

# TRUSTEE CONFERENCE REPORT

**Name:** Ted Martin      **Date Submitted:** February 9, 2015

**Name of Conference:** Public Education Symposium 2015

**Sponsoring Organization:** Ontario Public School Board Association

**Theme (If any):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Conference Dates:** January 29 – 31, 2015

**Location:** Sheraton Centre, Toronto

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

**General Observations:** I expected more structured, practical workshops for trustee orientation; however, the sessions were informative and useful for experienced and new trustees.

### **Introduction/Welcome** – Michael Barrett and Denis Labelle

Trustees are *of* the community, *by* the community, *for* the community.

A Board needs harmonious relationships to stay focussed on the one thing that matters most – our students.

### **The Minister of Education** – Liz Sandals (introduced by George Zegarac)

Conferences like this are important because trustees need to interact to get a whole province perspective.

Effective governance relies on mutual respect for the different roles of trustees and Directors.

The Vision (Excellence, Equity, Well-being, and Public Confidence) should inform all the decisions we make.

The least safe place on the way to school is the parking lot/street in front of the school because of all the parents driving their kids to school.

### **Voice of Experience: Reflections on the Role of Trustee** – Carmen McGregor

The networking at this conference is crucial to understanding the education system.

An effective school board works as a team to further the education and well-being of all students.

Relationships are key – respect the different roles of trustee, chair, director and other staff.

### **Innovate Like a Toddler** – Jim Grieve

Early years learning isn't about preparing kids for school, but about preparing kids for life.

With few exceptions, babies are born with a level playing field – only about 10-20% is "hard-wired."

We learn better outdoors and active, so why do we lock our student indoors and have them sit still?

Play and learning are the same thing – play-based learning shouldn't stop after kindergarten.

Kids are geniuses at thinking about life without limits: "Impossible" becomes "I'm possible."

We need to make connections with our municipal partners: 7-to-1 (up to 17-to-1) return on investment.

### **How Does a Board of Trustees Make Things Happen** – panel discussion (with Marilyn Gouthro)

*Asked and attempted to answer four questions (though many responses didn't address the questions):*

1. What does a Director need from Board? Common focus; Role clarity; Strong relationships; Trust.
2. How does the Chair influence the Board? Strategic plan; Governance model; Reporting and consultation.
3. What are the questions Boards should be asking? We need a joint understanding of the vision.
4. How do we engage parents in the conversation? 96% of Ontario students are in publicly funded schools.

## **Making Connections: Strategic Planning and the Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario –**

table exercise facilitated by Marilyn Gouthro and Lise Lortie

Four pillars: clarity, leadership, excellence, accountability. Trust underlies all of these.

Strategic plan is the basis for what the Board does.

What are we currently doing? What are the next steps to align our Board with the Ministry vision?

### **Aligning Resources to Priorities – Gabriel Sékaly**

Use knowledge to create the best outcome from the resources we have, putting the kids and their needs first.

Know our priorities and constraints, where we are going and how to get there, and how well we are doing.

Ask about what you don't know and what you think you know. Ask why not. Ask about the evidence. Keep asking until you understand. An organization that does not innovate will atrophy and die.

### **Aligning Resources to Priorities – panel discussion (with Alain Gélinas)**

*Again, questions were posed and not directly answered.*

The budget process happens all year: set priorities; make budget; monitor implementation of the budget.

Each trustee is a trustee for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students.

Trustee should not get involved in individual parent issues – get involved when we pass the budget.

Strategic planning allows us to concentrate our resources. What gets measured gets done.

Nice, light, informal conversation allows trustees to speak with candour around the board table.

**General Observations:** Excellent topics, but too many panel discussions (and disappointing attendance from our Board: although eight WRDSB trustees registered, only five attended regularly).

### **First Nations Trustee Council Meeting – Peter Garrow**

Introduced to the First Nations trustees and their role. Reminded us that we are all trustees for all students.

Stressed the importance of First Nations curriculum for all students – it is Canada's history.

### **The Arts and Education – Jeff Melanson**

Everyone is fundamentally artistic, creative and innovative: there is no special creative class.

Arts education needs a re-think: we must ensure that all children see themselves as creative and artistic.

Most kids in school today will probably have jobs that don't yet exist. Collaborate with arts organizations.

### **The Mark of a Leader – Doug Keeley**

Best definition of a leader: someone who helps others to be their best (“we” is more important than “me”).

Leaders must operate on all five levels of human: spirit, imagination, intellect, heart (passion), hands (action).

We choose the lens through which we see the world; consider opportunities to change the lens we see through.

Nothing great happens alone – it takes a team (what is my 4-minute mile? the Board's 4-minute mile?)

Words can have incredible power: change your words, change your world.

### **The Power of Why – Amanda Lang**

Productivity and innovation are two sides of the coin – if you improve one, you improve the other.

Toddlers ask why and why not – they are creative and curious, but adults stamp that out.

Education teaches us to think alike when we should be acknowledging that people think differently.

Empower people to think creatively – reward ideas and ask questions for which there are no right answers.

### **How Does a Board of Trustees Make Things Happen – panel discussion (with Marilyn Gouthro)**

*Asked and attempted to answer three questions:*

1. How do we foster risk-taking? Respect each other's ways of thinking. Collaborative governance.

2. What opportunities for change? Revolutionize government. Strategic planning to lead.

3. How does Board demonstrate relevance? Need public representation. Trustee survival toolkit.

### **School Boards Collective Bargaining Act – workshop (with Penny Mustin)**

*Discussed role of directors, trustee organizations, trustees, Ministry and Business Supers in negotiations.*

### **The Changing Role of Trustees – panel discussion (with Geoff Williams)**

*Asked to identify the single biggest positive change:*

Focus on team. Wilson report. Role clarification. New media. Code of conduct. New team with 4-year mandate.

### **The Whole Child and Student Well-Being – panel discussion (with Laurie French)**

Emphasis on early years has greatest potential to change the outcome for children for their whole lives.

We need to be able measure well-being. We must focus on the whole child.

First Nations students need a caring adult in every school. You can have high expectations and empathy too.

**Central West Regional Meeting** – Donna Danielli

Summary of legislation and consultation underway. Discussed suggested priorities for OPSBA.

**School Board Governance: Setting the Conditions for Effective Management** – Mike Hines

Principals/VPs are set up for failure in their role as managers of human resources. To support them, the Board must put these in place: consistency, ownership of control, empowerment and engagement.

**Canada and Canadians in a Changing World** – Peter Mansbridge

Told a series of stories (Obama, Vimy, Appeldoorn, Afghanistan, Berlin Wall) that led to the conclusion that Canadians are a people who care.

The issues at the school board are as important as any in Ottawa because they affect real people in their real lives. Create the conditions by which student voice can be heard and recognized, and opportunities can be pursued.