

# OPSBA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

23 May 2020

## PUBLIC

### Minister Lecce

- Talked about and acknowledged the province wide work to support digital access, technology devices, connectivity and mental health supports
- Decision to close for the remainder of the school year was one of safety based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the COVID Table. Concerns around community spread
- All students will finish this year remotely
- 40 hours of community volunteerism graduation requirement has been waived for this year
- There will be grades 9 -12 summer learning opportunities
- Ministry currently working on curriculum and Capital announcements
- Expect to have a plan for September reopening by the end of June

### Q & As

Q - How is the September reopening plan being formulated?

A -

- Minister and Deputy Minister will get perspective from all boards.
- Feedback from the 14 provincial tables of consultation.
- Benchmarking of how the plan can be operationalized.

Q - What other jurisdictions are being looked at for return experience?

A -

- Ministry regularly monitoring with UNESCO discussions.
- Looking at France - but Ontario's will be home grown.
- Looking at issues around additional spacing, sanitation, where students can go and not, alone or not. At this point everything is on the table

Q - Ideas around Equity of Learning

A -

- Internet access and income levels are a challenge
- Ministry provided \$75M this school year for tech.
  - Boards should be using their funds for tech
- Summer learning plan will place emphasis on the more vulnerable children. Additional dollars have been set aside for these children

## Additional thoughts

- Regarding the question around teachers teaching remotely from their classrooms - the instinct is to say yes let them use this space. Minister and Deputy are looking at a framework for this
- Minister drew our attention to the Ontario Together website - there is a specific section "Support for Students and Parents"
- More PD has been provided to teachers to adapt to on-line teaching
- 25,000 teachers signed up for this PD
- More will be provided over the summer around things such as asynchronous learning
- Minister Lecce has committed to weekly calls with board chairs

## Nanos Poll

- OPSBA commissioning poll to focus on:
  - Challenges during the shutdown
  - Concerns around September potential opening
  - Want results ready to inform provincial plan for September
- Previous Nanos poll for OPSBA had low sample size for northern regions/remote boards. Nanos has been asked to increase the sample size for these areas, to make the results more relevant to all boards/regions

## Finance

- GSN announcements expected within the next couple of weeks.
- Expected to be basically status quo, plus funding for CBA changes. There has been no indication of enhancements in the GSN to support the exceptional COVID costs boards have encountered or are anticipating, but there may be amendments after the initial release, as the picture of what to expect in September becomes more clear.
- Expectation the budget deadline to be extended
- Transportation dollars are still flowing to pay a percentage of the transportation contracts to keep drivers from being laid off, in anticipation of need for September
  - It was noted, many bus drivers are in the 60 years+ higher risk category
- OPSBA has talked to the Ministry - citing the potential funding needed for changes in September. Would like to see these funds in the GSNs.
- Unknown at this time what classrooms will look like
  - If social distancing is to be respected when resumed, bus capacity goes from an average 72 to 12
- Boards continue to provide updates to the Ministry on their PPE inventory
- TDSB is looking at a specific budget line for COVID

- Capital construction has resumed. No information yet on the funding of additional costs due to delays
- Some Capital priority announcements are being quietly made and are embargoed, so we are not hearing about the specifics
- WSIB premiums are going up significantly. Mental stress and trauma and concussions are significant contributors. Some boards are buying additional excess loss insurance coverage on the open market, but deductibles are in the \$1M range. School Boards Cooperative Inc (SBCI) has put a program in place to provide bridge insurance with deductibles as low as \$300K. However these premiums are expected to increase by 40% next year

### **Program Policy**

- OPSBA has asked the Ministry to hold off rolling out the new math curriculum until 2021
- The Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health has a member representing McMaster and the Offord Centre, which has been involved in various international efforts dedicated to monitoring the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic response on mental health and well-being of children, young people and their families. Through these efforts the Offord Centre has mobilized a Canadian team and are working hard to establish a robust methodology that will allow them to monitor the impacts within our provincial and national contexts. They are particularly concerned about the potential for long-term adverse impacts, and the high likelihood that this pandemic will further exacerbate existing inequalities in our communities. The Coalition will be assisting with this study in Ontario through dissemination of online surveys through our member organizations. The intention of the researchers is to provide rapid analyses of data and dissemination of evidence to key policy partners and decision makers through collaboration with the McMaster Health Forum's COVID-19 Evidence Network to support decision making

### **Legislative Update**

- House meeting on Tuesday and Wednesday for the next 2 weeks, then recessing for the summer
- Bill 190 COVID 19 Response- an amendment allows for virtual meetings - lifting the requirement to physically meet 3X annually (requirement was 3 meetings in 12 months, starting 1 December)
- Reg 7/07 Student Trustees an amendment allows elections of student trustees to be extended from 30 April to 30 September
- Reg 271/19 Proficiency in Mathematics - Amendments allow the Ontario College of Teachers to certify applicants who have not yet completed the Math Proficiency Test (MPT), with the condition that the applicant successfully completes the MPT by August 31, 2021.

- Reg176/10 Teachers' Qualifications - Amendments allow teacher candidates in their final semester of an Ontario initial teacher education program to be eligible for certification by the OCT, despite not having completed the entire practicum component. The applicants are required to have completed all other graduation components of the program.

## **COVID**

With the state of emergency declaration on March 17 and the initial closure of schools on March 19, OPSBA has been regularly connecting with its internal and external stakeholders. Decisions on the school closures made by the government, and the Ministry of Education, have been based on the advice and guidance of Dr. David Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health.

The province has been proceeding with a cautious approach to reopening and is learning from other jurisdictions where schools have already reopened.

The Deputy Minister (DM) of Education connects weekly with the executive directors of the school board/trustee associations, and more frequently as issues arise. There are also weekly teleconferences between the DM and all directors of education. These are regular opportunities for school boards to share and exchange on the ground experiences, raise concerns, seek clarification, and highlight challenges. The Minister of Education has also had a number of conference calls with school board chairs. OPSBA President Cathy Abraham has been in touch with Minister Lecce, and staff are in regular contact with his political staff as well as ministry staff.

In our conversations with government, we have emphasized the need for OPSBA, school boards, and trustees to be included in discussions around the re-opening of schools, and other aspects of the pandemic response. Issues that we have discussed include, but are not limited to, ensuring equity in our approach to distance learning, mental health supports for students, and funding for school boards' response to the pandemic.

In addition, there are currently several provincial working tables that include stakeholders from across the sector. These tables are discussing a number of issues related to the return to school plan that include:

- When, where and which schools to reopen?
- How to reopen schools?
- Continued supports (including mental health) for students, parents and staff
- Appropriate volume and proximity of students and staff, classroom set up
- Catch-up, review and remedial opportunities including expansion of summer offerings
- Continued professional development for staff on distance learning
- Supply inventory of safety equipment
- Use of personal protective equipment
- Cleaning & disinfecting schools
- Transportation
- School cafeterias / breakfast and other food programs
- Use of outdoor space for instruction
- Childcare and afterschool programs
- Increased and unexpected costs including technology/connectivity given to students and families
- Assessment, report cards, EQAO testing
- Access to schools for retrieval of personal belongings
- Remote learning challenges, including access to technology, synchronous learning, etc.

OPSBA also continues to connect with the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) and the other provincial associations. Staff recently participated in a webinar hosted by UNICEF entitled, Opening the Doors to Children and Youth: Using the new Global Framework for Reopening Schools in Child and Youth Serving Spaces.

The Framework can be accessed here: <https://www.unicef.org/media/68366/file/Framework-for-reopening-schools-2020.pdf>

### **Redeployment of School Board Staff**

- To-date approx. 266 volunteers have signed up, but no matches/placements yet
- Concern was raised around the potential effects on WSIB, mainly additional costs due to
  - Experience
  - Bringing currently un-insured under the umbrella, such as lunch time monitors
- All 4 trustee associations participated in the discussions and had the program was vetted by OPSBA legal
- OPSBA gets updates on the numbers daily
- Each Board gets their own list/numbers. Individual Boards have to agree to "availability" of the volunteer, i.e. if the province is looking for Social Workers, if Board says theirs are all fully engaged supporting students and staff, then there is no "availability"

### **OPSBA AGM Update**

- Legal counsel has advised AGM must be held prior to 6 October 2020. Looking at holding the AGM virtually, in the afternoon, following the late September BOD meeting. Details TBD.
- York RDSB has submitted a resolution around Anti-Racism advocacy and action plan. It is being modified and will be re-released

Here is a summary of the current OPSBA Priorities and some recent feedback. If you have additional feedback you would like raised, please email Trustee Penny or Boothby.

### **Re: Feedback on OPSBA Strategic Priorities for 2020-21**

#### **Background**

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) multi-year strategic priorities guide the Association's areas of focus. They drive how OPSBA directs resources, manages issues and plans activities. This positions the organization to be adaptable to meet any changes in the education landscape. These are the priorities to which the Association directs its expertise, time and resources to support improved student achievement and well-being and increasing confidence in public education.

As a non-partisan association, OPSBA has positive and mutually respectful working relationships with members of provincial parliament and staff from all parties and other education partners in the province. These

relationships help us to represent the voice of our public school boards regarding the diverse range of issues that affect students and communities.

### **Process for determining OPSBA Strategic Priorities for 2020-21**

Although the Association's strategic priorities are multi-year in scope, they are reviewed annually to ensure they remain current and responsive to the environment within which our education system operates. In keeping with this process, these priorities were considered at regional meetings and the Indigenous Trustees' Council meeting at the Public Education Symposium on January 25, 2020. Additionally, an online survey was shared with all Board of Directors members on March 4, 2020.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been felt across all sectors, few more so than public education. As the March regional meetings were cancelled, the OPSBA priority-setting process has had to be adjusted, with the Board of Directors having an additional opportunity for input at the May virtual meeting.

### **Mission Statement**

The mission of OPSBA is to promote and enhance public education by: helping Member Boards to fulfil their mandates; developing effective partnerships with other groups interested in public education; and providing a strong and effective voice on behalf of public education in Ontario.

OPSBA believes that the role of public education is to provide universally accessible education opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, social or economic status, individual exceptionality, or religious preference. Excellence in education is achieved by:

- Promoting high standards of individual achievement;
- Promoting high standards of individual achievement;
- Providing the understanding and basic skills required for active, compassionate participation in the life of the family, the community, the province, the nation, and a global society;
- Cultivating a love of learning;
- Employing highly qualified, highly motivated teachers, strongly committed to ongoing professional development;
- Recognizing the value of diversity among learners and communities; and
- Exploring creative educational alternatives.

To maintain excellence, the public school system must be accountable to the community it serves and must build effective partnerships throughout the community.

Local, elected school boards play a key role as part of a democratic process of checks and balances in decision-making by ensuring that schools remain responsive to both provincial program requirements and local needs and resources.

### **The Multi-Year Strategic Priorities**

#### **Advocating for the Whole Child and Student Well-Being**

OPSBA believes that improving student achievement and student engagement is directly linked to ensuring that we work collaboratively to support the social, emotional, mental and physical well-being of all children and youth in our increasingly complex world.

#### **Advancing Reconciliation: First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education**

OPSBA believes that through education we will move towards a Canada where the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians is founded on mutual respect and OPSBA, therefore, supports the Calls to Action of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

### **Supporting Trustees as Leaders in Public Education**

OPSBA believes that local democratically elected trustees make a significant and direct contribution to the achievement of all students through their leadership in directing the policies and priorities of the local school board that shape a culture of continuous improvement.

### **Strengthening Positive Labour Relations**

OPSBA believes that teachers and education workers deeply influence a positive and productive learning environment for students and are supported in this role through the peace and stability engendered by successfully negotiated collective agreements.

### **Advocating for Sustainable and Equitable Education Funding**

OPSBA believes that strong and equitable education funding is a foundational factor in setting the conditions that promote and sustain student achievement.

Note: OPSBA is moving ahead with Project Compass Phase 2, which involves reviewing the priority setting process (including engagement and reflecting mandate). This will not affect this year's process.

### **Feedback from Regional Meetings**

Staff have reviewed feedback from trustees at the January regional meetings and through the online survey and a summary is outlined below. This input will help to inform annual strategic planning as well as affirming the multi-year priorities at the Annual General Meeting.

### **General Comments**

- OPSBA needs to revisit priorities and include one major one on specifically online learning and the need to advocate for equitable access across the province.
- Support for continued government relations advocacy – including inviting relevant ministers (beyond the Minister of Education) and Opposition Critics to future events, and working with organizations (such as Employment Ontario) in strategies to help address issues such as adult education, English as a Second Language, literacy and youth employment. Other services need to be identified to help support a continuum of pathways for learners.
- There was mention of student polling and whether OPSBA could do this.

### **Advocating for the Whole Child and Student Well-Being**

- There was a suggestion to focus on poverty, which is an ongoing concern, especially in rural and remote areas. These regions have little to no access to services and supports other than being directed to the closest “urban” centre. Although partnerships are helping to some extent (e.g. United Way), this does not replace a recognized and dedicated funding source or a coordinated poverty strategic plan for this issue in the province.
- We need support for technological/technical education from any partner we can.

### **Advancing Reconciliation: First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education**

- No suggestions were shared. The Indigenous Trustees' Council continues to support the strategic priority as written.

### **Supporting Trustees as Leaders in Public Education**

- Trustees should be provided with more key messaging, with a consistent voice and narrative, without using the government's language.

- New trustees should be supported at the OPSBA level, with a “trustee training day” and a training checklist for boards.

### **Strengthening Positive Labour Relations**

- No suggestions were shared.

### **Advocating for Sustainable and Equitable Education Funding**

- OPSBA and school boards should be advocating for this at all times.

Additional feedback received supported the five current priorities and the continuation of funding to support government relations and advocacy such as OPSBA Advocacy Days at Queen’s Park.

### **Advocating for the Whole Child and Student Well-Being**

- Teacher Training: Faculties of Education need to strengthen requirements to include distance learning skills (OPSBA needs to ask Deans of Faculties to partner and develop training on this).
- Might be a need to look at strategies, as part of this priority, dealing with and advocating for broader supports for children who have not entered the system as of yet, and the corresponding relationship with incidents in the classroom. Partnering with our bargaining units might be a good idea; the issue here is we are not really looking at the whole child unless we consider preschool supports, and advocating for supports long before Grade 3, and to end long wait times.
- Very important to work with our community partners including the political partners. OPSBA should partner with anyone who advocates for similar goals and co-sponsoring research should be critical

### **Advancing Reconciliation: First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education**

- Need to continue to advocate to government to follow through with TRC recommendations.

### **Supporting Trustees as Leaders in Public Education**

- Need better, more ongoing engagement between trustees and OPSBA on a more personal basis; PES is not enough, and especially now with an increase in online meetings and such, we need to connect with trustees directly, not just through the Board of Directors or Chairs.
- There has to be a focus on the role, behaviours and leadership and everything we do, Friday of Board of Directors meetings, PES, etc., should be focused on changing the dialogue and behaviors, with good training.

### **Strengthening Positive Labour Relations**

- No suggestions were shared.

### **Advocating for Sustainable and Equitable Education Funding**

- Need to advocate for high speed internet for the entire province to support online learning.
- Need to invest in more technology for students who do not have access to devices.
- Expanding services to meet the changing needs of students and society.