

Report of the Secondary Vice-President

Ed Wyse

At the beginning of this school year many of you commented to me that I will be ending my career in a very interesting year. Little did we know how interesting. Thoughts of negotiating a contract in Ford Nation now pale as we wade through the complexities of life during a historically unprecedented pandemic. Fascinating time to be alive as a history teacher but frustrating time to be working as an educator. This, to say the least, has been for you, a year of uncertainty. You are amazing as you have had to find professional space in an administrative job action, unheard of within our lived experience, and now navigating professional, family, and personal space simultaneously, again a new and unprecedented lived experience. All of you are now working harder and with longer days than ever before. Please take care of yourselves.

With respect to Secondary we have not seen any mediations/arbitrations this year. We had five last year and we won all five. We have though had numerous issues; some we have been able to resolve through discussions with the Board; others we continue to work on and may eventually result in the need for mediation or arbitration. The school closure has impacted the progress of some of these matters and the Board and the Unit have agreed to extensions of required timelines. The support provided by OECTA Provincial and Bernie Hanson, of the Association's legal team, has, again, proven extremely valuable in working through these matters.

Staffing, as you can imagine, has been a challenge. The Board initially indicated that it would comply with the Collective Agreement and staff Secondary schools at 22:1. The government, at that time, was calling on the Boards to strive to staff at 28:1. This resulted in the Board staffing at 23:1 and the Unit filing a grievance to assert its rights to 22:1 as agreed to in the Collective Agreement. Just before Christmas the Board recognized it had violated the Collective Agreement and revised its staffing models to reflect a class size ratio of 22:1. This mid-year revision required 37 new 50% FTE (Full Time Equivalent) teachers to be hired effective February 3, 2020. While class size returned to 22:1 and more teachers were now in the secondary schools providing the high-quality education parents and students have come to expect from Catholic Teachers of Waterloo; we now face some additional challenges. Subject to the ability to be "topped up" many of these 37 teachers will most likely have to wait until at least next year to see themselves in a 1.0 FTE Permeant Contract. We are discussing with the Board staffing models in the hope that most, if not all, of these teachers can apply for LTO positions to ensure, at least, a full time pay cheque.

Under the circumstances of the recently agreed "Central" staffing ratios of 23:1 student teacher ratio in classroom sections and 30:1 student teacher ratio in eLearning sections there will not be any secondary members declared either surplus to school or redundant. For the Waterloo Secondary Catholic Teachers, the damage of 23:1 and 30:1 has mainly been mitigated by a projected increase in enrollment of 268 students.

The benefit program, now three years old, has seen extensive improvements, especially for members in the Continuing Education program. Our work has resulted in an increase in the understanding by the Trust and OTIP on the unique and complex needs of Con Ed. While there continue to be issues, their frequency has been greatly reduced.

Payroll continues to struggle with math. Please cheque you pay statements constantly and advise the Board of any issues.

The Secondary Bargaining Committee has been preparing a Local Collective Agreement proposal to be presented to the Board shortly. You are presently in receipt of a survey and if you have not yet completed this survey, we ask you to please have it completed by tonight. The results of this survey will aid the committee in finalizing the proposal to be presented to the Secondary members for endorsement and presentation of a proposal to the Board for negotiation. It is our hope to have an agreement in place and ratified by the end of June.

At this point I must acknowledge the support received, often on a daily basis, from our provincial organization. Special acknowledgment to David Dolan (Provincial Counselling and Bargaining Services Officer), Joe Pece (Member Counselling Services), and Tom Doyle (Provincial Benefits Liaison).

I am very appreciative of the work of the Secondary executive: Mike Kearns (Monsignor Doyle), who has input and guidance has proved invaluable as we worked through some complex Labour Management issues, and Breeann Hureau (Doyle), Patrick O'Donnell (Mary's), and Ted Mukhar (Mary's) for providing valued experience and guidance during the year.

Thanks as well to all 17 school-based Association Representatives. You are the eyes and ears of this Unit and without your keen perception, dedication and hard work, we would not be able to effectively support our members as they work in the secondary Catholic schools in Waterloo Region. Your input at our monthly meetings, phone calls and emails as you represent our colleagues is tremendously appreciated!

Thanks to Cathy Kuhn. (Some ears are dripping on the keyboard). Over the last 20 years of my involvement in this Unit you have been a constant and ever present support to me in whatever role I held in my work with the teachers of the Waterloo Unit and the Provincial organization. Without Cathy we would be, simply, lost. Your day to day work as our administrative support makes our work possible. Much appreciated.

To my colleagues on Unit Executive (more tears on the keyboard). We normally face complex issues of violence, teacher stress and burnout, and work life balance to mention a few. This year I have had the privilege of working with a highly professional team that, to borrow a line from Star Trek's Picard, handles "impossible things one at a time" with skill, vision and compassion. You have been for me a rock and support I will never forget.

To my release officer colleagues (still more tears on the keyboard); thank you. Patrick, your guidance, partnership and leadership is much appreciated. We could not have foreseen the challenges presented to us this year. Under your leadership we have achieved two very important goals: one, protection of the new and unprecedented working conditions and rights of our members and, two, keeping, as much as possible, the Board focused on reasonable and realistic policies during the school closure. We are in very uncertain times and without your experience, built on many years of hard work in this Unit and the Provincial organization we would be working in a confusing and misdirected environment. Simon, I have to say it again, how you do it? You handle numerous constant calls with a short period of time and each member is getting your full attention and competent resolution to their issues. As I mentioned last year, 50 schools, 50 administrators who have 50 different and often inaccurate understanding of the Collective Agreement, health and safety and general labour law. I have always been amazed. Jeannette, you have proven that, not only Waterloo Catholic, but all of OECTA, will benefit for years to come from your passion for improving their working conditions of Occasional Teachers. Your hours, days, weeks, months of work with the Central Bargaining table has brought us an agreement that, despite the best efforts of "Liar Liar Pants on Fire", protects and respects the work life balance of all Catholic Teachers.

(Keyboard is drenched – but I must add). This is a very special report for me as I now retire from 36 years in Education (33 in Ontario). To the teachers of Waterloo Catholic, that I have had the privilege of working with over the last 21 years. Changing Boards in 1999, mid-year at that, was a very difficult decision. I was 12 years at Dufferin Peel and felt very safe there, despite the ravages of the "Common Sense Revolution". Moving, even just schools, is always risky. Here I found a compassionate, professional and very supportive community as I taught at Resurrection and Monsignor Doyle together with my work representing you. I also must thank you for the top-quality education that my three daughters received and continues with my grandchildren. Leaving is difficult. I have made some very strong friendships, shared with you in making some very lasting memories and while walking away, I am sure in the knowledge that my family and I are the better for our time with you.