

LOCAL MATTERS



News & Information from OPSEU/SEFPO Local 352

Fleming College Academic Employees - Fall 2026 - Issue 1

FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we begin a new academic year, I don't think it is overstating things to say that we are entering a period unlike anything our College, or perhaps the Ontario college sector, has experienced before.

The proposed merger of Fleming and St. Lawrence Colleges will bring challenges and questions that none of us have faced before. There is still a great deal we don't know about what the coming year will bring, but I want our members to know that your Local is engaged, paying attention and preparing for what may lie ahead.

Most importantly, your stewards are here to support you. We have a good mix of new and seasoned stewards, all of whom give a tremendous amount of their own time to represent and assist our members. I would particularly like to recognize Kim Bell, who served as our Second Vice-President last year and stepped forward to take on many of the responsibilities normally handled by the President while that position was vacant. Kim, along with the rest of our steward team, helped keep this Local functioning through an exceptionally difficult period, and I am very grateful for that work. I'm also very pleased that Kim will continue as part of our team this year, taking on the role of First Vice-President.

This year also marks the return of a President to Local 352, and I am pleased to take on that role. One of my priorities is making sure our members have a better idea of what their Local is doing and why. *Local Matters* is one small part of that effort.

We also recognize that the challenges ahead won't affect faculty alone. We are working closely with our friends and colleagues in OPSEU/SEFPO Local 351, representing Fleming's support staff. While our collective agreements and circumstances aren't always the same, our interests frequently are, and I believe there is considerable value in approaching the year ahead together wherever we can.

There will undoubtedly be difficult days ahead. My commitment is that we will face them informed, prepared and together.

Michael Benedict

President, OPSEU/SEFPO Local 352

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NEED UNION SUPPORT?



Have a question, concern, or just not sure who to ask? Your Local 352 stewards are here to help.

Email: president@flemingfacultyunion.com

When possible, we encourage members to contact the Local using a personal, non-Fleming email account.

Not sure who your steward is? Contact us and we'll connect you.

FLEMING - ST. LAWRENCE MERGER

What we know - and what we don't

WHY WE'RE CALLING IT A MERGER

The Colleges have generally referred to the proposed combination of Fleming and St. Lawrence as an “integration.” Throughout *Local Matters*, we will normally use the term **merger**. This is deliberate. Based on the information available to us, the proposal is not simply about integrating services between two existing colleges. It involves the creation of a new institution to replace Fleming and St. Lawrence Colleges. We believe “merger” more accurately describes what our members are facing.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

- What the governance and senior leadership structure of the new College will look like, including the role and authority of the newly announced “Associate President” position.
- What the merger will mean for staffing levels and whether there will be further faculty reductions.
- How existing collective agreement rights, seniority and other employment provisions will be carried into the new College.
- What the merger will mean for the existing union Locals and how faculty representation will work across the new College.
- What programs will be offered at each campus and whether the merger will result in further program changes, consolidation or closures.

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

An August 20 message from the interim President to employees stated that union representatives had been offered an opportunity to participate in an integration sub-workstream. Discussions between OPSEU/SEFPO and the College Employer Council had been taking place, but no agreement had been reached on union participation in the merger process. In fact, CEC has said it will not proceed with a joint committee unless the affected Locals first withdraw their merger-related grievances and unfair labour practice complaints.

WHAT WE KNOW

The Colleges have moved ahead with detailed merger planning. Workstreams have been established covering governance and compliance, student experience, academic programs, IT and systems, finance and corporate services, workforce and culture, and engagement and communications.

At the same time, the unions and the Colleges disagree about when and how unions should be involved in the merger process. OPSEU/SEFPO believes the Collective Agreements require a joint union/employer committee to be established now. The Colleges and the College Employer Council disagree, saying that a formal government announcement or directive must come first.

OPSEU/SEFPO has proposed a joint committee representing both academic and support staff from Fleming and St. Lawrence. The goal is to give union representatives a meaningful role in dealing with the many issues the merger will create for employees at both colleges.

The College Employer Council has said it will not sit down with the unions in a joint committee unless the four affected Locals first withdraw their merger-related grievances and unfair labour practice complaints. OPSEU/SEFPO has not agreed to that condition. Our position is simple: meaningful union involvement in the merger should not depend on Locals first giving up their existing rights.

WE'LL KEEP YOU INFORMED

This is all changing very quickly. Local 352 will continue working with our union partners at Fleming and St. Lawrence and will share new information with members as it becomes available.

EMPLOYMENT STABILITY

Preparing for what comes next

WHAT IS EMPLOYMENT STABILITY?

The College Employment Stability Committee (CESC) is a joint union/College committee established under our Collective Agreement. Its job is to look for ways to improve employment stability and reduce the impact of potential job losses. The committee can consider options such as retraining, alternate assignments, professional development, voluntary transfers and other strategies that may help faculty remain employed.

THE EMPLOYMENT STABILITY FUND

The Joint Employment Stability Reserve Fund (JESRF) provides funding that can be used to support employment stability initiatives, including approved retraining and professional development. Unfortunately, Fleming's fund has been significantly depleted in recent years as it has been used to support the many faculty affected by program cuts and layoffs. While funds remain available, its ability to provide the same level of support in the future may be more limited. It is also not yet clear what will happen to the existing Fleming and St. Lawrence employment stability funds when the two Colleges merge.

WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW

The CESC continues to meet regularly and is working to identify ways to protect employment and support faculty who may be affected by further changes. With the merger ahead, we will also be watching closely for decisions that could affect faculty positions and looking for opportunities to reduce their impact wherever possible. Local 352's union representatives on the CESC are Kari Draker-Fortis and Michael Benedict. If you have questions about employment stability or believe your position may be affected, please reach out to either of us or to one of your stewards.

PART-TIME FACULTY

Working toward a first agreement

A LONG TIME COMING

Part-time and sessional faculty across Ontario's public colleges are now bargaining their first collective agreement. The bargaining unit was certified following a vote held in 2017, meaning these faculty have waited more than eight years for the protections of a collective agreement. What is negotiated now will establish many of the basic rights and working conditions for part-time and sessional faculty across the College system.

WHERE BARGAINING STANDS

Bargaining is underway, but there is still considerable work to be done. The union is focusing on issues including job security, unpaid work and class sizes, while the parties continue to exchange proposals. The next bargaining dates are September 28, October 28 and November 16.

MAKE SURE OUR PART-TIME COLLEAGUES ARE REGISTERED

Bargaining team members are concerned that the employer may seek a vote on an offer, making registration especially important. Registered part-time and sessional faculty can receive bargaining information and vote on important decisions, including offers and ratification. Full-time and partial-load faculty can help by sharing this information with the part-time colleagues you work with. Please share this site with your co-workers to make sure they get a voice and a vote!

<https://opseu.org/sectors/colleges/faculty-pt-sessional/>

HEALTH & SAFETY

Your workplace. Your rights.

HARASSMENT IS A HEALTH & SAFETY ISSUE

Workplace harassment isn't simply an HR or interpersonal issue. Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act requires employers to have a workplace harassment policy and program, including a process for workers to report concerns and for complaints to be investigated. Every worker is entitled to raise concerns about workplace harassment without fear of reprisal.

If you experience or witness behaviour that you think may amount to harassment, you can seek advice before deciding what to do. The College's procedure allows concerns to be raised by people who experience harassment, witness it, or otherwise become aware of it. If you are contacted as part of a College investigation, you are expected to participate in good faith. A Local 352 steward can help you understand the process and your rights before you participate.

KNOW YOUR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

Rights worth knowing

CALLED TO A MEETING? KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

If the College calls you to a meeting for the purpose of issuing discipline, including a verbal reprimand, the Collective Agreement gives you the right to reasonable notice so you can arrange for a union representative to attend. The Agreement also provides specific representation rights in harassment and discrimination investigations. If you're called to a meeting with management and aren't sure why, ask what the meeting is about and contact a steward before attending. We can help you determine whether you have a right to representation and whether it would be wise to have someone with you.

GRIEVANCE DESK

What your Local is working on

LAYOFF GRIEVANCES & SEVERANCE: AN IMPORTANT DECISION

A recent Local 352 grievance has resulted in an unfortunate decision that will have significant implications for faculty facing layoffs across the Ontario college system. The grievance challenged whether one of our members had been properly laid off. While waiting for arbitration, the member elected to accept the severance available under the Collective Agreement, while specifically stating that he intended to continue with his grievance. The arbitrator ultimately ruled that accepting severance ended the employment relationship and made the layoff grievance moot. As a result, the grievance was dismissed without the arbitrator ever considering whether the layoff itself was proper.

Of particular concern is that the decision relies on college-sector case law going back decades and reinforces that accepting severance can effectively end an individual's ability to challenge their layoff. This could have significant implications well beyond Fleming as colleges across Ontario continue to deal with restructuring and layoffs.

The message for our members is simple: if you have filed a layoff grievance, please speak with us before electing severance. Once that decision is made, we may not be able to pursue the grievance, even if you expressly state that you want it to continue.