

## President's Message

Ewan Geddes, Toronto District School Board

This has been a difficult start to the new year - more so than any other year that I can remember. The Ontario Government cut jobs in June which meant the cancellation of many elective courses, many of which have been Geography courses, as teaching jobs disappeared. Along with the job losses in classrooms across the province, there have been many central, subject-specific jobs that have been lost, meaning reduced curriculum support for all teachers. This much is certainly true for many Canadian and World Studies departments, which have been rolled under other curriculum areas - such as CWS's reassignment to an ESL central position in the case of the Toronto District School Board - to work within the new constraints.

In September, many of us saw an increase in our class sizes as the effects of the provincial push to make cuts. Even after the government back-pedaled and gave boards the ability to hire back the pink-slipped teachers, the damage had already been done to course offerings - It was too late to return students to the elected courses from which they'd been dropped as classes were cancelled to accommodate the higher class sizes and staffing consequences. Many of the senior Geography courses that might have run with class sizes of 15 or 20 students were canceled to keep other class sizes closer to 30 in an attempt to mitigate the damage of what turned out to be a blind threat of 28 students in a class. Toronto lost approximately 60% of its subject coaches. Peel lost about 200 central roles from coordinators to coaches, who have been returned to the classroom. Halton only has six program leaders, each of whom has a cross-curricular focus. York Region shared with the Toronto Star back in June that all of its schools would be affected by the cuts.

There is a particularly challenging effect here for those of us who are working to deliver quality geographic and environmental programming: because of the reversal of the government and the clawback of teachers, there are many "new", Geography teachers and little to no central support. Teachers who have never had the chance to teach in the subject area, or those who may not have taught in the subject area in many years are met with a deafening silence at the board level when they ask for subject-area support.



It's easy to look at all of these pressures and feel not much more than cynicism or dismay. But instead, these difficult days mark a time to rally. OAGEE has been supporting geographic and environmental educators for decades. Regardless of political pressure, we will continue to do so - especially when boards of education and governments don't seem to want to. Boards and governments are quick to make announcements about global citizenship and 21st-century education, yet they stand by and watch the numbers of geographic and environmental elective course offerings - the very courses that are at the heart of citizenship education for this century - disappear.

Becoming and staying a member of OAGEE is a wonderful opportunity to share and discuss ideas and strategies and materials with people across the province who value what we offer to our students in the classroom and what we offer the world outside of the classroom when those students graduate. At OAGEE, we know the good - the essential - work that we do, and we strive to support educators to do their best work. Your membership is appreciated and important, and we invite you to bring your colleagues into our community of practice to continue delivering the best in geographic and environmental education to our students.

This issue has a lot of great content for you to use and share. I also want to share with you the return of our OAGEE Story Mapping Competition. Enter your students' story maps dealing with a local, provincial, national, or global issue that they want to solve for a chance to win great prizes from OAGEE, ESRI, and Canadian Geographic Education for your students and for you. Please see contest information on pages 3 and 4 of this issue.

Keep up your good work. We'll weather this together.

Ewan Geddes