



Ontario's Teaching Regulator
L'organisme de réglementation
de l'enseignement en Ontario

October 14, 2022

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
438 University Avenue, 5th Floor
Toronto ON M7A 2A5

Dear Minister Lecce,

We are writing to confirm that we have reviewed the standards, supports and guidance for teacher professionalism, as requested in your letter dated September 23, 2022.

REVIEW FINDINGS

Three pillars underpin teacher professionalism in Ontario: [The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession](#), [The Ethical Standards of the Teaching Profession](#), and [The Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession](#).

These pillars infuse every aspect of the College's work, including key supporting resources that are shared with our members through every stage of their careers (see Appendix 1). The authority to develop the standards and these supports can be found in the *Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996*, its supporting regulations, and the College's bylaws.

In particular, the foundational standard 'Commitment to Students and Student Learning' is the cornerstone of professionalism in education, calling teachers to a higher purpose:

Members [Ontario Certified Teachers or OCTs] are dedicated in their care and commitment to students. They treat students equitably and with respect and are sensitive to factors that influence individual student learning. Members facilitate the development of students as contributing citizens of Canadian society.

Following our review, Council has concluded that the standards, governing legislation and supporting resources appropriately address professionalism in today's modern learning environment. In conducting this review, we were mindful of controversy regarding images of a teacher wearing prosthetic breasts in the classroom which has been the subject of recent media reports.

The College can and does help to raise awareness of the critical need for teachers to adhere to government and employer policies and protocols, as part of their commitment to teacher professionalism. For example, the College's [Essential Advice for the Teaching Profession](#) advises that "OCTs should consult their employers' policies to ensure that they know and follow the expectations and obligations in their particular workplaces and communities." In addition:

- **Board/School Policies and Protocols:** Employers of Ontario Certified Teachers play a crucial role in establishing safe and welcoming learning spaces for Ontario's students. Employment policies and procedures describe specifically how employees are expected to conduct themselves and the Board's expectations of them.
- **Government Policies and Protocols:** [The Policy/Program Memorandum 128 – The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct \(PPM 128\)](#): The Provincial Code sets clear standards of behaviour that promote “*respect, civility, and responsible citizenship*.” Adherence to school board codes helps educators conduct themselves professionally. One of the purposes of the Provincial Code is to ensure that all members of the school community are treated with respect and dignity.

A COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION SPACE

Ontario's education system is a collaborative space with many stakeholders, each playing a different role. The College recognizes the importance of leading when appropriate, but also consulting with others when needed.

Enforcement by Employers

The College's role is to regulate the teaching profession. Employers and school administrators have the primary responsibility to enforce their own policies and procedures. In most cases, school boards can and do address breaches of their policies and no regulatory intervention is necessary.

The Onus is on the Professional

All Ontario Certified Teachers, in their position of trust, are expected to demonstrate responsibility and sound judgement in their relationships with students, parents, guardians, colleagues, educational partners, other professionals, the learning environment, and the public. Teachers are required to uphold the standards of their professional practice and ethical standards both in and out of the classroom.

Regulatory Action

The vast majority of Ontario's teachers practice professionally. On the rare occasion that an educator fails to exercise good professional judgement and breaches these standards, a complaint can be made to the College and our Investigation, Discipline and Fitness to Practise committees may become involved. These committees are responsible for applying and upholding the College's [Professional Misconduct Regulation](#) (O. Reg. 437/97). When needed those committees provide counselling or impose discipline on those who have breached their professional or ethical standards. Failure to follow a school board's policies can be a factor a committee relies on to counsel a member or make a finding of professional misconduct.

NEXT STEP: STRENGTHENING THE SYSTEM FOR ONTARIO'S TWO MILLION STUDENTS

As noted above, the College is committed to raising awareness of the need for OCTs to adhere to government and employer policies and protocols, including the addition of explicit references to these policies and protocols in College materials and presentations to teacher candidates, aspiring principals and aspiring supervisory officers.

Student safety and well-being are at the heart of the College's commitment to promote teacher professionalism. To further this commitment, we are intent on continuing our conversations regarding the legislative/regulatory amendments previously requested by Council. These include reinforcing employer reporting requirements; allowing for better access to third-party criminal proceeding information; providing more flexibility to deal with frivolous or vexatious complaints made against members; permitting administrative revocation in certain sexual abuse and child pornography cases; and expanding funding eligibility for victims of sexual abuse therapy/counselling.

Working with the government to mobilize each of these requests would equip the College with additional tools to enhance professionalism among members. Moreover, these would allow for a more targeted focus of the College's resources in the public interest.

As Ontario's teaching regulator, the Ontario College of Teachers sets and maintains ethical and professional standards that are at the heart of teacher professionalism.

We look forward to discussing the items outlined in this letter with the Ministry of Education in greater detail.

Sincerely,



Diana Miles
Chair of Council



Chantal Bélisle, OCT
Interim Registrar and Chief Executive Officer

Attach. (Appendix 1: A Lifetime of Support)

DM/CB/kb-pol

APPENDIX ONE – A LIFETIME OF SUPPORT

EARLY CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The standards (*Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*, *Ethical Standards of the Teaching Profession*, and *Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession*) are first introduced to aspiring teachers through Ontario’s initial teacher education programs, all of which are accredited by the College. A mandatory requirement for accreditation is to ensure that the *Ethical Standards* and the *Standards of Practice* are included in foundational aspects of the program.

Outreach and Communications

The College connects with aspiring teachers enrolled in Ontario’s faculties of education via information sessions with a focus on our *Professional Standards* in both years of their teacher education program.

We also connect with this group – and those who have applied to the College – via [Your College and You](#) (YCAI), our official publication. Distributed monthly by email, YCAI regularly includes stories on the College’s *Professional Standards*, either as standalone articles, or in the form of case studies (*What Would You Do?*) based on facts from real cases involving allegations of professional misconduct considered by the Investigation Committee. Most importantly, every issue of YCAI includes summaries of decisions from our Discipline Committee, which provide insight into the importance and consequences of poor professional judgement.

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Another core component of the College’s work is to help OCTs further their knowledge throughout their careers. We do so in many ways, including:

Additional Qualifications

The College accredits [Additional Qualifications](#) (AQs) courses and develops guidelines that establish the required content of these ongoing teacher education courses. Every AQ course must include discussions of how the *Standards of Practice* and *Ethical Standards* inform the subject-specific content.

Professional Advisories

[Professional Advisories](#) provide advice on professional judgment and practice. The advisories apply to all OCTs. These advisories emphasize that teachers must follow employer policies, protocols and directives. The guidance in these advisories is reflective of, and explicitly tied to, the *Standards of Practice and Ethical Standards*. For example:

- [Safety in Learning Environments: A Shared Responsibility](#)
- [Maintaining Professionalism – Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media](#)
- [Professional Boundaries](#)
- [Supporting Students’ Mental Health](#)
- [Additional Qualifications: Extending Professional Knowledge](#)