

TRUSTEE CONFERENCE REPORT

Name: Kathleen Woodcock

Date Submitted: Feb 5, 2024

Name of Conference: Public Education Symposium

Sponsoring Organization: Ontario Public School Boards' Association

Theme (if any): Leadership Excellence: Strengthening Public Education Together

Conference Dates: January 25-26, 2024

Location: Sheraton Centre, Queen St., Toronto Ontario

Workshops/Seminars/Presentations/Keynote Speeches Attended:

Speaker: Steve Paikin, Canadian Journalist and Author

Mr. Paikin provided a historical overview of education in Ontario over the last 30 some years, from his perspective as a career journalist. With about 50% of school board trustees one year into the first term, the connections to the evolution of education under various political regimes were insightful and informative.

Panel Discussion: Colin Best, AMO President; Lucia Reece, Director of Education, Algoma DSB; Dawn Danko, Trustee and past Chair, Hamilton-Wentworth DSB; Juanita Nathan, Councillor, City of Markham, and former Trustee, York Region DSB

Moderator: Stephanie Donaldson, Executive Director, OPSBA

In response to questions posed by the moderator, panelists provided their perspectives on the relationship between municipalities and school boards emphasizing the importance of collaboration, efficiency, joint advocacy and respect in the shared responsibility to our students, families and communities.

Speaker: Romaine Mitchell, Education Officer, Indigenous Education Office, Ontario Ministry of Education

The topic of Mr. Mitchell's address was Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action - What Happened? What can I do? How can I help? He shared the journey of Indigenous Education in Canada and how Indigenous people have weathered the storm of residential schools and identified the scars left by them (the schools) and shed light on the path forward in answering the Call to Action and what can be done today to begin our personal journey towards Truth and Reconciliation.

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Navigating Complex Public Relations Challenges

Speakers: Dave Sommer, VP Strategic Communications, Enterprise Canada and Sarah Del Giallo, Director, Strategic Communications & Corporate Reputation Management, Enterprise Canada

The speakers provided valuable insights on how to overcome misinformation and disinformation in public discourse, determining when to make a public statement, when not to, and how to do so in a meaningful and inclusive way and how to use social media to reach the right audience with the appropriate information.

OPSBA Regional Gatherings

This informal meeting of Central West members provided an informative networking opportunity.

The EQ Leader in Industry 4.0

Speaker: Jamelle Lindo, Emotional Intelligence Coach

Mr. Lindo provided insight into why emotional intelligence is becoming the single most valuable leadership and workplace skill today and as we move into the future. He explored the latest research to validate what school board leaders can do to position themselves for success in today's incredibly demanding and evolving digital world. A very informative presentation.

Understanding the Lingo: Education Finance Tutorial and Q&A

Speaker: Brian Jeffs, Executive Director, Council of Ontario Senior Business Official (COSBO)

This session provided an in depth look at the education budget process, definitions, commonly used terms and a quick game of 'acronym bingo'. Very beneficial to newly elected and veteran trustees.

Affirming Muslim Learners and Challenging Islamophobia

Speaker: Aasiyah Khan, Director of Education, National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)

During this session, trustees were supported in building capacity in affirming intersecting Muslim identities, while removing barriers to equitable and inclusive education. Participants also developed their capacity to identify and address Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate and understand its impact on Muslim student well-being and achievement.

Rising Antisemitism: Old Ideas, New Problems

Speakers: Melissa Mikel, Director of Education, Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (FSWC) for Holocaust Studies; Zach Sadowski, Director of Antisemitism Programming & Outreach, Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre (FSWC) for Holocaust Studies

According to available data, antisemitism has been on the rise around the world in recent years and that rise has been reflected in incidents in schools across the country. The workshop examined common anti-semitic myths that, at their core, are rooted in ancient prejudices and stereotypes. Ways in which students are being exposed to antisemitism along with how this hate impacts our school environment were explored as well as best practices and resources available for school leaders in addressing antisemitism in educational settings.