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Opinion: Contract offer is an insult to hard-working CEGEP teachers



**KEVIN BUSHELL, SPECIAL TO
MONTREAL GAZETTE**

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The Dawson College building (formerly the Motherhouse) as seen in this aerial cityscape view taken from the roof of the Alexis Nihon Plaza, pictured in

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On the morning of the second day of the semester, there were already four messages from students in my inbox. And so it began. I have over 100 students and they all want instant answers. Last semester, I answered over 200 messages from students. This is teacher-student contact in the electronic age.

One might think I no longer see students in my office, but I do. I require them to see me the week before their oral presentations; I require them to see me to pick up their essays if they've failed that assignment; I invite them to show me their essay outlines to ensure they're on the right track and to help them organize their ideas; and of course I see some of them — usually the ones who haven't shown me their outlines — when they are upset with their grades.

Why do I mention this? Not because I'm resentful. I enjoy meeting and helping my students; it's why I became a teacher. But I am resentful of my profession being judged by people who know very little about it. CEGEP teachers are currently negotiating our next collective agreement, and as things heat up in the coming months, there will be a lot of talk about us having a sense of entitlement — the same sort of rhetoric that was levelled at students when they mobilized a few years ago. Ask anyone what they think of teachers' work and most likely the first thing that will come to mind is that we get our summers "off." But how much more do they know about our day-to-day workload?

Yes, we have flexible work hours (aside from in-class work), but I am often up until midnight preparing a class. This term, I'm teaching a new course, so much of my winter "holiday" was spent preparing, and my workload this semester will be especially high as I create new materials.

One weekend day, usually Sunday, is taken up with marking, which is exhausting. Even then, at crunch periods, I'll have to put in a few hours on Saturday and before sunrise on some weekdays. Between major assignments, I'm marking shorter ones and in-class work each evening because, unfortunately, if I'm not "picking it up" — to use the parlance of my students — they don't do it.

Aside from teaching, the last two years I sat as a faculty representative on the college's main pedagogical advisory committee. I didn't receive any release time or extra money for this. I also wrote letters of reference for graduating students, helped adjudicate a creative writing contest, and organized the visit of a guest writer, an event that required me to complete grant applications and create advertising materials.

And I haven't even mentioned the emotional demands on teachers as they are increasingly

d on to help our youth with depression and anxiety, as well as learning disabilities.

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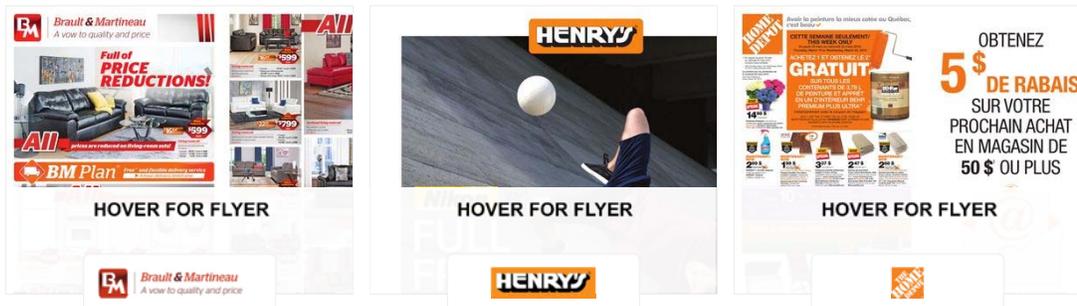
If we didn't get a summer break, we would quickly burn out. Some do anyway. Some become ill.

The Treasury Board's offer of a wage freeze for two years followed by a 1-per-cent increase over the next three is insulting. Teachers have seen a steady decline in purchasing power since 1989, and many of us have seen our net pay flatline for over a decade, which is why we made salaries our top priority in these negotiations. Teachers are already doing their bit to fight the deficit with the austerity measures of our last two collective agreements, one of which was decreed upon us.

Teachers deserve to be fairly compensated for the work they do and for their contributions to the future of Quebec. It's time all Quebecers stopped referring to our vacation period to justify anything less.

Kevin Bushell teaches English at Vanier College.

This Week's Flyers



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**Kevin Bushell** · Montreal, Quebec

It's always difficult to talk about salary because there is a range based on a number of factors. But I guess by "fair" I mean not only what someone would get in the private sector for doing similar work but also in terms of contribution to society. With regard to the former, I can say that public sector employees (including teachers) here in Quebec earn between 7.6 and 8.3% less than private sector workers for comparable jobs, depending on what sources you look at. As for the latter, well, it's up to Quebecers to decide how much they value education. Money aside, the main purpose of my article was to attempt to dispel some of the misconceptions about teachers--that we have easy jobs with long, paid vacations. Rather, we have demanding jobs with working, unpaid vacations.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 1 · February 24 at 5:52pm

**Peter Rasmussen** · Lake Of Two Mountains High School

If you work in the education sector you see this type of letter from teachers every round of negotiations. The average Canadian teacher's salary last year was \$49,410. The maximum annual salary for a Quebec cégep teacher is \$79,484. I don't think any further comments are necessary.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 1 · February 24 at 11:33am

**Sheila Das** · Montreal, Quebec

Here is a further comment I believe is necessary. Your comparison of the "average" teacher's salary with the "maximum" cegep teacher's salary is a handy way to skew the argument. Indeed, here in Quebec, the cegep teachers and school teachers are paid on exactly the *same* scale; averages would differ only slightly and according to differences in experience and education.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 2 · February 24 at 12:32pm

**Michael James** · Top Commenter · Dunham, Quebec

Where the hell do you get this info? Pulling numbers out of your a** helps no one. My salary topped out ten years ago, at almost \$20 000 less than Ontario teachers make. I have taught at both high school and Cegep, and am part of the same collective agreement. Get your facts straight..

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · February 24 at 4:51pm

**Isabelle Guy** · Quebec, Quebec

I'd like to add that just like most of my colleagues, I also pay for my office supplies from my own pocket.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · February 26 at 6:14am

**Michael Garmaise** · Montreal, Quebec

True, articulate, rational.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · February 24 at 12:13pm

**Norman Gee** · Top Commenter · Edmonton, Alberta

Always a question as to what "fair" means. And to whom.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · February 23 at 1:02pm

**Susan Gillis**

You said it, Kevin. Thank you!

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · February 24 at 6:31am

**Patra Dounoukos** · Teacher at Vanier College

Thank you for writing this!

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · February 24 at 5:30am

**Mark Emulsion** · Arlington High School

Well said, Kevin.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · February 24 at 6:24am

**Mark Beers** · Montreal, Quebec

Hear, hear!

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · February 24 at 9:04am

**Marie-Eve Simard** · Université de Montréal

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