

Eligibility for Membership

Given the nature of the change in the composition of OECTA's membership that is to be considered at AGM 2010, it is understandable that some members have concerns about how these new members would affect the current membership and the future of the Association.

The only way to change the OECTA constitution, to make Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) who work in the Early Learning Kindergarten Program (ELKP) eligible for membership, would be to obtain a supporting vote from 90 per cent of the AGM delegates. That will not be achieved unless the merits of the change are abundantly clear to an overwhelming majority of delegates and local OECTA leaders.

Can OECTA Fairly Represent Both Groups?

At times every union must balance the needs of one constituent group of members with the needs of another. OECTA is faced with this dilemma frequently: Should OECTA attempt to secure more rights for part-time teachers, or bargain for better benefits? Should OECTA try to reduce the number of on-calls for secondary teachers or secure more elementary specialist teachers? OECTA has wrestled with such questions at the provincial and local level for over 60 years.

Under the Ontario Labour Relations Act, all unions must act fairly when representing members, but also act in the interest of all members. OECTA acts on behalf of the majority, when the interests of one

individual or group of teachers within a bargaining unit cannot be reconciled with those of the majority. This satisfies legal requirements of Duty of Fair Representation under the OLRA, but as a democratic organization, OECTA balances interests of minority groups through a clearly defined and transparent process for prioritizing bargaining objectives. This allows for extensive input from the membership and ensures the views of the minority are accounted for by the majority.

OECTA's experience, gained through years of advocacy on behalf of Catholic teachers, positions the Association to negotiate working conditions and salaries for ECEs in Catholic schools more successfully than any other union.

The concern that expanding membership eligibility would change OECTA from a professional union of teachers into one in which teachers gradually become a minority is unfounded. The AGM proposal is to include ECEs only. Currently OECTA's full-time equivalent membership is 38,000. By the time the ELKP is fully implemented, the Ministry estimates that about 3,500 ECEs will be employed in Catholic schools. This would constitute just 8 per cent of the total membership. Any future effort to expand the membership would require a supporting vote from 90 per cent of delegates at a future AGM.

The recommendation to expand OECTA's membership to include ECEs was made only after extensive analysis and study by provincial staff and legal counsel. It has been made in the firm belief that the long term interests of the Association, and of the Catholic school system in which our members teach, would be best served by including ECEs as members of OECTA.