

A new school year, new videos, new case resolutions, and new job openings.

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In this month's newsletter:

- How the Ombudsman can help with education-related complaints as school resumes
- Catch the French Language Services Commissioner's new Q&A videos
- Recent case resolutions
- We're hiring: see our job openings

**Questions about going back to school?
How we can help**



There has never been a school year like the one that's about to start, thanks to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Students and their families have concerns and questions about almost every aspect, from busing to class sizes to classroom ventilation to online learning options.

As we have done since a provincial state of emergency was declared in mid-March, our Office is working (remotely) to help you find answers to those questions. Ombudsman staff can put you in touch with the right public officials, point you to the latest plans and advice from the Ministry of Education, school boards and public health authorities, as well as available complaint mechanisms.

We'll also track complaint trends, flag urgent issues and watch closely for ways to exercise our role as an independent, impartial watchdog, says Ombudsman Paul Dubé.

"At the start of every school year, we hear about administrative glitches and gaps in everything from busing to school programs," the Ombudsman said. "This year, we know school boards and families face extraordinary pressures to address students' need to be back in class and the need for everyone to be safe. As always, our Office will be ready to assist all sides in resolving those administrative issues."

It's important to know what the Ombudsman does and does not do, Mr. Dubé added: Our Office does NOT intervene in matters of broad government policy, or complaints about politicians or labour unions. Our role is to resolve individual and systemic problems where the administrative conduct of public sector bodies such as school boards is unfair, unjust, discriminatory, contrary to law or wrong.

"Local issues are always best solved at the local level, and our staff are experts in connecting people with the right officials – and following up to make sure their concerns are heard," he said. "We have a good track record of encouraging transparency and accountability in school boards and achieving results, almost always without need for formal investigation."

In fact, in the (almost) five years since the Ombudsman's mandate was extended to school boards – on September 1, 2015 – we have resolved more than 4,000 complaints about school boards. The most common topics of complaint tend to be transportation, special education, program admissions and pupil safety.

The Ombudsman has conducted two formal investigations of school boards since 2015. They involved a [major busing shortage in Toronto](#), and a [controversial school closure in](#)

[North Bay](#). In both cases, the boards accepted all of his recommendations.

“We know how important it is for educators, parents and students at all levels to resume classes as smoothly and safely as possible this year, and we will do what we can, as an impartial and independent watchdog, to help that happen,” Mr. Dubé said. Complaints about school boards (or any other body within our jurisdiction) can be filed [online](#) or by [email](#).

Read more about the [school board cases](#) we've handled since 2015.

University or college student? We can help you, too. [Read more about how we resolve complaints about post-secondary education](#).

Video series: French Language Services Commissioner answers your questions



This month, French Language Services Commissioner and Deputy Ombudsman Kelly Burke launched a series of short videos entitled “[La Minute de la Commissaire](#)” (A Minute with the Commissioner) to answer frequently asked questions about her role and the work of our French Language Services Unit.

Francophones and Francophiles are invited to send their questions via our social media channels or email by Friday each week, and new videos are posted on Mondays. Our social media posts can be shared using the hashtag **#MinuteDeLaCommissaire**.

Here are the topics we've addressed so far:

- Why file a complaint? What does “last resort” mean?
- What is the advantage of being in an Ombudsman's Office? Do you have autonomy in your work?
- What happens when you receive a complaint? How long does it take to resolve a complaint?
- What is your vision, and your role?

All the videos are captioned in French and English. Watch them all [here](#).

Children and Youth: Reaching out to residential programs



On August 25 and 27, staff from our Children and Youth Unit held virtual presentations for more than 25 employees at a large residential program licensed to support young people experiencing a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties. The presentations focused on how we can work with them to help resolve issues and complaints that young people may have about their rights, treatment or placement in care.

Service providers are invited to contact our Children and Youth Unit to request a virtual presentation for staff and young people in their residences. Email us at cyej@ombudsman.on.ca, or leave a voicemail at 1-800-263-2841.

How we can help: Case summaries

Education: Right to review

We helped a parent who was refused an identification, placement and review committee (IPRC) to assess her daughter's giftedness in kindergarten. She was told that the school board did not do IPRCs before Grade 3. We pointed out to the board that, under the *Education Act*, it did not have the authority to deny a parent's request for an IPRC. The board acknowledged the error and took steps to clarify the relevant parts of the legislation with its administrators.

Education: No longer a loan

After being injured and hospitalized, a college student was unable to complete his one-year course, so the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) converted his \$15,000 grant to a loan. He sought our help in asking OSAP to convert the loan back to a grant, so he could apply for further funding to resume his studies. We determined that he could apply for a formal review and explain the extenuating circumstances, which he did, resulting in OSAP agreeing to turn the loan back into a grant.

Children and Youth: A cry for help

A 15-year-old emailed us that she was being physically and verbally abused by her

mother, and had started to self-harm and even attempted suicide as a result. Our Children and Youth Unit connected her to a children's aid society and the Kids Help Phone crisis line. We followed up with her a few days later and she told us the children's aid society had visited her, and things had started to improve at home.

French Language Services: A message in French will follow

With the current pandemic and the necessity to work from home, using conference call lines has become the norm in many organizations. The French Language Services Unit received a complaint that the greeting message on one of the conference call lines being used by the Ontario Public Service (OPS) was in English only. Our staff contacted the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, which supplies information technology support to various ministries. The complaint was resolved within a week and the greeting message and prompts of the conference line were made bilingual. Since the resolution of this complaint, all of the OPS conference lines are now bilingual English-French.

Work with us: Job openings



We continue to hire new staff. Check out all of our open positions in the Careers section of our website.

- [Legal Counsel \(Bilingual\) & Legal Counsel](#)
- [Manager, Investigations and Early Resolutions, French Language Services Unit](#)
- [Policy and Issues Analyst \(Bilingual\), French Language Services Unit](#)

File a complaint or contact us here



The Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Ontario legislature who conducts oversight of provincial government agencies and municipalities, universities and school boards, as well as child protection services and French language services. Ombudsman Paul Dubé began his five-year term on April 1, 2016.

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