



Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

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**ANNUAL  
PRESIDENT'S REPORT  
2020**

## 1. Unprecedented Times

Over the past two years, my report title identified “Changing Times” and “Challenging Times”. This year I have chosen the phrase that you have already heard constantly—Unprecedented Times.

The events of this academic year have indeed been unprecedented and historic.

TSU defended quality public education!! I could be prouder of TSU, all OECTA members and every educator across Ontario.

TSU began the year not knowing when job action would occur. I did not say “if” job action would occur because the Government was clearly on a pathway to force teachers to escalate job action as they implemented their cuts to education. Dismantling public education was prominently on their agenda.

OECTA exposed the Government consultation. Our Bad Faith bargaining case achieved what no one else could. The release of the data embarrassed the government when it showed there was no support for the major cuts they were trying to impose. That led directly to the government changing their position.

OECTA Provincial remained at the table and, with the Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association, were able to reach a tentative agreement that would stabilize education for the next two years. Members last summer had serious fears about wage cuts, class size cuts, cuts in supports, elimination of fair hiring, gouging of benefits and sick leave and so much more. As with all negotiated settlements even while it is not perfect, we were able to defend members and our world class education system from significant cuts and achieved stability.

In the midst of the ratification process, the pandemic hit. Schools across the entire province were announced closed for two weeks past March break. We watched across the country as businesses shut down, major events were cancelled and our new paradigm was built under “social distancing” and “distance learning”. These phrases have become the cornerstone of our lives since the middle of March and will continue to do so for some time as we fight the ravages of COVID-19.

Many questions remain unanswered regarding what our future will look like—When will schools re-open? What safety measures will be put in place? How will workload look in a recovery period as members worry about equity and fairness as we assess and mitigate the gaps in curriculum due to distance learning? OECTA and TSU are working actively on all these questions.

This was certainly not how I imagined my last year as President of the Toronto Secondary Unit. It has been a great honour and pleasure to lead our members and facilitate the

tremendous work we have accomplished the past few years. This year when ability and capacity were tested, we managed not only the regular business of things like grievances, staffing, health and safety and all the challenges our employer creates but we handled bargaining, protests and a pandemic. All this while continuing to put in place more communications, programs and supports to better serve members.

I repeat a heartfelt “thank you” to my fellow release officers--1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President Pete McKay and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President Angela Tersigni, our office staff—Executive Assistant Sabina Barbagallo and Office Assistant Hayley Damecour, and all those who have sacrificed endless hours and effort to provide exemplary service to our membership during this time period.

Allow me to share some of the activities, challenges and results from the work done this past year.

## **2. Contract Bargaining**

We have completed the first stage of bargaining our new Collective Agreement which is OECTA Provincial bargaining also known as Part A or Central Terms. Part A was ratified by the OECTA membership vote.

Now that this bargaining phase is completed, preparations for local bargaining with the TCDSB have begun. Part A, though ratified, will not activate until we have completed the process of local bargaining for Part B of the collective agreement which are our local terms.

The last two rounds of bargaining have provided substantial and important language gains. The experience of —Co-Chair Darrin Sciberras, Sheila Gatensby, Sally Tellis and Chief Negotiator Pete McKay will serve us well. They will be joined by a new team member Paul DiProspero.

Please ensure that you have activated your TSU email account in the member’s section of the TSU website at [www.tsuoecta.org](http://www.tsuoecta.org) to receive updates from the Local Bargaining Team and to ensure your right to vote at ratification.

## **3. Finance**

On behalf of our membership, I offer thanks to the Finance and Budget Committee led by Treasurer Joseph D’Addario. The Committee members continue their hard work. This year offered additional challenges as the committee developed an austerity budget to prepare for impending job action. This ensured that positive work was able to continue while maintaining financial stability. We have put the unit in a very strong financial position along with a very high level of equity in our substantially improved office.

The Committee and executive presented the budget to members at the Budget and Finance General Meeting in October for ratification. The executive continues to provide

monthly financial updates. We continue to streamline finance procedures and the committees work has been very helpful. Our financial success, prudence and openness are seen in the Treasurer's report.

#### **4. Communications**

2100 of 2500 members have activated their TSU email!! TSU executive recognized a need to be able to provide all members with better access to information. Last year in planning for the bargaining to come TSU put in place a new communication platform with Union Strategies Inc (USI). USI is used by several other GTA teacher units. This platform bypasses Board email and allows timely and critical information to be sent. It has been an excellent tool during bargaining and the pandemic.

USI includes much more than Webmail (tsuoecta.ca email for every permanent and OT member). They also handle website design and maintenance including a member section and social media management on four platforms. Visit [www.tsuoecta.org](http://www.tsuoecta.org) to explore. USI expertise includes graphic design; newsletters; event planning; French translation; and the development of mobile app which is under construction. They do network support; remote office; telephone polling; and electronic voting for TSU. We were spending \$10,000.00+ per election for unit elections. This is now included in our service package with the new bonus that we can include electronic Association Rep and LSSAC elections (not previously available); electronic surveys with analytics (previously done through survey monkey); text blasts and e-blasts (not previously available). These consolidated services are currently provided at a combined cost of \$2500/month plus tax for everything. We used to pay several companies \$2700.00/month for only a few of these services. We now get more for less. Consolidating saved money, added many new services and more importantly it provided a start in moving members communications into the future.

The Communication Committee has been very active during the job action using some of these tools. Several newsletters devoted to the job action were prepared on very short notice by Executive Liaison Veronica Tuzi. The committee also developed a post-event feedback form and set up the daily "Did You Know..." tweet to provide members with current and timely information. Thank you to Veronica and 2<sup>nd</sup> VP Angela Tersigni for their attention to our social media accounts. All of this added to 1<sup>st</sup> VP Pete McKay's *Weekly Wrap-Up* has provided both historical and current information to all TSU members— permanent and occasional and this has been well received. We hope you have found them helpful and we welcome your feedback and ideas as we continue to expand our communication even further next year.

#### **5. OECTA AGM 2019**

This year's OECTA AGM 2020 had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis. For the first time in OECTA's history, the AGM will be held electronically for delegates on May 16, 2020. The meeting will be one day instead of three and resolutions will be deferred to next year's

meeting. Observers are directed to the OECTA member section to live-stream the meeting.

## **6. Health & Safety**

Health and Safety in our schools continues to be the biggest challenge TSU has faced this year. The continued vigilance and hard work that our 6 Designated Worker Members (DWMs) have done this year has helped significantly in moving issues and training for members forward.

A primary focus this year has been on expanded training for the DWMS and the addition of monthly meetings. Thank you to the Worker Co-Chair Rene' Jansen in de Wal for his efforts and diligence in facilitating DWM training and tenaciously holding the Board accountable for their lack of attention to the training of the DWMS and the safety of all TSU members.

Last year, I informed members that the Terms of Reference (TOR), which is the document which informs the framework for addressing health and safety issues, was finally signed by the Board. Unfortunately, the Board has yet to implement it. TSU continues to work to put in place consulted policies, programs and procedures to ensure employee work environments are healthy and safe. TSU continues to fight at arbitration to affirm the basic rights afforded all employees under the Ontario Health & Safety Act.

While arbitration takes more time, it can work effectively. The key to success at arbitration is the data TSU receives from members. It is crucial that members continue submitting reports, daily if necessary, to provide the JHSC the information necessary to advocate for safe work environments. Please ensure that you communicate with your school Designated Worker Member and provide all completed forms to TSU. TSU cannot advocate and fix what we do not know. TSU has no intention of stopping the fight to protect you no matter how long it takes.

TSU thanks 1<sup>st</sup> VP and Grievance Officer Pete McKay, our OECTA Grievance Liaison, John Pecsénye, and the team of lawyers at Cavalluzzo for their assistance in moving forward rights to safety for TSU members.

## **7. Technology**

The Joint Technology Committee (JTC) continues to be very active. Committee members Gillian Vivona, Tom Gilmor, Paul DiProspero, Alan Kwok, Emanuela Chiarot and Michael D'Addario have worked to meet the challenge of holding the Board accountable to proper consultation and the provision of resources and professional development.

The most pressing issue of late is live video-conferencing for curriculum delivery as part of distance learning. The JTC has been working tirelessly to assure that any platform recommended for use by the Board is safe for staff and students. To date, and despite the

push from the Ministry, TSU continues to have very serious safety, privacy and security concerns for using live video-communication. It is even more concerning that some would have teachers take such risks when in doing so we further jeopardize equity and fairness. Those challenges need to be named and dealt with properly. Further advice from OECTA Provincial will be forthcoming on next steps.

Thank you to the JTC members for the many hours they have devoted to serving the TSU membership.

## **8. Short and Long Term Leaves**

It is crucial that members do not engage in conversation with personnel from the Sick Leave and Disability Department (SLDD) without union representation. Several members have been significantly disadvantaged after sharing information that SLDD case workers were not entitled to have. Contact TSU to ensure your rights.

A heartfelt thank you to 2<sup>nd</sup> VP Angela Tersigni for her continued efforts in managing the short- and long-term leaves, return to work, accommodations and WSIB portfolio this year. Her knowledge and persistence continue to hold the Board's Sick Leave and Disability Dept to account as we defend rights and ensure fair process under the Labour Relations Act, Human Rights and Health and Safety.

We continue our efforts, with the support and assistance of OECTA Provincial. Despite of Board's continued attempts to ignore the Collective Agreement, Angela continues to advocate successfully for our membership. Next to health and safety, grievances for sick leave infractions account for the largest grouping.

## **9. Joint Safe Schools and Local Safe Schools**

Violence is violence under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). There is no mitigation as that is only for discipline under Safe Schools. Progress continues to be slow in discussion with the Board regarding violence in the workplace, particular to DD/ME classrooms. The Board continues to take a position that the role for Safe Schools is to deal only with student discipline. Special needs students do not receive discipline, so they claim it is not under their purview. It is clear that the Board has not been willing to address on-going issues relating to violence in the workplace and its failure to report under OHSA.

To highlight the issues even more prominently, TSU's Local Safe Schools committee members spent several weeks compiling 5 years worth of school safety plans and site risk assessment data for every school. The data was then analyzed and charted. The chart and summary report has been provided to the Board and will be discussed at our next meeting with the Board on May 20. On behalf of the membership, I would like to thank Executive Liaison Maria Andriano, JoAnne Maher and Ivana Calabria for their time and effort in

completing such a monumental task in such a short space of time.

There has been little genuine effort to comply with the Collective Agreement and the OHSA. This is not acceptable and appropriate grievances will continue to be filed as we continue to move this forward.

The JSSC continues to monitor teacher delegation and various statistics including fresh starts and threat assessments. Thank you to Chair Angela Tersigni, and JSSC members Maria Andriano, Kevin Marcos and Maureen Riffin for their on-going advocacy.

#### **10. Joint Secondary Schools Staffing Allocation Committee (SSSAC)**

While the challenges are always present, I am pleased to report that SSSAC is currently one of the most collaborative and effective joint committees. It has taken many years of diligent and vigilant work to reach this point.

Analysis of on-call tallies, class sizes, schedules, school data review and attention to various workload issues continued successfully through-out this academic year. The SSSAC Teacher team, comprised of Sheila Gatensby, Sally Tellis, Pete McKay and Co-Chair Darrin Sciberras, continues to be highly effective in holding the Board accountable for compliance with the Collective Agreement.

As always, much gratitude goes to the Association Reps that volunteer a great deal of time, energy and effort in the defense of the Collective Agreement. Without their work, SSSAC and the release officers would find it much more difficult to advocate for members and hold the Board and administrators accountable.

Thank you to Office Assistant Hayley Damecour for taking care of the ground work in preparing the on-call sheets and data reviews for analysis.

#### **11. The Unit Annual General/Nominations and Elections Committee (UAGMNE)**

The preparation and implementation of the UAGM and Executive election is always challenging. This year, the challenges have increased exponentially due to the COVID-19 closure. Never before has the committee had to deal with the delivery of the UAGM on a virtual platform. Several new practices also include the development of a more comprehensive Candidate Guidelines, holding an all candidates meeting, providing opportunity for candidates to send two communications to all TSU members on their TSU email and the provision of an election-dedicated social media hashtag.

Thank you to Chair Jennifer D'Addario and Executive Liaison Dave Szollosy for assisting the committee members with their efforts to navigate this year's discussions and decisions.

## 12. Occasional Teachers

This year TSU welcomed almost 500 occasional members into our TSU family. Current Occasional Teacher Representative JoAnne Maher brought her wealth of experience and sharp wit to assist release officers with the many issues and concerns faced by both Long Term and Daily Occasional Teachers. The learning curve in the office has been steep, but JoAnne has been on top of every situation to ensure the rights of OT's are protected and defended.

Prominent issues have included postings, interviews, pay inequities, inconsistencies between schools when dealing with OT assignments, and the monitoring of the various lists provided by the Board to ensure accuracy.

During the school closure, TSU has advocated successfully for the waiving of the 20-day requirement for maintaining employment with the Board. TSU is currently pressuring the Board regarding the 50-day requirement to receive full benefits next year. Occasional teacher members who could have qualified for benefits had schools not been closed should be allowed to collect benefits next year.

These are only some of the highlights of this years' committee work. I invite all members to review the committee reports provided by the UAGM/Elections committee.

Of course, no president's report would be complete without the acknowledgement of our Executive Assistant Sabina Barbagallo and Office Assistant Hayley Damecour. Sabina works tirelessly to track our operations and keep them running smoothly behind the scenes. Her efforts keep the release officers on track and our office productive. Hayley is most often the first voice that members will hear answering our phone. Her attention to detail has been a significant asset to the completion of any and all tasks she has been given throughout the year. On behalf of our membership, I offer both Ladies a heartfelt thank you.

And to you, our TSU membership, thank you for all you do for our students and each other. We appreciate your support and confidence. TSU looks forward to continuing to serve and work with the marvellous and talented individuals who are the membership of TSU.

On a final note, I wish you and your family peace. Be safe. Be well.

Respectfully submitted for UAGM 2020.

Gillian Vivona  
TSU-OECTA President  
Serving students by building  
a better working environment