

# Opening Statement: CAAT-A Part-Time and Sessional Faculty

We are here today representing part-time and sessional professors, instructors, counsellors, and librarians across Ontario's public college system. We come to the bargaining table committed to advancing the interests of our members, upholding the quality and integrity of public post-secondary education, and supporting the success of the students we collectively serve.

This day has been a long time coming. We enter negotiations for our first collective agreement almost a decade after the historic vote to organize Part-Time and Sessional faculty. The elected OPSEU/SEFPO College Faculty bargaining team—with support from staff—has worked diligently to identify, engage with, and meaningfully hear from members across the province. Many of our members come from equity-deserving groups. We have overcome obstacles that have kept precariously employed workers apart from one another.

The proposals we bring forward reflect the concerns and priorities identified through the collective process. They represent a unified commitment to amplify and assert the voice of a workforce that is essential to the functioning and stability of the college system.

The journey to get to this table has been arduous. For the first four decades of Ontario's public college system, the Ontario legislature refused to allow part-time workers—including part-time and sessional faculty—the option of collective bargaining. That changed in 2008 after a thorough review by Kevin Whitaker, Chair of the Ontario Labour Relations Board. The government of the day introduced legislation that recognized these workers' fundamental rights in this regard. Overcoming many hurdles over the next nine years, in 2017 part-time and sessional faculty voted overwhelmingly to unionize. However, for eight more long years the College Employer Council challenged the recognition of this vote, and so it was only in 2025 that the OLRB finally certified this bargaining unit.

We also must recognize that we begin bargaining at a time of considerable transition and uncertainty within Ontario's public college system. The issues before us are not isolated workplace concerns. They reflect broader structural changes that have reshaped the sector in

recent years, changes that affect the organization of academic labour, the availability of programs, and the learning conditions experienced by students across the province.

The people of Ontario know that part-time and sessional faculty play a central role in the Ontario college system. Our members perform the same core academic work as our colleagues in the CAAT-A Full-Time Division: we teach lectures, labs, and tutorials and facilitate learning in a variety of delivery modes. We design and deliver meaningful learning experiences, develop and evaluate assessments, and provide critical academic and personal support to students. Our counsellors help students navigate academic and personal challenges so they can remain on track. Our librarians teach information literacy, guide research, and provide essential academic supports. Many of our members bring extensive industry experience into the classroom, providing students with applied experiential learning by integrating contemporary tools, case studies, and professional insights into their teaching, connecting course material, bridging theory to professional practice. Much of this work is unrecognized and unpaid.

Part-time and sessional faculty also contribute to the dynamism of the college system and help drive innovation. Our members are essential to the launch of new programs, teaching specialized courses, and guiding institutional responses to program expansion and staffing needs and changes. Part-time and sessional faculty have long been integral to the delivery, quality, and responsiveness of college programs.

However, over the past decade the use of precarious labour has surged with institutions increasingly relying on these workers to sustain core teaching and academic support functions. Current estimates suggest that 70% of teaching in the Ontario college system is delivered by contract faculty working on fixed-term contracts, usually four months long. We have members who have worked for more than 20 years in the College system, piecing together work to pay their bills. The scale of this reliance has produced systematic exploitation of precarious workers who are denied job security, fair wages and benefits, and predictable employment.

Our consultations indicate that half of all part-time and sessional faculty rely on their college contracts to make ends meet, despite the assumption that this is somehow 'in addition' to the work they are doing elsewhere. Despite the heroic efforts of our members during COVID, and the record levels of inflation experienced in the last few years, hourly pay for these faculty have not changed since 2018. In real terms, this means that part-time and sessional faculty are

effectively earning 20% less today than they were in 2018. These faculty, critical to the success of Ontario's economy, would not advocate for these employment conditions for their students, and are not willing to accept them for themselves.

It is undeniable that chronic underfunding is a major constraint on our education system. Ontario has long ranked the lowest province in Canada in terms of per-student operating funding for post-secondary education. Even with the government's announcement of \$6.4 billion dollar investment starting in 2026/2027, Ontario remains the lowest funded province in Canada.

While overall enrollment has fluctuated over the past decade, current domestic student enrolment levels have remained relatively stable since 2022/2023. At the same time, the sector has undergone significant restructuring—a decision that is neither proportionate to enrollment nor strategically sound. More than 12,000 positions have been eliminated through layoffs, retirement incentives, and non-renewed contracts. More than 800 programs have been closed, and several campuses have shut down. The effects of these job losses and program cuts have had significant impacts on many other sectors within communities themselves. These developments are difficult to reconcile when colleges reported a system-wide surplus of approximately \$660 million in 2022/2023 and have recorded operating surpluses every year since 2012/2013. Collectively, colleges reported roughly \$2.7 billion dollars in cash reserves in 2023/2024. Meanwhile, the Ontario government's own Higher Education Quality Council forecasts that there will be a 45% increase in the number of post-secondary students over the next twenty years.

Provincial policy has also redirected some \$2.5 billion since 2020 toward private training initiatives through the Skills Development Fund. Over the past year, we have witnessed a troubling pattern: colleges closing programs with strong domestic enrollment while simultaneously partnering with private corporations to deliver similar programs through privatized training institutions. This approach undermines the mandate and integrity of Ontario's public college system. At the same time, policy changes affecting student financial assistance—most notably the shift toward a more loan-dependent OSAP model and tuition increases—are placing additional financial pressure on students who are already struggling with rising costs of living. These developments raise important questions about the long-term direction of Ontario's public colleges.

The impact of these structural pressures is also visible within classrooms and student services. Many faculty have seen larger class sizes, a substantial rise in the number and complexity of student accommodation needs, and more student-related incidents requiring intervention and support on the ground.

For part-time and sessional faculty, these pressures often translate directly into unstable working conditions. Our members regularly experience last-minute scheduling changes, late course offers, amalgamated course sections, and abrupt contract cancellations. In many cases, courses are cancelled with little or no notice, leaving faculty without income or meaningful opportunity to secure alternative work for the term. At the same time, significant shifts in program offerings and staffing models are increasing expectations on our members to develop new curriculum and adapt to changing delivery needs, often with minimal or no additional compensation.

The increasing reliance on precarious academic labour has also raised broader questions about sustainability within the college system. Institutions exploit and overly rely upon precariously-employed part-time faculty because it is less expensive to do so. However, this model creates long-term instability for faculty and undermines the quality of education within academic programs. It also limits pathways for experienced faculty to transition into stable full-time roles, even when they have been contributing to the system for many years.

The issues we bring forward in this round of bargaining reflect these realities and systemic challenges. Our members seek measures that reduce precarity, address compensation inequities, and provide greater stability and transparency in employment. These include fair compensation that reflects the full scope of academic work, access to health benefits, clearer and more transparent course assignment processes, and reasonable notice periods when work assignments change. Members also seek opportunities for professional development and greater inclusion in academic governance that shape the courses and programs they teach.

While we acknowledge the pressures facing the college system—particularly those arising from provincial funding policy and broader structural reforms—they do not diminish the responsibility of college leaders and their sustainable stewardship of the system. The collective agreement remains the most effective and immediate mechanism to improve stability, fairness, and transparency within the academic workforce.

The colleges are established, in law, to be responsive to the economic, and social development of their communities. For the history of their existence, Ontario's colleges have long been foundational to workforce development, community engagement, and pathways to economic mobility. Particularly in rural and northern Ontario, colleges are the economic drivers of the community. The closure of the rural campuses is not only detrimental to the communities that the colleges are meant to serve, but it also neglects the legislative duties that the colleges were established to provide. The continued strength and sustainability of this system depends on maintaining robust academic programming, accessible and well-resourced student supports, stable and secure teaching environments, and fair, equitable working conditions for the educators who deliver these programs. An increased reliance on precarious labour and declining program capacity threatens the quality, accessibility and integrity of college education in Ontario.

It is our intention in this round of bargaining to engage constructively and in good faith with the CEC to address the challenges facing both faculty and the institutions they serve. Strengthening the working conditions of part-time and sessional faculty is essential to strengthening the learning conditions of students and contribute to the long-term health of Ontario's public college system.

Achieving these shared goals, however, requires a foundation of transparency and accountability from the CEC. In previous rounds of bargaining, the CEC's failure to disclose critical information undermined the ability of both the union and the colleges to engage in meaningful negotiations and to fully assess the impact of proposed changes. This lack of transparency is particularly concerning in the context of the recent merger of two colleges—a significant structural shift which may likely result in layoffs, reassignments, and other significant workplace disruptions. By withholding relevant details, the employer has limited the ability of employees and their union to prepare for or respond to decisions that directly affect job security, workload, and institutional stability. Such conduct raises serious concerns about the employer's obligation to provide timely and complete information on matters affecting terms and conditions of employment.

Despite these concerns, we enter these negotiations committed to a thoughtful and productive dialogue at the table. Our goal is to achieve outcomes that serve the best interests of our

members and, most importantly, the students who depend on a strong and accessible education system and who will shape Ontario's future. This province's education system has long been recognized for its quality and impact, consistently ranking among the best in the world. We are committed to helping maintain that standard, but doing so requires meaningful engagement, transparency, and accountability from both the colleges and the CEC.