

Local 598 FAQ

Q: What is Local 598?

A: Local 598 is the OPSEU union local that represents the bargaining unit members at Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan.

Bargaining unit members represent almost half of all employees at Teachers' and Local 598 gives these employees a say in how the workplace operates.

Managerial staff, consultants, students, as well as members of certain professions (*e.g.* chartered accountants & financial analysts, lawyers, *etc.*) are not eligible to become bargaining unit members.

Q: What are my rights and responsibilities as a union member?

A: By signing your membership card, you become a participating member in OPSEU Local 598.

Being a member of the bargaining unit does not mean that you can automatically participate in union activities. Having a signed membership card means that you can help with a number of union activities, such as:

- set demands for collective bargaining
- stand for office
- elect members
- participate in committees

Being a member of Local 598 means that you have the responsibility to treat all members in an equitable manner, which provides an environment that is free from harassment and discrimination.

Q: What does the union local do?

A: Our Local provides a number of services to its members, including:

- Election of Local Executive Committee (LEC) positions (President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Steward, *etc.*)
- Negotiation of collective agreements
- Answer questions & provide guidance regarding the collective agreement
- Process grievances when required
- Representation on joint committees with management (*e.g.* Joint Consultation Committee, Health & Safety)
- Annual budgeting and allocation of our own money

We also help introduce co-workers to each other, and provide training/information sessions to our members.

Q: What does the Local Executive Committee (LEC) do?

A: The LEC is comprised of elected officers and stewards who are responsible for the daily operation of the union.

The LEC meets on a monthly basis to review arising issues and to plan for future events.

Stewards are the front line contacts for bargaining unit members as they provide information and support to bargaining unit members with issues related to their employment. They serve for two years once elected.

Q: What is a grievance?

A: To qualify as a grievance, the problem normally involves a violation of:

- the collective agreement
- an employee's rights
- a past practice
- applicable laws

A union steward can help members address these issues with management before they become actual grievances.

Grievances may also be filed for a group of bargaining unit members or even on behalf of the union itself.

Q: How much are my union dues?

A: They are deducted at a rate of 1.375% of your gross salary. The rate is set by delegates at the Annual OPSEU convention. Union dues are a non-refundable tax credit, which reduces the amount of tax owed to CRA after all deductions are made from your taxable income.

Q: The union? Meh. Why do I have to pay dues?

A: First of all, your union dues are mandatory as per Article 4.1 of the Collective Agreement, whether you are active in the Local or not. If you are not active, you still benefit from the terms of the Collective Agreement in the same way all other bargaining unit members do. Flex days, vacation time, medical and dental benefits, along with a process for grievances and many other areas have all been improved solely through arbitration. These improvements cost time and money to effect, and apply to all bargaining unit members so that everyone enjoys the same benefits and protections.

Second, bargaining unit members have the ability to attend OPSEU educational courses. If you take a day off work to go to a union educational, the employer doesn't pay you, or cover course materials, child care, hotel accommodations, *etc.* All of these areas are provided for from the "dues pool."

Finally, pension experts, lawyers, research, negotiators, convention, health and safety, and arbitration all cost money. Our employer budgets to hire human resource staff, lawyers, negotiators, and so on. The only funds that bargaining unit members have to protect their interests is their own money; dues provide for this in the event that you ever need union representation in a personal matter, a group matter, or as part of negotiating improvements to the Collective Agreement.

Q: Why should I sign a membership card?

A: While participation (*i.e.* signing the membership card) is not mandatory, it does provide you with the opportunity to influence how your Local is run. Signing a card gives you voting rights at annual general meetings, and allows you to participate in OPSEU annual conventions.

Additionally, the greater number of signed members our Local has, the more delegates we are able to send to the OPSEU's annual convention, and therefore, the more opportunity we have to effect change beyond 5650 Yonge St.

Q: When does the current collective agreement with the employer expire?

A: The current agreement is in effect until December 31, 2017.