

PRINCIPALS CONFERENCE 2019 REPORT from KATHI SMITH

September 26-28, 2019 at the Ivey Spencer Leadership Centre, London, Ontario

It is always exciting to go to a new location for the WRDSB Principals Conference. This year, the conference was moved to London, Ontario at the Ivey Spencer Leadership Centre.

I arrived a little later than I had hoped as I got lost on my way to the location. I arrived during the latter part of dinner. It was great because I sat at a table with many new elementary administrators. There were some that I knew but it was a great start to meet many new people. It was great to see the excitement and nervousness of some of these new staff. I missed the icebreaker which was a scavenger hunt. My late arrival meant that I was still having dinner when they started. It seemed like a very successful icebreaker that most jumped right in and enjoyed the activity.

The rest of the evening gave people a chance to get together to chat, have a drink or two, dance - casual downtime. I had an opportunity to catch up with a number of people that I knew but also I had a chance to meet with quite a number of new staff. Great new and newer and staff all who were excited about the new school year.

The bedrooms were great, very quiet and very comfortable. Meant a very wonderful night of sleep (those a little less than hoped for).

On Friday morning, we started with Frank D'Angelis. I had heard Frank speak in the early 2000's not long after the tragedy at Columbine High School. That was an extremely tough time for him as it was so close to the actual event. Clearly, twenty years later, the trauma was still very real. I believe it gave every one a lot to think about. For younger staff, it was a reminder that something had happened when they were quite young. It gave me a lot to think about. The actual tragedy - the two who had the guns and how and why they became the shooters. The victims who lost their lives and the victims who lost their innocence. I would love to believe that it will not happen again, but based on what I see, I don't believe that it will not happen. It was an excellent talk, gave me much to think about. What do we need to do to bring kids together, how do we help them all to feel valued, how do we bring staff together so they feel they are all on the same page. Frank is an outstanding speaker. Thanks for bringing him for all to hear.

The first workshop that I chose was with our communications team. It was well done, the room was full. I really think that all of our trustees and staff should have a workshop like this for the WRDSB. I think all of us could learn a lot. It would be really valuable for our superintendents. It would be very helpful for all of us. Excellent work!!

Dr. Beth Veale is a retired superintendent with the TDSB and a skilled presenter. Her topic was Contagious Awesomeness - Keys to Personal/Professional Wellness. She was a great presenter and did well at engaging individuals directly into her presentation. She was excellent - I would recommend her for another conference or for our teaching staff.

Attended another workshop in the afternoon but can't find my notes. It was good but not great enough that it is etched in my mind.

I left the conference site to purchase a gift to be given away. Not sure if it was given away or who got it. The days of thank you notes or a personal thank you seem to have gone by. First time in twenty ish years that I did not get a thank you or even know who got it. Disappointing. Dinner was excellent, sat with some trustees, some elementary teachers and a few secondary. Great conversation!!

Saturday morning our speaker was Orlando Bowen. Third excellent speaker! He was very engaging - really drew in the audience. He would be an excellent speaker for our senior students from our Board. I was really inspired by him. His message was straightforward and excellent. I really hope that we can bring him to speak with our students.

The conference was well done. I am sorry that there were not more staff in attendance. It really only took one day away from school and was certainly well worth it. *I was disappointed that senior staff were not more engaged with staff that were attending. There is a bigger gap between senior staff and school staff that is hard to miss.* I am used to this conference drawing in staff so that they know one another better and for senior staff, trustees and newer staff to have a chance to meet and get to know one another. My fear is that senior staff will vote not to continue with this annual conference. I wish that if they feel that way, they sit down with the organizing committee, some trustees and have discussion that thoroughly covers pros and cons. I believe that this conference allows people to be real and to learn things in a different setting that will allow our Board to be better. We have a huge gap in relationships with this new group of superintendents that I think needs to be addressed.

I learned a lot - from other attendees, from speakers, from listening to newer staff. We are fortunate to have something like this to offer to our staff. Let's take the time to review what this does and can offer. Our students really do benefit!!