# Ontario considers shortening teachers’ college program amid growing education staffing crisis



The Ontario government is currently examining the possibility of shortening the two-year teachers' college program as a measure to address a growing shortage of educators in the province. This consideration arises amid increasing challenges in meeting the demand for qualified teachers, particularly in specific subject areas and regions.

Documents obtained by The Canadian Press through a freedom-of-information request reveal that the Ministry of Education undertook research and jurisdictional comparisons last year regarding teacher supply and the duration of initial teacher education (ITE) programs. The findings highlight that longer teacher education programs do not necessarily correlate with enhanced teaching effectiveness. According to the document, "There is little evidence that the amount of course work in ITE makes a difference in teachers' effectiveness when they enter the profession." However, it notes that extended in-class practicum experience tends to better prepare teachers and contributes to higher retention rates.

Currently, Ontario’s teachers' college programs consist of four semesters over two years, a structure implemented in 2015. Prior to this, programs were shorter, and the province used to experience a surplus of teachers, with unemployment rates close to 40% among newly certified educators. The change to a two-year program led to a significant reduction in admissions, dropping from over 7,600 in 2011 to about 4,500 in 2021, according to the Ontario College of Teachers.

Now, the situation has reversed, with near-zero early-career unemployment for teachers and a widely acknowledged shortage expected to worsen from 2027 onwards. Among the subjects most affected are French, technological education, and Indigenous studies, along with challenges in northern parts of Ontario. Contributing factors include an anticipated increase of approximately 180,000 students, rising retirement rates with some 7,800 teachers projected to retire by 2030-31, and no immediate changes in teacher education programs.

The Ontario government has indicated a focus on finding the best approach to ensuring adequate staffing and student success. Education Minister Paul Calandra’s spokesperson, Justine Teplycky, stated, "The minister is well aware of the changes the previous government made to teachers’ college programs and has asked the ministry to report back on the best way forward to ensure student success."

Debates around the optimum length for teacher education programs continue among key stakeholders. The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) president Karen Brown pointed to the financial burden of the two-year format, saying, "We're finding that the cost has become a factor, a barrier for many people to actually commit that length of time to the program." Brown also questioned the added value of the second year, stating, "There isn't actually much more learning taking place...So really, people are saying, 'What is the purpose of the second year?'"

The Ontario Teachers' Federation, representing over 160,000 educators, published a position paper advocating for evidence-based changes developed through teacher consultations. They did not specify a timeline but emphasised that program length is less important than the quality and outcomes of teacher training. The federation has opposed the transition to the current two-year program, instead promoting a model delivering three semesters over 12 months, including 100 days of practicum, to alleviate teacher shortages, especially in high-need subjects and regions.

In response to shortages, Ontario has recently allowed some teacher candidates to work as supply teachers before completing their training. Karen Littlewood, president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), criticised this as a temporary solution. She stated, "We're going to need a lot of people to fill these jobs, but they shouldn't be in the classroom in front of students until they finish their training."

Teachers' unions like the OSSTF have also linked shortages to broader working conditions in the education sector.

From the perspective of post-secondary institutions, the Council of Ontario Universities emphasises the complexity and increasing demands placed on teachers. CEO Steve Orsini explained that universities are working to "compress and streamline" teacher education but cautioned against shortening programs in a way that might undermine the quality of preparation. He noted, "The skills and knowledge that teachers need to develop in response to changing technology, social and mental health issues, and to foster student success is only becoming more complex, not less."

Comparatively, the document notes that across Canada, six out of 13 provinces and territories maintain four-semester teacher education programs, while the international norm ranges from two to four semesters. All jurisdictions except the Northwest Territories face teacher shortages and have implemented various strategies such as scholarship programs, expanded teacher training spaces, recognition of foreign credentials, student loan forgiveness, bursaries, and streamlined certification processes to address the issue.

The evolving teacher shortage in Ontario and the question of program length continue to be critical topics for educators, government officials, and institutions shaping the future of education in the province.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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