

TRUSTEE CONFERENCE REPORT

Name: *Carol Millar*

Date Submitted: *February 3/2015*

Name of Conference: *Public Education Symposium 2015*

Sponsoring Organization: *Ontario Public School Board Association*

Theme (If any): *The focus was on ethical leadership and good governance as the cornerstone of making the decisions and creating the conditions that will offer children and youth across Ontario every opportunity to succeed in school and in life.*

Conference Dates: *January 29/15 to January 31/15*

Location: *Sheraton Centre, Toronto*

Workshops/Seminars/Presentations/Keynote Speeches Attended: (Include a brief Summary)

I attended the Pre-Symposium on Thursday January 29th

This day was dedicated to (new) Trustee Orientation with the focus being on “Realizing the Vision” There was a large group of both new and experienced trustees in attendance. The morning started with the Honourable Liz Sandals introducing and discussing the Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario. She outlined and reviewed the renewed goals of Achieving Excellence, Ensuring Equity, Promoting Well-Being and Enhancing Public Confidence. Minister Sandals reminded trustees that these goals are being built on the solid foundation that is already there. She ended her session by taking questions from the attendees.

The second speaker for the day was Carmen McGregor, a previous trustee from Lambton Kent District School Board. She shared her reflections on the role of the trustee. Carmen emphasized the importance of building relationships among the trustees and working together as a team. She also found that developing a set of “guiding principals” is helpful to both new trustees as they learn and focus on their role and a good review for experienced trustees. She encouraged new trustees to get involved, get to know the other trustees, attend school celebrations, talk to parents and visit school sites.

Jim Grieve – assistance Deputy Minister of Education (Early years) discussed and showed video examples of the significance of Early Years, talking about and sharing documents and data that reinforce the importance of this initiative. Mr. Grieve reminded us that the impact of Early Years education is life long - it is NOT about getting ready for FDK or Grade 1.

The morning finished with a panel discussion on “Making Connections – Setting the Climate for Student Achievement and Well-Being”. Again, the theme focused on the importance of the Board having an updated, workable Strategic Plan as well as staff and board members having role clarity. The importance of relationships between trustees, staff and the community was emphasized - needs to be mutual respect and trust. The panel also reminded trustees that mental health and well-being is a crucial issue to address and focus on as it impacts student achievement and testing.

After lunch, the trustees at our table were given the opportunity to discuss strategic planning and the renewed vision for education in Ontario. Strategic planning is essential as it shows the uniqueness that distinguishes one school board from another. It should identify the mission, vision, values and priorities. While creating the strategic plan it is a good opportunity to engage key partners in the process. The strategic plan is the basis or work for the school board and answers the question - “why do we exist”. To develop the strategic plan - trust and dialogue is the key, where everyone feels safe and can discuss and build together. Enriched debate allows team work NOT group think.

The final presentation for the afternoon focused on Aligning Resources to Priorities. The province wide vision of achieving excellence and the boards vision (inspirational and achievable) are the starting points. Allocate resources that get you closer to your vision. It is important to know your priorities, have them align with your vision, know where you are going and how you want to get there. Align your priorities to your multi-year plan. It was also suggested that prior to budget you should walk through the previous budget. That is a good refresher in what was decided and evaluate its success.

The Main Symposium on Friday January 30th began with keynote speaker Amanda Lang. Amanda talked about productivity, innovation and status quo and what they mean to and the impact they have. Productivity measures how we are doing, innovation is an innate quality that creates an environment for challenging us to ask “why” and “why not”. Status quo focusses on what you are doing and keeps us doing what we already did.

The panel discussion that followed - How Do School Boards Keep Relevant. Some of the discussion was on fostering an environment for risk taking and curiosity. It was discussed again the importance of a strategic plan. The theme of developing trusting relationships (not group think). Trust and respect are the glue. Respecting and supporting the staff and providing them with the resources they need. Public education with public representation is another thing that would help prove relevance. Boards should be self-evaluating their own work. That would start with the director and asking yourselves are we meeting the targets in our strategic plan.

The Changing Role of the Trustee was presented through a panel discussion. The theme again focused the strength of working together as a team. All members need to be committed to this. It was suggested that there be regular workshops or it is too easy to slip into past practices. Policies should be streamlined and there should be a code of conduct. This shows transparency and accountability (OPBSA has a template).

The final presentation for the afternoon was The Whole Child and Student Well-Being. The discussion was on working collaboratively for the social emotional mental and physical well being of all children and youth. These issues are important and the boards should not be focussed only on “scores” Examples of this were QDPHE, Student Success, Anti-Bullying initiatives, Promoting Positive School Climate Mental Health promotion etc.

The evening performance was UNITY charity - this group uses art forms to engage students with high energy, inspiring and engaging performance and workshops. UNITY engages and empowers students to learn healthy ways to positively express stress.

On Saturday January 31st, I attended the breakfast meeting for the Central West boards.

It was followed by a presentation on School Board Governance by Mike Hines.

The final speaker was Peter Mansbridge who shared stories about his experience of Canada and Canadians in the Changing world. He ended the presentation by taking questions from the audience

Materials Taken Away:

General Distribution

Trustee Distribution

Staff Distribution: Name of Staff Member: _____