

Why OSSTF is the right choice for you



OSSTF

Uniting education workers since 1919

OSSTF: Uniting Education Workers Since 1919

We believe that the single most compelling reason for you to join OSSTF is that education is our specialty. All our expertise and resources are focused on helping educational workers achieve their goals and helping students succeed in strong, well-funded public education institutions.

We have established excellent salaries, pensions, benefits and working conditions for our members and played a leading role in defending equitable access to high-quality education in Canada and around the world.

Founded in 1919, OSSTF represents more than 60,000 anglophone and francophone educational workers in 140 bargaining units across Ontario. The current membership is approximately 60% female and 40% male. In the mid-1980s, OSSTF expanded its membership to all employees in publicly funded school boards. Again in the 1990s, OSSTF expanded its membership to include educational workers employed at universities.

We are a strong, independent union that uses its knowledge and power to balance both the protective and professional concerns of its membership. We look forward to welcoming you to the OSSTF family.

For more information on any of the topics covered in this booklet, please contact your OSSTF representative or visit www.osstf.on.ca and click on Membership.



“ Our employer is more accountable and treats us with respect since joining OSSTF. They are just a phone call away, are very professional and knowledgeable and we’re always amazed at the calibre of training with which we are provided. ”

Rose Linklater
Bargaining Unit President, Algoma College

“ As a Chief Negotiator, I find the opportunity to share with negotiators from other bargaining units invaluable. Part of OSSTF’s strength is the opportunity that it provides for networking and coordination. ”

Dave Brohman,
Chief Teacher Negotiator, District 24, Waterloo

Democracy in action

OSSTF is a democratic union that provides you with the opportunity to be a part of the decision-making process and grow personally and professionally. As a member, you will play a role in making decisions for your local organization and determining OSSTF’s actions and policies at the provincial level.

Strong local autonomy is the hallmark of the Federation. No other union can offer you such a well-developed and strong local support system. All bargaining units and districts have their own constitution and bylaws and an elected executive. Members elected by their peers to lead our bargaining units are often full-time employees on paid leave from their jobs.

The elected Provincial Executive is supported by professional and experienced staff at the provincial office in Toronto. The staff has a broad range of knowledge, skills and experience in negotiation, mediation, communication and research. We also bring you specialized expertise in pensions and benefits, pay equity, professional development, government funding, government relations and in all aspects of the province’s education system. Our elected officers and staff are just a phone call away at 1-800-267-7867. During regular business hours someone will always answer your call – OSSTF does not resort to voice mail.

As a representative of your local, you can participate in –

- Standing committees and councils that identify local concerns and provide advice
- Sector councils that advise on government legislation and professional standards
- The Provincial Council that gives advice and feedback and relays local concerns to the Provincial Executive
- The Annual Meeting of the Provincial Assembly (AMPA) to elect the Provincial Executive, set priorities, set the budget, determine policy and establish action plans

Bargaining from a position of strength

OSSTF is a proven leader in bargaining for the education sector. Your issues will get the attention they deserve. While negotiations are always conducted by a local team that you choose, you will always have access to research, resources and a trained OSSTF negotiator from the provincial office.

With more than \$60 million in our strike fund, we have the resources to back up your contract demands and ensure your collective agreement is followed. Even though more than 97% of collective agreements are settled without strikes, it is good to know that if a settlement cannot be reached, OSSTF has the resources to back its members when needed. The decision to go on strike is always made by members of the bargaining unit through secret ballots. Before such a vote is held, you will be informed of all the issues so you can make an informed decision.

At a minimum of \$50 a day plus benefits and pensions from day one, our strike support is one of the most generous in the country. Other funds can also be available during a strike to complement strike pay.

Financial strength that guarantees better services

OSSTF has an annual operating budget of more than \$38 million. Our books are open – our budget and expenditures transparent. Each year, locally elected representatives have the right to amend and approve the budget. Provincial dues can only be increased or decreased by a majority vote of the elected representatives at the OSSTF annual meeting.

We provide greater protective and professional services for employees in education than other unions and for a smaller fee. At 1.3%, our dues are among the lowest of any union and are tax-deductible.

Every district is funded through a formula that provides all bargaining units with the funds needed to conduct their day-to-day affairs effectively. The provincial office pays for everything else – provincial workshops, conferences (including travelling expenses and accommodations), professional development, negotiation assistance, grievances/arbitrations, approved legal expenses and strike pay.

Three departments to serve you better

OSSTF is organized into three main departments that provide many of the services we offer.

The Protective Services Department is responsible for negotiations, grievances/arbitrations, education finance, pay equity, pension advice, health and safety, benefits, long-term disability, training and organizing. This department also provides assistance in local grievances and resolving issues informally with employers. Specialists at the provincial office and our lawyers represent members when required at no cost to you or your local.

The Educational Services Department provides professional support for all members, works with the professional colleges, and liaises with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and various other agencies and educational institutions. This department also monitors Ministry initiatives and education trends in Canada, and organizes professional development and training on issues of importance to all members.

The Communications and Political Action Department employs a full-time legislative lobbyist to liaise with government and other political parties and oversees a political action committee to provide advice on political strategy. It offers workshops, issues brochures and pamphlets, advertises in the media and makes submissions to government. You are kept informed through a regular newsletter, a periodical, a flyer on current issues and direct mailings when the need arises.

“From day one, we were aware that we were working with a professional organization.”

**Heidi Klose,
Brock University Support Staff Bargaining Unit**

A leader in pay equity

OSSTF is a recognized leader in negotiating equal pay for equal work for women. In the 1920s, we were one of the first unions to fight for equal pay for equal work for women teachers. Since that time OSSTF has been successful in achieving numerous pay equity plans for educational workers across the province.

Unmatched pension expertise

By joining OSSTF you will have the benefit of our longstanding expertise in the area of pension negotiations. OSSTF was a leader in a coalition that some 30 years ago established the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP). The OTPP has gone on to become one of the most successful pension plans in North America and more importantly provides defined and secure benefits to our members upon retirement. OSSTF has also taken a leadership role for education unions in reforming OMERS, another major public sector pension plan, and had a direct impact on the legislation that redefined OMERS.

“Since joining OSSTF in 2002, our support staff unit has benefited tremendously by gaining a ‘seat at the table’ whenever issues arise that affect our members. We enforce our collective agreement through a wide range of tools such as labour relations with the employer, member education, involvement on joint committees and the grievance process.”

**Norm Westbury,
President Brock University Support Staff
Bargaining Unit**

Lobbying and political action

Because we specialize in education, we are recognized by government and other stakeholders as a credible and trustworthy voice in educational matters. Whether advocating for better benefits for women while on pregnancy leave, fighting for the right to strike for Ontario educational workers, or leading a provincial protest against draconian changes to education, OSSTF has always been at the forefront in the fight to secure better working conditions for its members and better learning conditions for all Ontario students.

Working toward a just society

Over the years, OSSTF has developed numerous working and supportive relationships with a broad range of coalitions and charities, not only in Ontario, but around the world. Through the Provincial Executive and the Human Rights Committee, OSSTF makes financial contributions to a number of organizations through direct donations, membership fees, special project grants and support for fund-raising activities or conferences.

Within the labour movement, OSSTF belongs to the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress. Many local labour councils around the province have OSSTF members as presidents.

What our services cost

The cost of membership of OSSTF is 1.3% of your salary before deductions. This is one of the lowest rates in Canada.

- All union dues are tax-deductible.
- Dues can only be increased or decreased by a vote at the provincial annual meeting.
- On average, approximately 40% of the dues paid to the provincial office are returned either directly or indirectly through subsidies to your bargaining unit to conduct your day-to-day business and take part in OSSTF activities.
- Your dues also pay to provide services such as:
 - professional negotiators
 - services that include grievance and arbitration, pay equity negotiations and maintenance, pension and benefit services
 - access to legal counsel in specific cases
 - training at the local, regional and provincial levels
 - hardship funds, member/student scholarships, grants and awards
 - political action campaigns
 - union newsletter and magazine
 - professional development

YOU DO NOT BEGIN TO PAY OSSTF DUES UNTIL YOUR FIRST COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT IS SIGNED

“ OSSTF has tremendous credibility in the education community and with government. As chair of the Communication and Political Action Committee (CPAC), I take great pride in our ability as an organization to use our collective strength to improve Ontario’s public education system. ”

Joan Jardin,
Chair of OSSTF Communication and Political Action Committee, Kingston

How to join OSSTF

SIGN MEMBERSHIP CARDS

A signed card indicates your desire to secure bargaining rights through OSSTF and protect your future. By law, your decision to join the union is strictly confidential. The employer is never told who signed a card and will never know how you voted as an individual. The union and the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) are the only parties that see the signed cards.

APPLY FOR CERTIFICATION

When a clear majority of your co-workers agree to join OSSTF by signing cards, an application is sent to the OLRB requesting certification.

VOTE BY SECRET BALLOT

The OLRB will order and conduct a secret ballot vote within five working days from the date of application by the union.

GET CERTIFIED AS AN OSSTF BARGAINING UNIT

To be certified as a union in your workplace, you need a majority of eligible voters (50% plus one) to choose that option. Congratulations, you are now a member of OSSTF, the largest all-inclusive education union in Ontario. Now we start working on your behalf.

SET YOUR LOCAL CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

With the assistance of an OSSTF representative, your bargaining unit will establish a local constitution and set of bylaws that will govern your bargaining unit. Your local constitution and bylaws will be adopted by vote at a general meeting of your membership.

ELECT YOUR LOCAL EXECUTIVE OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

At a general meeting where all new members are invited, the members will also elect a new executive committee, including a president, treasurer and chief negotiator to work on your behalf.

GIVE NOTICE TO BARGAIN TO YOUR EMPLOYER

OSSTF, as the new bargaining agent, will notify your employer that we wish to meet and negotiate a new collective agreement. A professional negotiator from OSSTF and your collective bargaining committee will meet with the employer to negotiate your first OSSTF contract. The employer is legally bound to bargain with your union in good faith.

You can take the first step toward achieving your goals right now. Complete and sign the enclosed OSSTF membership card and return it in the envelope provided.

