



MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Presidents
Executive Members (For Information)

FROM: Lorna Larmour, Coordinator, Professional Relations Services

DATE: October 22, 2020

RE: **Newly Released Advisory on Professional Boundaries**

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) issues professional advisories to assist members by providing advice and guidance. Advisory topics come to the College from various areas. The College's advisories offer members insight into specific practice areas and provide the public an understanding of what Ontario Certified Teachers are expected to review as a professional responsibility.

The College's past advisories have examined:

- *The Duty to Report;*
- *Safety in Learning Environments: A Shared Responsibility;*
- *Maintaining Professionalism - Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media;*
- *Professional Misconduct of a Sexual Nature;*
- *Additional Qualifications: Extending Professional Knowledge;*
- *Responding to the Bullying of Students; and*
- *Supporting Students' Mental Health.*

In November 2019, briefing notes supporting six possible topics for the College's next professional advisory were shared and rated during the summer focus group sessions and presented to the College's Executive Committee for consideration. A motion approving the development of an advisory on the professional boundaries was approved.

Released October 1 2020, the College of Teachers has provided the [Professional Advisory: Professional Boundaries – An Advisory for Ontario Certified Teachers](#). The new advisory on professional boundaries highlights behaviours that should inform members' judgement and professional practice and define the professional boundaries they must maintain with students.

As part of the development process, the College sought input from organizations and individuals that have expertise in this area. In early June, the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) received an outreach request for review and input into a draft advisory on professional boundaries. The affiliates worked through OTF to provide consistent and thorough feedback on the content of the advisory.

Content concerns raised by the affiliates included:

- Reliance on American academic resources;
- Conflicting statements;
- Lack of cohesion; and
- Failure to provide clear and consistent advice.

Some of those areas were addressed in the final document released, however, the advisory still provides broad cautions which can be difficult to interpret in a practical way as members have different interpretations on appropriate limits of social, emotional and physical interactions.

Members are at greater risk of oversight when their regulatory body develops an advisory. It is the expectation of the College that all members are responsible for reviewing and reflecting on their professional practise and implementing/maintaining expected boundaries which are very broad. Any perceived conduct in violation of this advisory may have greater disciplinary considerations from the College. Any disciplinary action by the College can have a long lasting and devastating impact on a teacher's career and can sometimes impact occasional teachers from getting full-time employment when a decision is noted on the public registry.

The Federation performs an abundance of advocacy work with members to remind them of boundary issues. Some PRS Matters Bulletins which address boundaries include: #105, *Use of Electronic Technology in the Classroom*; #33, *Use of Member's Own Vehicle to Drive Students to Board-Sponsored Events*; and #3, *Professional Boundaries, An Important Issue For You*. The Federation also provides conferences such as *An Ounce of Prevention* for members as we know the importance of establishing limits on social, emotional and physical interaction with students and we know that students interpret behaviour in a way that is not always intended. Local president's will want to communicate to members that a new [*Professional Advisory: Professional Boundaries – An Advisory for Ontario Certified Teachers*](#) has been released.

LL:SC