

Reflections of OECTA Toronto High Presidency

By: Joseph Ravesi (1982-1984)

In 1982, I began my two-year term as the President of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA), Toronto High Unit (THU). Later on, the Unit's name would change to Toronto Secondary Unit (TSU).

During this time, the Unit had approximately 1,100 to 1,200 OECTA teacher members who were employed by the Metropolitan Separate School Board in Toronto (MSSB). The Board's name changed to the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB).

OECTA representation, at the time, was limited to teachers in Catholic schools that received some form of public funding. This included teachers who's timetable specifically included students enrolled in Grades 9 and 10.

Teachers in high schools who taught students enrolled in Grades 11 and 12 were technically working for the partnered private schools, however, if these same teachers serviced students in Grades 9 and 10 they were members of OECTA.

I had begun my teaching career at Cardinal Newman High School in Scarborough, in September of 1975. I followed Susan Sillery as Unit President and Greg Pollock would eventually succeed me as Unit President. The elected membership of the Unit Executive in that day, represented the diversity of the MSSB high schools. The Executive demonstrated a leadership team that practiced and respected collaboration, cooperation, and collegiality. All of us were voluntary and elected members of the Unit Executive.

What was notable about the Unit between 1982 - 1984, was that I was the first president to have pre-determined release time, specifically, the second semester of the school year for both years of my term as President.

As such, I had the opportunity to service the Unit's membership and Executive in a manner that no previous president had. This involved obtaining Board approval to provide me with release time, finding and equipping an office, along with having some secretarial support.

The Unit's office location, which was approved by the Executive, was a room in St. Augustine's Seminary on Kingston Road next to Cardinal Newman High School. This made it possible for me to check phone messages daily after school during the first semester and to have access to the Board's courier service to send information to members throughout the school year. I was permitted to purchase and use a pager that allowed me to receive messages 24/7. That was a first for our Unit.

The OECTA Metro Elementary Unit (MEU) at the same time, with a larger membership, for a number of years had the service of a full-time release President, along with a number of support staff in a Unit office, which included meeting rooms. The Toronto High membership

was approximately 17% of the total number of FTE OECTA teachers employed by the MSSB during my term as Unit President. Any shared expenses between the THU and the MEU were paid according to our percentage of OECTA members employed by the MSSB.

In reflecting on my term as Unit President, one defining highlight was making a formal visit and presentation to teachers in *all* of the MSSB 30 plus high schools in semester two during each of my two years served. The first year's presentation focused on highlights of our OECTA (THU) - MSSB Collective Agreement. The second year's presentation focused on highlights of the Ontario Teachers Superannuation (now the Ontario Teachers Pension Plan).

Both presentations had excellent member participation and those in attendance were provided with Tim Horton's treats! The hosting schools Principals agreed to treat their teachers by making coffee available.

In the spring of 1984, outgoing Ontario Premier Bill Davis announced that the Catholic (Separate) schools in the province would be phased into full funding equal to that of the Public schools. This resulted in the transfer of under-utilized Public high schools to the Catholic system and the full funding of Grades 9 through 12 in public Catholic high schools.

My reflections as Unit President from 1982-1984 are that it was a time of increasing enrolments and challenging times for financing of education in Toronto and Ontario Catholic high schools. It was noteworthy to have experienced and participated in a strong Catholic community resolve to maintain and expand our faith-based Catholic school system from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

It was, in hindsight, a fabulous time in Catholic education. We saw the expansion of OECTA representation to eventually include all teachers in our high schools.