote distance learning. Even in cases where the reopening of schools produced few new positive cases, unexpected issues often arose that required educators to adapt to new circumstances. The model for in-service training must reflect and be able respond to the virus' unpredictability.

6. CONCLUSION

6.01 For months, our Association has been vocal about the need for the government to consult meaningfully about all aspects involving school reopening. However, too often the government has not taken the time to genuinely consider the ideas and expertise of frontline education professionals before proceeding with announcements.

6.02 As September draws closer, it becomes ever more critical for the government to show real leadership, by not only asking educators for their opinion, but by actually listening to them. The priorities and guiding principles outlined in this document would contribute to strengthening the in-service training opportunities provided to educators, while respecting collective agreement provisions. By adopting these recommendations, the government will be better positioned to promote safe, inclusive, and productive learning and working environments for all students, teachers, and staff.