

## **Revitalizing the Ontario College of Teachers**

*Third in a series of mini-discussion papers prepared for the Education Partnership Table to permit wide input to the direction of education in Ontario*

**March 18, 2004 (v.2)**

*“The Commission believes that the teaching profession in Ontario must now be considered equal to other established professions.”*

Royal Commission on Learning, December 1994

### **A FRESH OPPORTUNITY**

The McGuinty government believes it is time to revitalize the Ontario College of Teachers.

We believe the premise of the College is still intact – that teachers deserve the privilege of self-regulation. Ontario teachers exercise a significant trust in their everyday working lives by making discretionary decisions about the needs and development of our children and young adults. It follows that they should be extended the respect of controlling how their profession operates to serve the public interest.

Self-regulation in the public interest means to define the qualifications for becoming a teacher as well as the ongoing obligations to ensure continuing competence, high quality and public protection. Previously, the government exercised this power and acted as an outside regulator.

On paper, the mandate of the College provides for self-regulation. Even though a significant organization has developed around this purpose, several key weaknesses have now become apparent. The College of Teachers can be seen as one of the education reforms of the last several years where a useful goal was harmed by poor implementation.

The benefits of a successful College to Ontario students should be obvious: highly skilled, motivated teachers who are held in high regard by the public at large. For this reason, we believe that the problems the College has experienced can and should be overcome. Some of our key approaches are set out below.

### **LACK OF RESPECT FOR THE COLLEGE BY THE PROFESSION**

One of the key missing ingredients for the College is an apparent lack of respect for it by the very profession it is meant to reflect.

In 1997, 32 per cent of teachers voted in the Council elections. By the third Council election in 2003, a mere four per cent of teachers bothered to cast a vote, indicating a profound loss of confidence in the College’s stewardship of the profession. While harder to quantify, it is clear that the College has had a demoralizing effect. Its members have come to regard it as an adversarial entity focused on sanctions, not recognition, of the profession.

We believe that the College has structural problems in the makeup of its board that were well identified at its inception. The regulation setting

out elections and representation does not give clear control to working teachers. This raises a self-defining question: If teachers are professionals, they are worthy of the trust this implies. If not, why have a college?

**Our commitment is to have a clear majority of College board members composed of classroom teachers.** Teachers are a mature profession capable of resolving issues and restoring confidence in their College. We understand that working teachers elected to the College may require more support than they currently receive to carry out their roles. We also appreciate that arrangements may have to be made to ensure principals, in particular, have access to peer review by other principals.

### **POLITICIZATION**

The present makeup of the College board has been characterized as two competing caucuses, one appointed by the government and the other elected by teacher federations. An argument has to be recognized that the active influence of both undermines the very idea of an independent body that is capable of upholding the public interest.

**As set out by the Premier when he was Leader of the Opposition, it would be our intention to not interfere with a properly constituted College.** Further, as a government, we would make only fully qualified, third-party-validated minority appointments. This would ensure the public character of the board as well as representation of minority teacher interests (such as principals, supervisory officers and private schools).

Teachers' federations have a legitimate and important role in pursuing the interests of teachers in discussions of teacher compensation and working conditions. The public protection role of the College, however, inevitably sets up a con-

flikt with the federation role as there will be times when the public interest and the self-interest of teachers are not the same.

**Having a College that is fully de-politicized is a precondition for its success.** This means the practice of running slates and or federation-sponsored campaigns would have to be discontinued. Instead, candidates would be qualified individuals not currently in union leadership positions. This could be achieved by explicit agreement or by non-conflict definitions such as those adopted by the College of Nurses.

At the same time, teacher acceptance for the College would benefit if there were open discussion of real or perceived conflict in the roles of the College and the federations, since the federations also carry out professional functions for their members.

### **HIGHER COMMUNITY EXPECTATION AND CONFIDENCE**

We believe teachers are the most qualified people to set what constitutes professional requirements. They should also define the conduct and practice of teaching, working with the community at large. Only part of this can be accomplished by appointing a strong minority of public members on the board. Current public views of the College are dominated by the reporting of disciplinary actions. **There is a role for the College to cultivate a much greater understanding of the public at large towards teaching as a profession and to engage the public in all aspects of its work.**

### **INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED TEACHING PROFESSIONALS**

The government is looking to the College of Teachers, like other Ontario professional bodies to better address the needs of internationally

trained professionals. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities recently provided the College with new funding for this purpose. The government is interested in further measures that would ensure a true balance between upholding standards for teaching in Ontario and processes that can be artificially onerous for qualified immigrants to become accredited.

### **TEACHER TRAINING**

**The government has advised the College of its intent to introduce legislation this spring to eliminate the Professional Learning Program that was imposed upon the College by the previous government.** We strongly believe there needs to be a beneficial discussion about appropriate teacher training and the roles played by individual teachers, school boards, the government and the College. We will be putting forward a separate discussion paper on that wider subject in the near future.

### **MOVING FORWARD**

The McGuinty government believes that opportunities to expand and advance the teaching profession were lost through the way that the Ontario College of Teachers was implemented.

It is not our intent to undertake a general overhaul of legislation or mandate, but rather to address the specific key issues identified above. We also do not wish to subject the College to a prolonged period of uncertainty. While it is a great deal to ask, we are requesting teachers, the education sector and the public at large to take a fresh look at its possibilities.

We believe the process concerning changes to the College is important. Given both the lack of opportunities at its inception and some of the negative experiences in the interim, it is very important that teachers and others have a chance to provide input before a final new direction is set. We intend to hold regional round tables and town halls for that purpose between now and the fall of 2004.

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**Your** feedback is welcome and solicited. It should be directed to:

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