

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Education Workers' Wages in Ontario: The Impact of Ten Years of Cuts



CUPE



SUMMARY DOCUMENT

CUPE education workers earn an average of just over \$39,000 per year (including part-time and casual employees).

A decade of wage restrictions imposed by the government have meant that education workers' wages have fallen 10% behind inflation and below the wages earned by employees who work in the private sector. As a result, education workers' wages have increased by a mere 8.8% since 2012 while inflation in Ontario has been over 19.5% for that same period.

"Affordability has become nearly impossible to manage. Every expenditure has increased substantially (food, gas, clothing, insurance, utilities, and taxes) but our wages have stagnated. This is not sustainable"

Technician

"Struggle to pay rent. Rent prices have doubled in the last ten years. My 2-bedroom apartment costs \$2300 dollars a month. Food has gone up. Home prices have gone up. Car prices have gone up. Gas prices have gone up. Our wages have not gone up to compensate for this."

Maintenance/Trades

"We are an invaluable asset and the classroom could not run without us. Our pay does not reflect this in any way."

Designated Early Childhood Educator

Education workers' wages are not enough on their own, to support a household. According to a survey of CUPE members, 51.4% of school board workers have had to take at least one additional job to make ends meet. The sole income earners are some of the hardest hit with 64.5% of them working at least one extra job (approximately 1/3 of CUPE education workers are the sole income earner in their household).

"I love my job but it saddens me that I can not support my family with my current income."

Educational Assistant

"I've had a second part-time job for many years."

Library Worker

Not only have education workers' wages fallen behind inflation, they have fallen behind every other unionized sector in the province. Private sector wage settlements have averaged 20.3% over the past decade, municipal unions have averaged 19.1%, unions in federally regulated workplaces have averaged 18.6% increase, and the Ontario Broader Public Sector (BPS) has averaged 12.2%.

Wage restraints imposed by the government has worsened the gender wage gap in Ontario. Women made up more than ¾ of respondents to a recent survey on wages of CUPE education workers. Approximately 90% of women who responded to the survey said they make less than \$50,000 per year (compared to 60.9% of men). This is in part because women in the education sector are more likely to have their annual income limited by 10-months of employment (members who are laid off for summers, and often December and March breaks as well). The survey shows that 81.7% of women work 10-month positions while only 20.1% of men do. Restrictions on wage increases hurt everyone but hit women particularly hard.

Over the past decade, wage increases that have trailed inflation have meant that almost \$1.3 billion has been denied to CUPE members' incomes. In 2021 this meant CUPE members' annual income would have been \$4085 higher if this money had been allocated equally to 55,000 members. Over time this wage gap has had profound negative effects on education workers' financial and personal wellbeing. But the issues have extended to school boards themselves who are facing significant recruitment and retention problems related to uncompetitive wages.

In the survey of education workers (with over 16,000 participants), members were given two groupings of questions to gauge the effects of wage restraint on them and their families. The first grouping of questions roughly correlates to financial difficulties, the second roughly correlates to personal impacts on members and their families, including quality of life issues.

SINCE 2012 EDUCATION WORKER WAGES INCREASED AT LESS THAN INCREASES IN THE COST OF LIVING. WHAT HAS THIS MEANT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

I struggle to afford childcare	2399	14.52%
My children cannot participate in extra curricular activities (e.g., sports, camps, music lessons, etc.)	3502	21.19%
I have to hold off on planned household spending (e.g., clothing, renovations, new appliances, car repair, etc.)	12192	73.79%
I am not be able to put money aside for my children's post-secondary education	6927	41.92%
I struggle to pay my monthly bills (including rent/mortgage, heat, car, student debt)	7740	46.84%
I struggle to be able to afford gas/public transit	4026	24.37%
I have to cut back on food	4485	27.14%
I have had to visit a food bank	634	3.84%
I have to stop putting money aside from savings and/or drain my savings account	11359	68.75%
Other (please specify)	1012	6.12%
None of the above	1439	8.71%

Only 8.7% of members indicated that they have not faced any of the listed problems. Often those members indicated that they would have certainly had financial difficulties had they not been married to someone with a good income.

75.2% of respondents said that they faced two or more of these financial difficulties, 59.8% indicated that they faced 3 or more of these problems, and 42.7% face 4 or more. This suggests that the impact of wage restraint is multifaceted and is felt deeply by members and their families. Among the most common ill-effects is the inability to save, including for children's post-secondary education, and/or the drawing down of existing savings, leaving members even more vulnerable to future financial difficulties.

The second group of questions relates primarily to personal effects of below-inflation wage increases over the past decade. Anxiety and stress about being able to afford everything they need is felt by over 76.4% of respondents and over 81.2% are worried that an unexpected event would cause economic hardship. More than 2/3 of respondents also indicate that they have cut back on entertainment or hobbies and have canceled (or avoided making) vacation plans.

Overall, 95.1% of respondents faced at least one of these adverse personal effects of wage increases that fell below inflation - 87.0% of respondents faced two or more of these effects, 80.1% faced three or more, and 71.2% experienced four or more. Once again, we see that the effects of declining real wages are felt deeply, adversely affect members' well-being and quality of life, and are multifaceted.

BECAUSE OF MY INCOME I HAVE (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):

Felt stress or anxiety about being able to afford everything I need	12679	76.74%
Worried that an unexpected event would cause economic hardship for me and my family	13428	81.27%
Been late in making bill payments	6781	41.04%
Been unable to afford new essentials (e.g., cell phone, highspeed internet, data plans, etc.)	7458	45.14%
Had to borrow money from family and/or friends	5873	35.54%
Suffered from poor mental health	6740	40.79%
Faced housing insecurity or worried about where I would live	3439	20.81%
Used payday loans	1217	7.37%
Cut back entertainment and/or hobbies	11088	67.11%
Canceled vacation plans or avoided planning vacations	11172	67.61%
Other (please specify)	551	3.33%
None of the above	806	4.88%

"We work hard and don't get the credit we deserve; we are running around trying to help multiple students in multiple classrooms with many different needs, we pay out of pocket for resources and work on building education resources on our own time."

Professional/Paraprofessional

"As education workers we feel stressed everyday because we do not have enough time to get our work completed and to meet the needs of the schools/departments. No overtime is offered either. This overwhelming stress is then compacted by not bringing home a decent wage to support my family and my obligations. It really is deflating when you put your blood sweat and tears into a job that doesn't reward you mentally, just exhausts you. nor does it reward financially. I just make ends meet. I have considered getting a part-time job to help aid me with my expenses. But I am exhausted at the end of the day, I need to be there for my family. Thank you."

Central Administration

CUPE locals, and even school boards themselves, have indicated that low wages have resulted in recruitment and retention problems. Across the province there have been reports of shortages of skilled trades persons, EAs and DECEs, professional staff, as well as office and clerical staff and custodians. It is regularly reported that wage improvements would improve employers' ability to recruit and retain qualified applicants. Wage gains hurt workers, but they are also counterproductive for employers.

"Many of us make considerably less than the industry standard for our skills/trades."

Information Technology Staff

"Giving CUPE employees better wages would mean less revolving door positions. I constantly consider going back to school or applying to other positions in an attempt to earn more money because as much as I love this job even at it's highest paying rank it is not enough for me to live comfortably."

Secretary/Clerical

Education workers deserve a raise. It is long past time that we do something to change the existing trends towards stagnating wages and growing income inequality. There is nothing inevitable about the current state of affairs. But it will take political will, and political action, to make things better for workers.

"WE ARE the Front Line workers to make sure your kids have a safe and virus free educational environment"

Custodian/Caretaker/Cleaner


 The CUPE logo is displayed in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a teal background. To the left of the logo is a blurred photograph of a wooden table and chair in a classroom setting.