

TRUSTEE CONFERENCE REPORT

Name: Joanne Weston

Date Submitted: February 22, 2022

Name of Conference: Public Education Symposium

Sponsoring Organization: OPSBA

Theme (If any):

Conference Dates: January 28, 2022

Location: Virtual

Workshops/Seminars/Presentations/Keynote Speeches Attended:

Public Education Symposium

The symposium began with comments by Cathy Abraham, OPSBA President, and the Honorable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. Minister Lecce highlighted the measures that were taken to combat the pandemic in schools, the importance of in-person learning for youth mental health and for youth to access nutrition programs. He committed to combating hate in schools by working toward a curriculum that reflects the diversity of Canada and to consult with communities.

Keynote: “The Audacity to Dream in the Face of Adversity”, Randell Adjei, Ontario’s First Poet Laureate

Randall Adjei presented his poem “Flowers” which spoke to the importance of honouring people while you have the opportunity to. He then spoke to the importance of the arts in schools, recognizing and supporting students’ gifts, and supporting teachers so they can be there for students. Finally, he noted that challenges can be seen as opportunities to create equitable solutions. “Equality is giving everyone a pair of shoes. Equity is giving everyone a pair of shoes that fit” [author unknown]. Randall challenged everyone to create opportunities for all students despite where they live and their background, “We need to give students shoes that fit”.

Workshop: Moving Forward with Anti-Racism in Every Classroom

Matthew R. Morris, educator, speaker and writer, hosted this session about anti-racism in every classroom and how trustees can create capacity around examining bias. He talked about understanding our own biases and spending time to fully understand what students value and how this intersects with public education. Without this understanding, we will continue to alienate students, they will not feel accepted, and students will continue to drop- or act- out. Schools should be filled with teachers who are willing to get to know the community in a meaningful way (not just at school events).

**Keynote: “The Profound and Enduring Impact of Coronavirus on the Way We Live”,
Nicholas A. Christakis, Sterling Professor of Social and Natural Science at Yale University
& Author of Apollo’s Arrow**

Dr. Christakis provided an overview of the pandemic to date and how it may unfold in the future. He cautioned that planning is required now to keep schools open and students safe as it is possible that serious viruses could present more often.

Panel Discussion: Ontario School Boards – 2022 and Beyond

Panelists included Trustees, an associate director and a professor of public administration. In this discussion, it was highlighted that school boards lag behind other levels of government with the number of racialized members elected. While slightly less candidates for Trustee were BIPOC compared to candidates in other elections, the number elected was significantly less. The professor stated that this was due to acclamations and incumbencies. The lack of term limits was seen as a significant barrier to BIPOC candidates being elected. Trustees were encouraged to seek out BIPOC candidates, encourage them to run and mentor them.