

College Chair's Opening Remarks: Full-time Support Staff Bargaining 2025

As we prepare to engage in the 2025 bargaining process, we look forward to constructive discussions with you on issues that are relevant to the *CAAT Full-Time Support Staff Employee Collective Agreement*. Ultimately, our goal is to work with you to develop solutions that:

- will support the needs of college employees,
- will provide a world-class college experience for students and
- will contribute to the long-term sustainability of Ontario's publicly funded colleges.

Our team brings a wide range of knowledge and experience, developed through formal education and years of work in the college system and related fields. Our team members have experience teaching at the post-secondary level, providing academic leadership in the college system, working in the fields of organizational development and labour relations, and providing financial and administrative leadership in colleges. Several have experience in collective bargaining, in the college system and beyond.

I, along with our vice-chair, Kim Watkins, have previously been involved on several college support staff bargaining teams.

All our team members believe strongly in the role that colleges play in providing students with a safe, welcoming and supportive environment as they pursue their career goals and contribute to community vitality, and in providing a safe, supportive and respectful workplace for all college employees.

Like you, our team has spent the last several months consulting with various groups at all 24 colleges, including human resources, student services, facilities, academic leadership, finance, and more.

Our views and responses during bargaining will be guided by a series of values.

*- Acknowledge that colleges are public institutions, maintaining management, union and support staff accountability and responsibility /
Reconnaître que les collèges sont des institutions publiques, en maintenant la responsabilité et l'imputabilité partagé entre l'employeur, le syndicat et les membres du personnel de soutien*

We believe we should honour the public trust we have earned in our work and be good stewards of the public support that colleges receive.

*- Improve operational flexibility in support of academic delivery /
Améliorer la flexibilité pour soutenir la livraison de la formation et des services.*

We will remain focused on creating an environment that allows students to learn and succeed.

- Enhance productivity / Améliorer la productivité

We will work to remove unnecessary barriers to employee productivity.

- Endorse innovation and creativity / Encourager l'innovation et la créativité

Colleges should continue to be places of creative and innovative thinking, in the classroom and in the workplace.

- Maintain the highest degree of integrity and factual communications / Maintenir le plus haut degré d'intégrité et communiquer de façon factuelle

We are committed to being truthful and factual in our communication with your team and with all stakeholders.

- Work towards a sustainable positive relationship with the union and its members (our employees) / Œuvrer à établir une relation positive et durable avec le syndicat et ses membres (nos employé.e.s)

You are doing important work here. We respect your commitment to this process, and we want to work together to achieve the successful renewal of the collective agreement.

- Enhance co-operation and problem solving with the employees' bargaining agent / Renforcer la coopération et la résolution de problèmes avec l'agent négociateur des membres du personnel de soutien
We sincerely want to work collaboratively with OPSEU and your team to address pressing issues at a challenging moment for Ontario colleges.

- Ensure that colleges continue to respond effectively to the changing needs of Ontario's economy / Veiller à ce que les collèges continuent de répondre efficacement aux besoins changeants de l'économie de l'Ontario

We are committed to the primary mission of Ontario colleges, to provide students with a pathway to meaningful careers and to help meet the workforce demands of the province.

As outlined in the legislation that governs our activities, the purpose given to the colleges is “to offer a comprehensive program of career-oriented, post-secondary education and training to assist individuals in finding and keeping employment, to meet the needs of employers and the changing work environment and to support the economic and social development of their local and diverse communities.”

The Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, 2002 Act

establishes colleges as agents of the Crown operating on behalf of the provincial government with accountability to the people of Ontario. Colleges are accountable to the broader public and the government for their actions, achievement of goals consistent with government priorities, and prudent fiscal management. Accordingly, they must operate with a view to long-term sustainability.

As has been discussed in past rounds of bargaining, we also note that ongoing funding challenges continue to impact the colleges to varying degrees. The IRCC changes to the International Student Program have had a significant impact on college enrolment and revenue, an impact that will last for several years as international students who entered their programs in 2024 progress to graduation. As a result, colleges across the province have had to suspend programs and reduce their workforces as they realign their offerings and maintain financial stability. This new reality will influence our conversations and the final agreement we want to work with you to accomplish. We hope this context will be considered as you prepare and introduce your demands for bargaining.

We all need to recognize that we are in unprecedented times with a new reality of economic challenges that we need to face together.

Our team is prepared to listen to you with open minds as we expect that you will listen to our perspective. We view the bargaining process as an opportunity for both sides to engage in full, frank and sometimes blunt dialogue to identify issues and to discover terms upon which we can reach mutual agreement. We will take the time to understand your perspectives and proposals so that we can work together on issues that can effectively be addressed during this round of bargaining. I hope you will provide us with the same courtesy.

Throughout this round of bargaining, we intend to be forthright and open about the rationale for any additions, deletions, and modifications to the collective agreement that we propose.

I have taken the time today to outline our values so that you can gain an understanding of our approach and thinking. Those values will guide our deliberations and how we assess proposals that come forward as bargaining progresses.

We are sincerely committed to finding common ground between us and reaching a negotiated settlement that will ensure that we can preserve the integrity and quality of Ontario's college system now and for the future.

It is important for all stakeholders in the college community to continue to work together. Now, more than ever, we need stability in the system so that learners, employees and community employers have confidence that we can meet their needs and continue to provide quality public education.

We hope to have fruitful discussions with you during the days that we have scheduled. As we come to understand each other's views, we expect to discover common interests that can be used to build a renewed collective agreement respecting the current climate.

We know from past rounds of bargaining and more recent discussions at the EERC that we have some challenges to address, but we also have a strong history of working together to solve problems. With goodwill and good intentions on everyone's part, We are optimistic that we can accomplish much together. I assure you that our team is committed to the task, and we look forward to working with you.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.