

Dear Minister McCann,

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers at all levels of education have faced unprecedented challenges in the delivery of high-quality education for which they are known. In the post-secondary sector, these challenges have manifested themselves in particular ways.

The massive and abrupt shift to online teaching at colleges and universities has created significant physical, mental, and in some cases, financial strain for teachers. This has been largely caused by the fact that the allocation of teaching resources during the pandemic is still based on formulas used during pre-pandemic times: Teachers are expected to teach the same number of students and the same number of course sections, and deliver the exact same competencies, even though teaching online is by nature, significantly more labour intensive. At the same time, teachers are expected to get by with the same amount of institutional support as before; this has meant that many have had to transition to online teaching with little institutional, professional-development support, and in some cases, pay for at-home IT services and other equipment out of their own pockets.

The system-wide impact of the latter tendencies has meant that the pre-existing inequities amongst certain employment categories of teachers and professors, in access to resources and adequate working conditions, have been exacerbated by the pandemic. At colleges, these inequities exist between “regular” full-time teachers and those teaching in Continuing Education; at universities, they exist between full-time professors and part-time course lecturers.

While all teachers have been doing their best to prop up the education system, the strain they are currently facing is not sustainable, for the individuals in question and for the system as a whole. If we are to ensure the quality and the viability of the post-secondary education system, we need an immediate and substantial injection of funds to do the following:

- Reduce the teaching workload by reducing class sizes
- Bridge existing and growing inequities between certain employment categories of teachers and professors
- Provide supplemental support for teachers for online training and support and, for at-home IT and other expenses normally covered on campus
- Support to remedy physical and mental health issues created by pandemic working conditions

Moreover, we ask the government to ensure that Colleges and Universities maximize the allocation of such funds to classroom-teaching so that teachers and students are the direct beneficiaries.

The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing inequities in all sectors of our society. In the education sector, however, the current circumstances have compounded the effects of years of “Austerity” measures which have left the public higher education system without the resources it needs to achieve its mission. Another couple of years without an important injection of resources and a commitment to support higher education from the government would be catastrophic. It is becoming increasingly clear that the only way out of the current situation is not to “return to normal” but to return to better. We call on the government to prioritize investment in public higher education to address the long-standing issues in the sector so that we have a robust education system for the future.

As the pandemic drags on, one year and counting, with no end-date in sight, it is critical that the government make these necessary investments immediately. Failure to do so will risk putting the well-being of our teachers, and the future of our education system and our youth in peril.

Sincerely,

Roy Fu, President, John Abbott College Faculty Association

Eric Durling, President, Vanier College Teachers' Association

Perry Shearwood, President, Concordia University Continuing Education Part-time Faculty Union

Louisa Hadley, VP Internal, Dawson College Teachers' Union

Raad Jaasim, President, McGill College Course Lecturers and Instructors Union

