



EDUCATION



This profile is intended to provide CUPE members with basic information about the sector they work in from a national perspective. Find all our sector profiles and more information online at cupe.ca

CUPE represents over 125,600 workers in elementary and secondary schools across Canada in every classification in the school system, except teachers and management, in 411 education bargaining units.

More than half of all education workers across Canada are CUPE members. The proportion ranges from 100 per cent CUPE members in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick to about 15 per cent in Quebec.

We represent the full range of support staff classifications in nearly every province.

About one-third of CUPE education workers work as educational assistants, 25 per cent as custodians, and 13 per cent as school office staff.

Approximately 75 per cent of CUPE members working in schools are women, especially in classifications such as educational assistant, school office, library technician and early childhood educator.

Men tend to predominate in trades and maintenance positions as well as information technology. Fifty-five per cent of CUPE education sector members are over 50 years old, 41 per cent are between 30 and 50 years old, and fewer than five per cent are under 30.



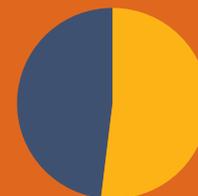
School board workers in CUPE

■ SCHOOL BOARD
■ CUPE



School board workers by gender

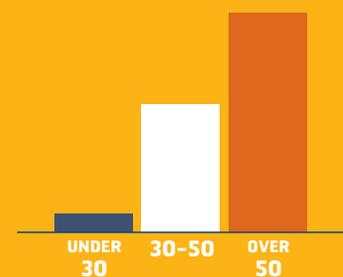
■ WOMEN
■ MEN



CUPE members in the sector

■ CUPE MEMBERS
■ OTHERS

School board workers by age



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ISSUES

Declining enrolment strains funding

Declining enrolment in elementary and secondary schools has been an overarching issue in the sector. Since 2000, enrolment has declined in all provinces except Alberta, where enrolment trends are now difficult to project since the sharp decline in the oil-based economy. Enrolment declines have been steepest in the eastern provinces and lowest in central Canada.

CUPE members are feeling the impact of declining enrolment in communities across the country. As more provincial governments have adopted per-pupil funding formulas, declining enrolment has created intense funding pressures for many school boards. Education locals are constantly fighting off budget cuts invariably aimed at CUPE members—who are often treated as the expendable, “non-classroom” staff.

Hundreds of schools have been closed across Canada. In the spring of 2016, the Cape Breton board in Nova Scotia announced plans to close almost 30 per cent of its schools in the next few years. The Toronto District School Board is under intense pressure to close dozens of “surplus” schools, which are hubs for all kinds of educational activity, ranging from early childhood education and parenting centres to adult language and general interest courses.

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There are some positive signs for school enrolment. Population projections for school-aged children suggest that enrolment in most provinces has reached its lowest point, and will begin to moderately increase again in the next five to 10 years. The implementation of early childhood education programs in Newfoundland and Labrador, PEI, Ontario and BC has offset job losses related to declining enrolment. Often the positions being created, however, are not new jobs, but represent a shift of employment from the child care to the education sector.

Violence in schools continues to rise

Most of the public is unaware of the routine violence and threats experienced by education workers who deal directly with students. But our members are acutely aware of it. CUPE locals are pursuing better training and reporting

mechanisms, and enforcing members’ rights under occupational health and safety acts. The central deal reached in Ontario in 2016 school board bargaining establishes a provincial health and safety committee that has workers and employers directly addressing this issue.

Looming privatization

Piecemeal privatization is occurring in some areas of the sector, such as busing, information technology, trades and maintenance. Shared services—the merging of some administrative functions between school boards—are being increasingly promoted by some provinces. Most of Ontario’s 72 individual school boards are now part of a transportation consortium with a neighbouring board. The provincial government would like to expand shared services beyond transportation into IT and payroll, a change that would affect CUPE members.

So far, public-private partnerships (P3s) have not gained a major foothold in the sector, but there have been some negative developments recently. Saskatchewan has moved ahead with P3 schemes for school construction and maintenance. On the positive side, Alberta abandoned its P3 school procurement policy, acknowledging that the business case for P3 schools just did not add up. The Nova Scotia government has to make a decision in 2016 whether to renew leases on its 20-year old P3 school schemes or abandon the model for traditional funding arrangements. Their decision should be an easy one, and made even easier by the recent publication of a scathing Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report on Nova Scotia's P3 disaster.

BARGAINING

Move to central bargaining

Twenty years ago, education was funded primarily through locally-raised property taxes, and most CUPE locals bargained directly with local school boards. This funding model started to change in the 1990s when provincial governments across the country began amalgamating school districts, and centralizing education funding, prompting a corresponding shift towards province-wide bargaining.

Today CUPE education workers in seven provinces bargain monetary and other major items at provincial tables, and local bargaining deals mainly with local issues. Only the three Prairie provinces have no formal central bargaining structure.

Though we have been in a prolonged period of low inflation, many provincial governments have been zealously pursuing "net zero" contract increases in the public sector, and education workers haven't been spared.

The 2016 provincial agreement covering more than 55,000 CUPE education workers in Ontario contained a 2.5 per cent wage increase over three years. That deal was achieved after a successful, first-ever work-to-rule campaign across the province. And earlier this year, 10,000 members in Quebec ratified a five-year provincial agreement that averages more than 1.5 per cent annually in wage increases.

Our members are also making wage gains in other ways. Some rural Manitoba locals have negotiated market adjustments to close the gap with urban wages.

CUPE 2745 scored a huge pay equity adjustment in their 2016 round of bargaining, with significant support from CUPE National and the New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity. Some classifications, including educational assistants, will receive immediate wage increases, as well as annual adjustments totaling nearly \$10 an hour when the deal is fully implemented in 2021.

PENSIONS

Over 90 per cent of CUPE members in the school board sector are covered by defined benefit pension plans, and virtually all CUPE members in the sector have access to a pension. In Ontario,



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Saskatchewan and BC school board members are part of multi-employer municipal pension plans. Members in Manitoba have been pushing employers to adopt defined benefit plans to replace inferior defined contribution plans which are widespread in the sector. Some locals were successful in their most recent round of bargaining, but much work remains to be done.

One potentially huge development is the proposed education workers benefit trust in Ontario, which is currently being analyzed by both sides. The trust, if established, will provide a common benefits plan across the province funded by the provincial government but administered and controlled by CUPE. It will mark the second education sector trust in which CUPE is involved, following one established in BC several years ago.

CAMPAIGNS

A number of sector-based campaigns are underway across the country. In Ontario, members are using billboards and social media, and mobilizing members, to promote the work they do and the impact on students of cuts to education workers.

CUPE 4254 in Saskatchewan is running a postcard campaign highlighting shortfalls in provincial funding and the impact on services that CUPE members provide. CUPE is also working on a Saskatchewan-wide “Hire Your Boss” campaign focused on the fall school division elections. PEI members are raising awareness of school violence, and have a separate campaign on school bus safety.

The work-to-rule campaign in Ontario and the pay equity victory in New Brunswick prove that the effort put into campaigns can pay off at the bargaining table.

Most school board sector members are covered by defined benefit pension plans.

Achievements in Ontario and New Brunswick show that campaigns can pay off at the bargaining table.

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- More information for your sector • Tools to help you and your local
- Success stories from across the country • And more!