

Ontario can't allow massive pay hikes for college presidents: Editorial

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Post-secondary education minister Deb Matthews needs to rein in proposed salary increases for college presidents. (Richard J. Brennan)

By Star Editorial Board

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Raise your hand if your salary increased by more than 50 per cent in the past five years. Nope? Didn't think so.

But it could go up that much by September if you're the president of a college in Ontario. Or maybe it will rise by a mere 39 per cent.

Whichever, you get the picture. As the end of a five-year wage freeze on non-unionized public sector workers approaches, the province's 24 colleges are setting the stage for massive pay increases for their presidents.

[Deb Matthews](#), the minister responsible for post-secondary education, needs to rein them in. Not only to stop a salary race at the college level, but to manage pay expectations for other public sector workers, including those at universities, hospitals, school boards and government agencies.

The extent of the college presidents' pay ambitions are made clear in documents released by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, which opposes the proposed new salary levels.

They show that Algonquin and Mohawk colleges propose to increase their presidents' pay by more than 50 per cent. The heads of Centennial, Confederation, Fanshawe, Georgian and Lambton colleges would get raises above 40 per cent. And those at Boreal, Cambrian, Canadore, Durham, George Brown, Sheridan and St. Lawrence colleges would see their pay jump by over 30 per cent.

At three colleges (Algonquin, George Brown and Sheridan), the president's salary would go up to almost half a million dollars.

Even little Northern College in Timmins, which had only 1,188 students in 2013, is considering a proposal that would pay its president \$325,000. That's for a college about the size of a big city high school. By comparison, a high school principal in the Toronto District School Board makes about \$130,000 a year.

How did this get so [out of hand](#)? The government told the colleges to base wage expectations on a comparison with similar organizations. They compared their presidents' salaries to those in other colleges, but also to executives heading up universities, giant health organizations such as the University Health Network and, in some cases, even Toronto Pearson Airport and the LCBO.

The colleges had to hold public consultations on all this. But interestingly, they were quietly held during the holiday period from mid-December until mid-January. So now the proposed salaries go up before the colleges' boards of directors with few public objections on record.

How convenient.

Allowing huge raises for college presidents would set off a round of catch-up involving managers and unionized staff throughout the education system – and the whole public service. It would fly in the face of the government's message of restraint and do nothing to improve the quality of education.

The colleges' boards should knock these inflated salary expectations down to size. If they don't act, the government should step in and end this unseemly exercise.

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