

April 2025

ONTARIO EDUCATION STAFFING CRISIS

Addressing the Shortage of Certified
Teachers in Ontario Classrooms

A Call for Immediate Action



COUNCIL OF ONTARIO DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION
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Executive Summary

There is a significant and growing teacher shortage in Ontario, affecting all 73 publicly funded school boards across our province – English, Catholic, and French. The education sector is experiencing significant daily classroom teacher shortages across the sector primarily due to teacher absences, capped enrolments at Faculties, as well as shortages of certified early childhood educators and education assistants (Ontario Principals’ Council, 2023; People for Education, 2024). Additionally, in specific parts of the province, there are shortages of certified teachers in specific subjects such as Technological Education, Indigenous Languages and French – including French as a Second Language, French Immersion and Francophone teachers in our French Language School Districts.

While daily staffing challenges across the sector impact schools and more importantly, students, this report focuses on the teacher shortage in Ontario. It explores the contributing factors and offers practical strategies to mitigate these daily and longer-term shortages to ensure high-quality education for all students. Without immediate investment in the profession, shortages are expected to worsen in the coming years, especially by 2027 (Jones, 2024).

The number of applicants who are interested in entering the teaching profession has never been stronger, with the number of funded spaces in faculties of education insufficient to accommodate the interest.

High-quality classroom instruction by certified teachers is critical for students to learn and succeed.



Too many students, already suffering from the pandemic upheaval, are now subjected to a series of unqualified adults in charge of their learning.

*Kathy Hibbert, Associate Dean
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Research from the OECD shows that certified teachers have a significant positive impact on student achievement. Students taught by well-trained, certified teachers generally perform better in academic assessments. Their findings highlight the importance of a strong teaching force for high educational outcomes across OECD countries. This is primarily measured through data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Key points about the impact of certified teachers based on OECD findings:

- **Higher student achievement:**
Studies consistently link higher levels of teacher certification with improved student performance in various subjects, including reading, math, and science.
- **Quality of initial teacher training:**
The content of teacher education programs, particularly those including strong subject matter knowledge, assessment and evaluation, pedagogy, and practical teaching experience, plays a crucial role in teacher effectiveness.
- **Teacher stability and retention:**
A well-trained and certified teaching force is associated with lower teacher turnover, which supports the continuity of student learning and improve student achievement.
- **Impact on disadvantaged students:**
Certified teachers can have a particularly significant impact on the academic achievement of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (OECD).

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Issues

Factors Contributing to the Teacher Shortage

As teachers retire or leave the profession, there are not enough new teachers to replace them. The Ministry of Education warns the situation will get worse in the coming years (Callan & D’Mello, 2024; Jones, 2024).

At the same time the shortage of certified teachers is growing, overall enrolment in Ontario schools is also increasing. The result is a demand for even more certified teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2024b).

The teacher shortage is particularly challenging in specific subject areas including French and Technological Education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021, 2024a; Ontario Public School Board Association 2020, 2021). Teacher shortages in the French-language education system have been ongoing since 2016 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

The limited supply of teachers is also exacerbated in certain areas of the province including northern, rural and remote areas.

In 2015, Ministry policy changes increased the length of time to complete teacher education programs (Kitchen & Petrarca, 2022). This meant fewer graduates were available to fill yearly vacancies. In 2011, over 7,600 students were admitted to teacher education programs. This number dropped to 4,500 by 2022. (Ontario College of Teachers, 2022). Additionally, it has been challenging to attract teachers from other provinces and countries as shortages exist nationally and internationally. The number of new teachers from other provinces and countries was 1,916 in 2023, down from 2,415 in 2011. The Ontario College of Teachers forecasts a need of 1,500 more new teachers every year by 2030 (Ontario College of Teachers, 2022).

The number of teachers certified has also declined since 2005 when more than 9,000 teachers were certified, with a high of 9,638 in 2008. For the past three years, the numbers of teachers certified were (Ontario College of Teachers, 2024):

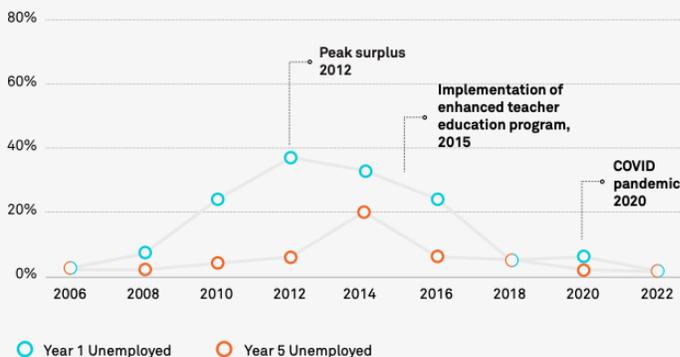
- 2021 - 5,747
- 2022 - 7,957
- 2023 - 7,171
- 2024 - 8,139

Key Factors

- **Aging workforce and retirements:** A significant portion of the teaching workforce is nearing retirement age, leading to a large number of vacancies in the coming years (Ontario College of Teachers, 2023).
- **Increased student enrolment:** In some regions, rising student populations, especially newcomers, are outpacing the supply of new teachers (Jones, 2024). Enrolment has been on the rise within the French-language sector since 2005-06 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021). A commitment by the Government of Canada to increase the presence of French-speaking immigrants outside of Québec is now having a significant impact on the student enrolment within Ontario’s French-language system (IRCC, 2023).
- **Increased sick leave access:** Policy changes to sick leave entitlements, along with a lack of financial resources, have contributed to the number of daily, unfilled vacancies. The average number of days absent for elementary teachers in 2023-24 was 15.59 days, and for secondary teachers was 13.25 days (SBCI, 2023-24) – for an overall absentee rate of one and a half days a month for every teacher.
- **Teacher Education Programs:** The increase to the length of teacher education programs in 2015, combined with a cap on post-secondary funding, has resulted in a decrease in the supply of certified teachers. In 2024, a total of 9,019 applications to the two-year program within Ontario faculties of education were received, with less than 50% of applicants, on average within faculties of education, accepted due to existing funding and enrolment caps; this figure does not include applications to concurrent or Master’s programs (The Ontario University Applications Centre [OUAC]).

Figure 1

Trend reported unemployment, teaching Years 1 and 5, 2006-2022



(Ontario College of Teachers, 2022)

2012

Peak of teacher supply

2015

Change to 2-year teacher education program

2015-2025

Decline in teacher supply

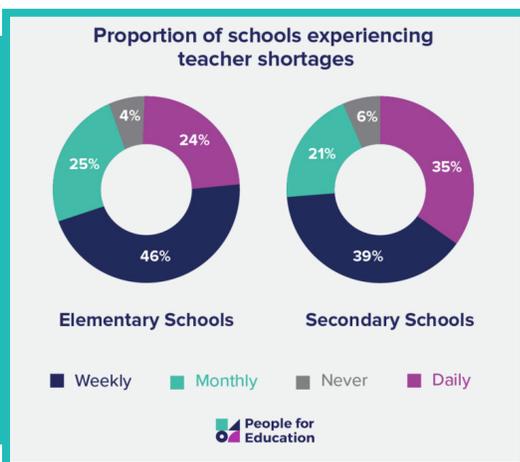
- **Limited pathways to teacher certification:** Barriers to entry for internationally educated teachers and those seeking alternative certification routes restrict the pool of certified candidates. In addition to these barriers, certification delays add to daily unfilled jobs by certified teachers (Balintec, 2022).
- **National and international teacher shortages:** With other provinces and countries experiencing teacher shortages, incentives from other jurisdictions have drawn from the number of certified teachers within the province (BC Gov News, 2024). With the recent federal requirements on international student caps, it is critical that these are not imposed on international teacher education candidates.

Impact on the Education System

The teacher shortage impedes the progress towards achieving Ontario’s education priorities and negatively impacts learning for Ontario’s students. On a daily basis across the province, principals and vice-principals scramble each day to implement plans to address unfilled vacancies (Teotonio, 2024). These plans may include the temporary reassignment of another teacher, often from intervention supports, to cover the class. Unfilled vacancies exist where there are no certified teachers or no certified occasional teachers to cover the class. As a result, classes are either cancelled or uncertified ‘teachers,’ including university students, are utilized to supervise the classroom to address safety compliance concerns. Safety compliance is not the same as teaching, and as a result, the quality of education is being impacted (Ontario Principals’ Council, 2023).

In areas of the province where the shortage is at a “crisis” level, significant numbers of uncertified staff serve as the regular classroom teacher.

In some cases, the lack of certified teachers has resulted in schools being partially closed. In one Northern school board, for example, part of the school is bussed over an hour one way to another school due to the inability to hire permanent certified teachers.



70% of elementary schools and 74% of secondary schools are experiencing daily or weekly shortages of qualified teachers.

(People for Education, 2024)

School-based Impact

- **Increased reliance on uncertified teachers:** To fill vacancies, administrators utilize uncertified staff, potentially impacting the quality of education (Jones, 2024; Ontario Principals' Council, 2023).
- **Difficulty filling specialized positions:** Shortages are particularly acute in specific subject areas such as French and Technological Education, compounded by recent Ministry of Education policy decisions to mandate more Technological Education courses as a graduation requirement (Jones, 2024; Zwaagstra, 2024).
- **Inequitable access to education:** Teacher shortages disproportionately affect rural and remote communities, as well as schools serving greater proportions of underserved marginalized populations (e.g., First Nation communities).

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Calls to Action

Strategies to Address the Teacher Shortage

An intentional and formalized plan, with short-term and long-term strategies, is needed to address the critical and immediate teacher shortage in Ontario. The shortage of teachers in Ontario cannot be resolved by school boards and faculties of education without significant investment in the education sector by the provincial government.

There has been a steady erosion of education funding across the province as a result of funding formulas not keeping up with inflation. While the overall funding has increased, this is due to increased student enrolment. Without adjustments for inflation, there are fewer funds within the sector to address a multitude of challenges, including teacher shortages (See et al., 2020).

There is a need for the government and the Ministry of Education to formally acknowledge and address the staffing shortages that exist in the education sector. The immediate short-term solutions with appropriate funding must be prioritized.

- **Fund more teacher education seats within Ontario Faculties of Education:** Teacher education programs have reported that they have twice as many applicants as they have funded spaces.

More funded spaces in existing teacher education programs will immediately increase the pool of certified teachers (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 2024), as opposed to making any significant changes to the length of the program. The length of the program has been a topic of much discussion with the suggestion that there should be a return to a one-year program. The support for the addition of compressed programs may be the best solution, ensuring that teacher candidates are well prepared for the role while meeting the needs of the sector, especially in high demand areas.

Reducing the length of the program back to one-year may also have the unintended consequence of impacting the readiness of new teachers as they begin their teaching career. Increasing the number of seats in teacher education programs would also better meet current and immediate needs. Connected to this issue is the requirement to restore or boost the overall program funding to faculties of education which was also reduced by 50% with the change to the two-year program.

- **Increase use of retired teachers:** Provide immediate support by increasing the number of days for retired teachers from 50 to 95 days. This is not a long-term solution, but rather one that will address immediate needs until other strategies are implemented.
- **Streamline pathways to teacher certification:** Facilitate the certification of internationally educated teachers and those with alternative qualifications to expand the pool of certified candidates:
 - Review the recent policy changes at the College of Teachers to determine the efficacy of the program changes to attract more international and interprovincial teachers;
 - Support internationally educated teachers to allow them to fully understand the uniqueness of Ontario's education system and be successful as classroom teachers;
 - Review the impact of transitional certificates based on school board input (Ontario College of Teachers, 2024) with funding provided to faculties to support the implementation of the transitional certificate.
 - Recognize the expertise and experiences of education assistants and early childhood educators who may wish to proceed to teacher education programs;
 - Review the existing time constraints for the College of Teachers to grant certifications.
- **Offer incentives for teachers to work in high-demand areas:** Financial incentives, housing assistance, and student loan forgiveness programs can encourage teachers to work in underserved communities (BC Gov News, 2024). This could include signing bonuses and service retention bonuses for graduates who choose to relocate to underserved and northern areas of the province.
 - One potential model would be the three-year subsidy (2023-2026) that the province of Ontario instituted to pay for Basic Constable Training (\$15,450 as of 2023) to increase the pool of available police officers. This model could be utilized for overall recruitment, to hire within specific subject areas, or to attract teachers to specific geographic regions of the province.
 - Expand the Learn and Stay Grant beyond the health care sector to the education sector.
- **Offer incentives for teacher candidates to complete their practicums in other parts of the province:** There are insufficient practicum placements in areas of the province due to many factors (e.g., small schools, teacher demographics), with incentives ensuring that teacher candidates complete this critical program requirement.
- **Target recruitment efforts and incentives to attract teachers for specialty areas such as French, Technological Education, and Indigenous languages:** Under the current central bargaining approach, the province is responsible for teacher compensation decisions. The province needs to create monetary incentives to attract specialty area teachers and to work with the provincial unions to address the staffing crisis in Ontario.

- **Review New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP):** The recent changes to education means there is a need to review NTIP. The current shortage of occasional teachers prevents school boards from providing a fulsome induction and mentoring program for new teachers. In some areas of the province, teacher demographics combined with the increasing demands of the profession result in fewer teachers available to mentor new teachers.
- **Increase support and incentives for internationally educated teachers:** Internationally educated teachers need specific support to better understand the Ontario classroom context including diverse student and behavioural needs. Providing incentives would assist in attracting them. Additionally, all teachers could benefit from learning about the unique experiences and skills that internationally educated teachers bring to all Ontario classrooms..
- **Expand alternative certification programs:** Create more alternative pathways for individuals with relevant experience to become certified teachers and transition into teaching, especially in high-need subject areas such as Technological Education and Indigenous languages..
 - In addition to more pathways into the profession, fund more compressed teacher education programs to decrease the time requirement to become a certified teacher in Ontario (Gaudreau, 2023). Again, compressing a two-year program would ensure the preparedness of teacher candidates.
- **Partner with universities to increase teacher education enrolment:** Provide funding to offer scholarships and incentives to encourage students to pursue teaching degrees, especially for Indigenous and racialized candidates in light of the research demonstrating the value of a diverse teaching force. Research from literature consistently shows ‘benefits of access to same-race/ ethnicity teachers on the outcomes of students of color, including increased test-score performance (Dee 2004; Egalite, Kisida, and Winters 2015), academic expectations (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016), and reduced absences, suspensions, and expulsions’ (Blazar, D., & Lagos, F., 2021).
 - The government has recently implemented free or reduced tuition in the health care sector to address significant labour shortages in the sector. Follow this implementation model for the education sector.
- **Promote the teaching profession:** Public awareness campaigns and initiatives to encourage young people to consider teaching and/or support positions in education as a career can help attract new talent to the profession; including the creation of a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) education pathway for a variety of teaching and other occupations in the education sector.
- **Increased funding for education:** Allocate more resources to schools to hire additional staff, including permanent occasional teachers, and to improve overall teaching conditions. It is important to note that there are also support staff shortages in all boards, which directly impact teaching and learning.

- **Data collection leadership:** The Ministry of Education should implement a standardized system for tracking teacher data including shortages by region, division, and subject.
 - Create forecasting models to more accurately track retirement trends and demographics of certified teachers.

Strategies to Address the Teacher Shortage Within the French-language System

All the strategies identified above are also pertinent for the French-language system. In addition, in January 2021, a French-language Working Group submitted a report to Ontario’s Ministry of Education addressing the ongoing shortage of French-language teachers since 2016. The report included recommendations in three main areas:

- Teacher Training Programs and Labour Market Needs (24 recommendations);
- Professional Integration and Retention of New Teachers (four recommendations);
- Promoting the Teaching Profession and Employment Opportunities (two recommendations).

The report also highlighted the need for funding to implement these five recommendations. (Report on the shortage of teachers in Ontario’s French-language education system, 2021).

Despite efforts since 2021, Ontario still faces a shortage of French-language teachers in 2025.

The strategies identified in the 2021 report and action plan developed by the Ministry based on these recommendations should be updated to include the new strategies outlined above in this report. Both the English and French-language systems share the same legislation and regulations, although the minority context presents additional challenges.

- **Increase funding for French-language education:** Invest in programs to attract and retain French-language teachers. The shortage of French-language teachers is significant across Canada.
- Considering the number of newcomers accepting teaching positions in the French-language system and considering the lack of French-language services for newcomers in the province, provide additional financial support to French-language school boards to support these teachers during their first and second years of teaching.

Hiring French-language teachers from abroad has become part of the solution for French-language systems across Canada. In Ontario, until local education program expansions produce more teachers, recruiting international teachers is part of the solution (180-200 teachers from abroad since 2023, La Passerelle, Centre franco). This situation requires more funding to support the integration of these teachers within the Boards.

The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), despite its orientation towards professional learning, should incorporate flexibility in its mandatory teacher appraisal process during the first year of teaching for teachers from abroad. It is essential for these educators to acclimate themselves to the school's culture and pedagogy before undergoing an appraisal.

Addressing the shortage of French-language teachers in Ontario is crucial to ensure the provision of quality education for young francophone students.

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Conclusion

The teacher shortage in Ontario is having immediate and significant implications for the education system and for student achievement and success. Addressing this shortage requires an immediate, multi-faceted approach involving the Ministry of Education, the Ontario Treasury Board, provincial school boards and Trustee Associations, principal associations, faculties of education, the Ontario College of Teachers, the Ontario Teachers' Federation and its member unions (Hibbert, 2024).

Implementing the strategies outlined in this report is a step forward to ensuring that Ontario continues with a strong education system and that all students have certified and dedicated teachers.

The strategies in this report will set Ontario on a positive path forward. Implementing them will help ensure that students have access to the certified teachers they deserve and maintain Ontario's status as one of the most effective public education systems in the world.

CODE looks forward to working closely with the Ministry of Education to implement our Calls to Action and ensure the public remains confident in Ontario's Kindergarten to Grade 12 publicly funded education system.

About CODE

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) is the professional association which represents Directors of Education of the 73 publicly funded District School Boards in Ontario.

Strategic Priorities

To achieve our goals, CODE has established three strategic priorities:

- **Advocacy:** We advocate for policies and programs that improve student achievement, ensure safety, and promote well-being. That means working with decision-makers, securing funding, and supporting the recruitment and retention of skilled staff.
- **Leadership:** We help members grow as leaders by offering networking, mentorship, professional development, and opportunities to share solutions to community challenges.
- **Equity and inclusion:** We promote equity and inclusion to ensure all students learn practical knowledge, job skills, and life skills in safe, supportive environments—no matter who they are.

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