

# Teachers across Ontario mourn the deaths of the 215 children who perished at Kamloops Residential School

*A statement by Parker Robinson  
President of the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF)*

It is with profound sadness that teachers across Ontario received word on May 27, 2021 of the discovery of the bodies of 215 children on the grounds of the former residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. As teachers, we commit to making schools a place of safety for all, and we are heartbroken as we contemplate the tremendous suffering, culminating in their death, of these 215 Indigenous young people, along with that of other children and youth who survived the cruelty of Canada's residential schools. There is nothing that can erase this darkest of all periods in Canada's history.

OTF stands with Indigenous families and communities across Turtle Island who have had to re-live once again this week the painful trauma of Canada's residential school system. We support the call of our colleagues at the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) for the federal government to take immediate steps to carry out extensive and exhaustive investigations on the grounds of all former residential schools across the country. It will not be possible for Canada to reach true reconciliation with Indigenous peoples or even to address broader issues of racism and promote social justice in our society if we do not adequately confront the shameful legacy of the past.

As teachers in Ontario look to what we can do to raise our own consciousness and that of our students, and as we search for concrete actions that we can take to honour the children lost to the residential school system, OTF is calling on its members to consider creating heart gardens in our schools. The Heart Garden project was first introduced on June 3, 2015, at the closing ceremonies of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Since that time, many schools across the country have taken part in building heart gardens in memory of children lost to the residential school system, as a way of honouring residential school survivors and their families and also as a means of supporting the legacy of the TRC.

Since most of us are not physically in our schools right now, we can also create heart gardens in our own front yards, on our decks and balconies, etc. to express our support for the program. It is also possible to create virtual heart gardens with our students. For instructions and ideas on how to create a heart garden, teachers can consult these excellent resources:

<https://projectofheart.ca/>

<https://fncaringociety.com/heart-garden-faq>

[https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/AboriginalEducation/Have\\_A\\_Heart\\_booklet.pdf](https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/AboriginalEducation/Have_A_Heart_booklet.pdf)