

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



More than half of all education workers across Canada are CUPE members. CUPE represents over 130,000 workers in elementary and secondary schools across Canada in every classification in the school system – except teachers and management – in 411 education bargaining units.

From almost 55,000 members in Ontario to representing 100 per cent of the education workers in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, CUPE's Education Sector remains one of the strongest in Canada. 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 83 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. Less than one per cent identified as having a non-binary gender.

Men tend to predominate in trades and maintenance positions as well as information technology. Over 50 per cent of CUPE education sector members are over 50 years old. Forty-two per cent are between 30 and 50 years old, and almost six per cent are under 30.

Issues

CHRONIC UNDERFUNDING

Funding increases are incongruent with the costs of providing education and maintenance demands, leaving school boards under enormous pressure. With an already \$16 billion backlog in school repairs, the Ontario government's scrapping of the

\$100 million school repair fund will leave school boards in a worse position as they incur additional deferred maintenance costs forcing them to make impossible choices between repairing heating systems and funding programs.

The ongoing shrinking of funding to school boards has school board administrators scrambling for resources as they try to address budget crises and the needs of a growing and diversified student population. In provinces like British Columbia, where enrolment is expected to rise, unless provincial funding is matched, our members will be forced to accommodate the additional demands on staff time and resources while not compromising the quality of education and service they provide. With a growing number of students requiring individualized care, more staff resources are needed to ensure that students are not falling through the cracks. Relying on already financially strapped parents to fundraise for things like recreational facilities and classroom technology – while they are also being asked to cover additional fees like field trips and transportation – is not the answer. Adequate funding is the answer.

Instead, more public funding is going to private schools that charge exorbitant access fees and that reinforce systemic oppression and differential access. CUPE Alberta and CUPE education workers in that province have joined with organizations to call on the government to reallocate public funds from private schools – special education schools exempted – to the public school system over a three-year period. They are also calling for the government to fulfill campaign promises, including reducing mandatory school fees, reducing class sizes, increasing classroom supports and introducing a school lunch program.



The provincial and territorial governments must make a bold decision to adequately and consistently fund education and not download additional burdens onto local school boards and districts that are already struggling with long-term planning and sustainability.

AMALGAMATION AND FUNDING STRAINS

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.

The Horizon School Division in Saskatchewan has erased the potential for slated wage increases beginning in the 2018-19 school year by cutting days for 10-month education support staff. Education assistants, librarians, secretaries, occupational therapists, student counsellors, and outreach workers all lost between four and 13 working days. The division also cut the only two speech pathologist assistant positions.

Hundreds of schools have been closed across Canada. In 2018, the Nova Scotia government announced plans to dissolve the province’s seven elected regional school boards and instead create one provincial advisory council made up of people appointed by the minister of education. The government also intends to move principal and vice-principals out of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. In Ontario, 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.

There are some positive signs for school enrolment. In Saskatchewan, student enrollment in K-12 education increased 10 per cent between 2010 and 2017 with Saskatoon Public Schools witnessing a 21 per cent increase during that same period. Unfortunately, this increase in enrollment was not matched with adequate funding. In fact, the 2017-18 provincial budget cut \$54.2 million in funding to schools and classroom supports and annual funding was slashed by \$500 per student.

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 rather 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 bargaining survey done by the recently formed Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU) documents members’ experiences of health and safety in Ontario and will frame its bargaining priorities in 2019.

PRIVATIZATION IN AND OF SCHOOLS

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.

We're witnessing the introduction and internalization of business-like practices, techniques and terminology in the public school sector. Public education services are being handed over to the private sector with public-private partnerships (P3) and contracting out, and we face the importing of ideas and practices that mirror the private sector, including the evaluation and surveillance of education workers and the use of merit pay schemes.

We've seen some huge wins against P3 schools. In Manitoba, the plan to build four new P3 schools was squashed and actually left the province with one additional school! CUPE 737, which represents education support staff at the Brandon School Division, successfully led a campaign to "raise red flags" on P3 schools in the province. Not only did the provincial government back down but the money saved from abandoning the P3 model was committed to building a fifth school. Besides the millions of additional dollars that P3 schools can cost taxpayers, they are also covered in secrecy and corruption and shift schools from being places open to the community to closed-off, private spaces.

In 1998, the Nova Scotia government signed P3 agreements with four developers for 39 P3 schools. Now 20 years later, with the leases coming to the end of their expiry date, the government has been buying back some of these schools, realizing that it would have cost significantly less if the schools remained public. The auditor general cited that as much as \$52 million could have been saved had the schools been built the traditional way. In 2017, the government

committed to buying 10 P3 schools from developers Nova Learning and Ashford Investment for \$49.3 million. The total cost for buying back 37 of the 39 schools was \$215.9 million.

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. Local bargaining deals mainly with local issues. Only the three Prairie provinces have no formal central bargaining structure.

Though inflation rates have been decreasing since 2011, with the lowest slump occurring in 2015, many provincial governments have been zealously pursuing "net zero" contract increases in the public sector. Education workers haven't been spared.

In 2017, CUPE education workers in Ontario celebrated one of the largest settlements of its kind in response to *Bill 115's* attack on Charter rights that sought to prohibit the right to bargain collectively. The financial compensation settlement was a result of the Ontario Superior Court's ruling that *Bill 115* was unconstitutional. The settlement will see CUPE education workers share almost \$57 million with other education workers in the province.



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 totalling nearly \$10 per hour when the deal is fully implemented in 2022. CUPE’s Job Evaluation (JE) staff worked with CUPE 2745 and the employer to achieve this settlement. While the process took many years to complete, pay equity adjustments will be phased in with retroactive payments dating back to 2012 and will continue for up to 10 years. These pay equity wage adjustments will make a big difference in the lives of some of the most underpaid and undervalued workers.

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, 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 the inferior defined contribution plans that 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. During the fall and summer months in British Columbia, Kindergarten to Grade 12 education support workers were featured on movie screens, promoting the important services they provide. Using a 30-second animated video, the character “Rachel” comes into contact with CUPE members during her day, including an education assistant, a custodian, clerical worker, tradesperson and bus driver who all contribute to making her experience at school possible. The campaign includes buttons, flyers, posters and newspaper and radio ads for locations without large cinemas.

CUPE 2745 representing educational support staff in New Brunswick have been touring the province pushing their “Save our School Libraries” campaign in response to budget cuts, cuts to library workers and the move to use volunteers to replace work done by our members.

The cancellation of the P3 schools in Manitoba and the pay equity victory in New Brunswick prove that the effort put into campaigns can pay off at the bargaining table.

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