

## **President's Address – AMPA 2022**

Welcome AMPA Delegates, Life Members, Members Extraordinaire, AMPA volunteers, staff, and guests, to the 103rd Annual Meeting of the Provincial Assembly

Au nom de l'Exécutif provincial, j'espère que vous et vos êtres chers vous portez bien et que, lorsque possible, vous avez trouvé le temps et l'espace pour prendre bien soin de vous.

Before I begin to speak specifically about OSSTF/FEESO and AMPA, I want to acknowledge that there is a crisis happening right now in Ukraine. Almost two and a half million people have had to flee their homes, many seeking refugee status. Their sovereignty has been attacked. Sadly, Ukraine is not the only area in crisis. Despite promises from the Taliban, many girls continue to have to hide in order to get an education in Afghanistan. Around the world, there are countless people displaced by conflict. As an education union, we work to better the lives of our members and to protect public education.

Where we can, we try to make education supportive donations as a sign of our solidarity during times of crisis. Provincial Executive passed a motion this week to support such charities in Ukraine. We stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine

Closer to home, we too have a big fight ahead but I am not comparing it to that of Ukrainians or women and girls in Afghanistan or that of people in refugee camps but a struggle nonetheless. This is truly important as we gear up and mobilize for the June 2<sup>nd</sup> Provincial election. This election is CRITICAL for the future of publicly-funded education in Ontario. We all know how much the Ford government consistently undermines the public education sector and the work of teachers, education workers, and unions... and how their not-so-secret plan is to increasingly privatize public services.

The June 2<sup>nd</sup> provincial election and the next round of bargaining are vital for the Federation and its Members, but also for the entire province. As I, and others on the Provincial Executive, have said numerous times, the election and our bargaining strategies are inextricably intertwined.

The outcome of the upcoming provincial, municipal and trustee elections will deeply impact the next round of bargaining for all our Members, school board sector or university alike. The election's outcome will affect and determine the future of the province and of publicly-funded education.

We need to see this election as the once-in-a-generation opportunity that it is a chance to create a more equitable and prosperous future for Ontario as we recover and rebuild from the pandemic.

We need voters in Ontario to realize that this recovery must focus on strengthening and improving our public services. The pandemic made it abundantly clear just how crucial public education, healthcare, and social services are for the livelihood and well-being of everyone in Ontario.

We know that the Ford government will do everything in their power to strip away these essential services. Their cuts to publicly-funded education began with their election in 2018 and it remains abundantly clear that they are intent on further undermining the public safety net and our public services if they win another majority this June.

We must be part of unseating this government and in bringing in an education-friendly government and official opposition.

Cette élection est notre meilleure occasion de freiner le gouvernement Progressiste-Conservateur et d'élire un gouvernement qui se soucie des élèves, des familles et des communautés.

Un gouvernement qui se soucie des services publics essentiels et qui nous élève tous plutôt que d'accorder la priorité aux besoins des promoteurs immobiliers, des chefs d'entreprise et des conservateurs sociaux.

Throughout COVID, many people across the province have expressed a desire to return to the 'normal' lives we knew before the pandemic. I am reluctant to ask for a return to 'normal'. There was nothing normal about massive cuts to public education.

The pandemic had nothing to do with those cuts. We can do so much better than a \$16 billion school repair backlog, cuts to staffing amid staffing shortages, mandatory online learning, hybrid learning, privatization of services, inadequate funding for post-secondary institutions, and budgets that don't even keep up with inflation. We can do better than leaving

students waiting for the social and emotional supports they need to help them face their challenges. How do we do better? We can vote in a government that prioritizes students, workers, families, and communities.

As we focus on the election and fighting for a better public education system, one that Ontario deserves, we need to be the best version of ourselves, reflecting what we advocate and fight for every day... to better the lives of all our members and protect public education. This includes building a future where we commit to combatting all forms of racism and oppression.

And while I acknowledge how far we still have to go in this journey, I want to say I am very proud of the work that we have done since the last AMPA.

Je tiens à remercier nos membres qui travaillent incessamment pour nous améliorer.

Votre voix nous a permis de comprendre ce que nous devons changer.

Nous sommes plus forts quand nous sommes unis et vous en êtes la preuve.

Based on the advice from Members as reflected in the OSSTF/FEESO Action Plan to Support Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression, several initiatives, programs, and changes to policies and practices have taken place, including:

- examining representation across various levels of the Federation and intentionally creating space for voices from First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and equity-seeking groups
- creation of budget lines that members, as well as Districts and Bargaining Units, can access to cover the costs related to equity and/or anti-racism training
- Launching the Equity Mentorship Engagement Program
- In the area of bargaining, including an open question on equity concerns to consider and conducting qualitative interviews with members from First Nations, Métis, Inuit and equity-seeking groups to determine bargaining priorities
- Committing to a review of the OSSTF/FEESO pledge and a pause in reading the pledge at Provincial events until the review has been completed
- Amplifying the voices of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and equity-seeking members and groups in our publications

We are working to identify and target the work that needs to be done, to eliminate barriers at all levels and to create space. And we aren't stopping there as our Equity work is ongoing, woven throughout all of our initiatives and not treated as a stand-alone but as something we must consider in everything we do as a union.

We are working to better represent the entirety of our Membership, especially as we head into the next round of bargaining. Part of doing this important work is knowing who we are, and we need you to tell us!

The OSSTF/FEESO **Self-Identification Survey, Tell Us Who We Are** has been designed to help us better understand the demographic composition of our membership, in addition to providing context for bargaining.

Participating in this survey also means that OSSTF/FEESO will deepen its understanding of how Members are affected by government actions and employer policies that may disproportionately impact certain demographic groups or job classes. A clearer vision of the makeup of the membership will better position provincial and local leaders to implement various

strategies to improve institutional and political practices, and enhance our ability to be more responsive to the needs of members and advocate for them more effectively.

Thank you to those of you who have already completed the survey. We encourage everyone else to fill out the survey as soon as possible. You should have received a paper copy in the mail in December or January but don't worry if you didn't, you can still participate. We still need you to participate.

You can find information on the survey, including how to participate online, on the AMPA Chime site left side navigation panel in the Self Identification Survey tab. Please encourage your member back in your districts to complete this survey if they have not done so already.

As we have during the pandemic and in our No Cuts to Education campaign and rotating strikes in late 2019 and early 2020, we continue to work with other education unions and partners, uniting our efforts, and strengthening our collective impact. For example, we are working with **OECTA** on the issue of de-streaming in secondary schools, and how we

can ensure that the government will provide adequate funding and resources to ensure de-streaming is successful for all students.

Without proper consideration or any real investment to address the many related issues at a systemic level, the transition to a de-streamed curriculum could inadvertently exacerbate existing problems and prove counterproductive to reducing systemic barriers in Ontario's publicly-funded schools. These barriers already disproportionately affect students who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, in low socio-economic situations, and those living with disabilities.

We are advocating for the need to take a comprehensive and holistic approach to implementing de-streaming in a way that involves meaningful collaboration with education experts and community stakeholders and establishes and commits to resources and supports for students and educators. And, most importantly, we must be present at the table to provide our expertise as frontline teachers and education workers to ensure de-streaming is implemented thoughtfully and successfully across the province.

As a Federation, there are times when we strongly advocate on issues that are particularly impactful to specific job classes. That could occur anywhere in the school board sector, in District 34 or into the university sector. Right now, we are working specifically with our ESS and PSSP members because of the threats to their roles posed by the government's latest directive in PPM 81. You may not be aware of PPM 81 but I can try to put it simply. This is the revision of a policy memorandum that could have a devastating impact on our ESS and PSSP job classes, as devastating as the Lisa Thompson 28:1 announcement, an announcement that had the potential to devastate the entire school board sector, delivered on the Ides of March no less.

OSSTF/FEESO has recognized the value of and has been committed to the vision of a full-service educational team in schools for many years. We know that specialized School Board employed professionals such as Speech-Language Pathologists, Behaviour Analysts, Occupational Therapists, and Physiotherapists are uniquely positioned within the school community to provide high quality and effective service to students and their families. We are working hard to make sure the government doesn't move forward with PPM 81 in its current form and we are not the only

dissenting voice. We find ourselves aligned with school boards, community organizations and supporters of public education.

We have connected with local leaders to identify our collective strategy and are a part of the government's formal consultation process. Again this is a not-so-secret push towards privatization by the Conservative government.

Supporting our members working in universities remains a priority. We continue to lobby the provincial government to provide universities with clear, multi-year, and sufficient operating-grant funding and tuition policies so that universities can reduce their reliance on tuition fees.

We will pressure the provincial government to ensure that universities publicly report their allocations, from both public and private funds to appropriate expenditures in order to make funding issues transparent and accountable. Work will continue with members and allies such as the Canadian Federation of Students, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, and the Ontario Federation of Labour to fight against the underfunding of universities. OSSTF/FEESO was proud to support a campaign last year, led by the Ontario Federation of Labour to save

Laurentian University. It was a campaign designed to bring attention to the Ford government's failure to support public institutions, and their reluctance to address the chronic underfunding of universities in Ontario.

March 8<sup>th</sup> was International Women's Day. I celebrate the fact we have 4 strong women leading the 4 big education unions in Ontario. I stand in solidarity with Karen Brown, Anne Vinet-Roy, Barb Dobrowolski. When I think of women leading these unions, unions comprised of majority women, trans women, non binary, I have to remember that the Ford government has imposed wage restraint on our sector and other women dominated sectors like healthcare.

Bill 124 is an attack on women. \$5000 prorated non pensionable dollars in a nurse's pockets does little to make up for this lack of respect. And have any of you been contacted about a job retention bonus?

D'autres secteurs publics dominés par les hommes, comme les services d'incendie et la police, ne sont pas assujettis au même niveau d'examen aussi minutieuse que le sont les travailleuses et les travailleurs en soins de

santé et le personnel en éducation, de la part de ce gouvernement, ni aux attaques contre leur rôle dans la société et au salaire juste qu'ils méritent.

After four years of dealing with the attacks from this government and two years of the pandemic, we are depleted and exhausted, yet more strategic and capable at the same time. I will do what the Ford government has not, I will thank all of you for your efforts over the past two years. We have navigated the pandemic and adapted to the difficult realities of pandemic learning, all while staying nimble and constantly pivoting.

OSSTF/FEESO is grateful to each and every one of you for your dedication to your students and to publicly-funded education in Ontario. YOU are the reason that students from kindergarten to post-secondary have had the many supports they needed throughout the pandemic.

For the past two years, we have been advocating for smaller class sizes, physical distancing, better ventilation, high-quality masks (we've been told employers will continue to provide n95 masks for workers in education), increased testing for staff and students, better screening tools, tracking and tracing, and priority access to vaccinations for education workers. And our advocacy has made a difference, let's not forget that.

Our efforts have achieved some important results. We must not shy away from taking credit where it is due. Our advocacy and continued unrelenting pressure has led to the availability of N95 masks for educators and better-quality masks for students, and rapid tests for staff and students. We fought for priority access to vaccines for education workers and it happened.

Now, of course the Ford government didn't realize that the province of Ontario extends north of highway 7 but thanks to pharmacists, doctors and clinic volunteers across the province, vaccination clinics were planned and those who wanted a third shot were able to get one. All of this took a lot of time and didn't come soon enough for us or for Members. Because of the unwavering behind-the-scenes work alongside public pressure from local leaders, members, parents, and communities, we made the government listen to our concerns and implement some of our most critical demands. It demonstrates the power of communities, families, workers, and unions working together.

Our advocacy and evidence-based approach convinced some local public health units to mandate better safety measures in schools beyond the standards set by the province.

But, as we heard just this week, the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario has all but declared that the pandemic is over. Their rationale for doing so – we'll just have start living with COVID. Doug Ford is tired of the pandemic so it's time for it to end.

By announcing the cancellation of mask mandates in schools and in communities, the government is taking a pre-election gamble with the health and safety of Ontarians. We know the removing of the masking mandate in schools is a divisive issue in communities and even amongst our membership. We are all looking forward to the day when COVID is an afterthought and when we can all safely go about our work without wearing a mask. The pandemic is not over and advocating for the health and safety of our membership is a significant part of what we do as a union. We will focus our efforts on making sure that our members are working in healthy and safe workplaces. As we have all along, we will continue to consult medical experts including an epidemiologist along with legal counsel.

advocate on behalf of our members to make sure they are in safe work environments.

We strongly encourage members to take care of themselves and, as always, exercise their right to refuse unsafe work as outlined in the Occupational Health and Safety Act if they find themselves in an unsafe situation at work.

On the theme of membership advocacy, I want to spotlight the great work of the members from District 30, who pushed the Provincial Schools Authority to reopen their residential program this past January. Keeping the residences for deaf and blind students closed for an extended period would have cost many of our Members their jobs but worse, would have had a massive negative impact on students. The D30 struggle isn't fully resolved yet either. We have a government that time after time has failed to treat students equitably. District 30 is planning a number of rallies with the support of the local community in the coming weeks and Provincial Office is assisting in their efforts. The OFL is helping to amplify the message as well. We hope to see members who live near the Provincial Schools come out to support District 30. I encourage leaders to contact D30 President

Tamara Witcher for more details about the rallies and also to follow them on Twitter @PSATD30.

As we start to see a little bit of a light at the end of the COVID tunnel, OSSTF/FEESO has outlined its vision for publicly-funded education in the post-pandemic period and beyond.

Last June, we launched our Education Platform. It provides a road map to a vibrant and equitable future for publicly funded education in Ontario. I cannot stress enough the importance of this Education platform for OSSTF/FEESO. It marks an important departure for our Federation, in terms of election strategy as well as equity. We embarked on a very broad consultation process when creating this platform, to ensure our Members' voices were heard and reflected.

When we reviewed the feedback from our platform consultations, we found that members, local leaders, community groups and parents said they saw the importance of strong public services as a priority and the integral role that schools play as a central part of the community. As we know, nothing happens in isolation and our education platform reflects this. As I stated

before, OSSTF/FEESO must continue to improve and better reflect the values of equity and inclusion that we are fighting for across the province. Our Education platform is an important part of this improvement as it centres all we do and all we fight for in equity.

This platform is entitled Strengthen Public Education – Rebuild Ontario, and it's built on five pillars:

The first is **Increasing student centred supports and services** and outlines how Ontario can create safer school buildings and campuses, promote student and education mental health and trauma recovery, and create healthier communities.

**Second is centring schools as part of our communities.** It focuses on building a robust publicly-funded education system fueled by investments in communities and public services.

The third is **improving learning conditions for all** in recognition of the unique needs of learners. When students feel safe, see themselves

represented in schools, when they are in smaller class and have access to skilled education workers and supports, they are far more likely to succeed.

The fourth pillar is **Addressing systemic inequities**. It is grounded in equity and covers the significant need to confront and dismantle anti-Black racism, racism, anti-Indigenous practices, and social and geographical inequities.

The systemic changes we are advocating for in this pillar, like the others, need to be permanent and accompanied by sustainable funding.

The final pillar is **Providing safe, healthy learning and working conditions that** strengthen mental, physical, and social health protections, including measures to protect against COVID-19, or any future pandemics, and of course fixing the \$16 billion school repair backlog.

Our vision for a strong public education system provides the measures that will allow the next government to seize the opportunity before them and build trust and confidence in a publicly-funded education system no matter the school or community in Ontario. There should be no preferential treatment between early learning, elementary school, secondary school,

adult and continuing education or post-secondary. These are all essential parts of our public education system and they need to be treated as such.

Les membres de la FEESO et les familles ne devraient pas être obligés de se contenter des « normes minimales », d'un sous-financement chronique pour les réparations, de milieux d'apprentissage et de travail dangereux ou d'un manque de soutien pour les élèves.

Et avec votre aide, en vous faisant champions de notre programme, ce ne sera pas nécessaire.

Right now, we have 8 election organizers out in the field, hopefully in person very soon, connecting with local leaders and Bargaining units. They are well-versed on our Education Platform and election priorities. They are a resource available to local leaders, to help coordinate and strengthen our impact during this crucial election. They'll be sharing all the ways you can take action and how we can ensure alignment across the province.

Today, I'm proud to announce that we are releasing the names of the first round of candidates that we will endorse in the upcoming provincial election – many of them incumbent MPPs and candidates that we believe will build

an education-friendly government and education-friendly official opposition after the election on June 2nd. The list of candidates will be available shortly on the AMPA Chime site under the Election Readiness and Organizers page and will also be available to all on our provincial website following AMPA.

This list was developed based on consultations with bargaining unit and district leaders and falls in line with the Strategic Action Plan adopted by AMPA in 2020 and 2021. We encourage everyone to take note of these endorsed candidates and support them in your local districts. Provincial Office will continue to work with local leaders to grow this list of endorsements as we get closer to the election.

In challenging times, it's important to also find things to celebrate. It's my honour to announce the inaugural OSSTF/FEESO Solidarity Award. This new award publicly celebrates an OSSTF/FEESO member who, throughout their career, has embodied the our motto - Let us not take thought for our separate interests, but let us help one another.

To be considered for the award, the member must have done exemplary work within a Local or District, and whose leadership and activism has demonstrated a deep commitment to strengthening the Federation. Emphasis will be placed on efforts to improve equity, social justice by breaking down barriers, and building a more engaged and inclusive union. You can go to the Awards tab in the chime site for more information.

At AMPA every year, we also celebrate the Student Achievement Awards in honour of Marion Drysdale. They celebrate students who are creative artists, whether using words, visual or digital/media arts. It serves as a medium that use their art to unlock feelings. The theme this year was A Moment in Time. I know for many of you, the annual presentation of these awards is an AMPA highlight, often it's standing room only in the Sheraton Ballroom. Judging for this year has been completed and the 11 award winners have been announced. You can see the full list of Student Achievement Award winners in Update online. The winners will be presented with awards of \$1000.00 each.

The student award winners fill me with great hope for the future and remind us of why we work so hard every day to improve public education in

Ontario. As we prepare ourselves for the coming months and the significant work that we will all undertake, I want us to never forget the students. They are why we do the jobs we do.

Just as we have a duty to serve our students, we've been granted an opportunity and duty to protect publicly-funded education in Ontario.

No one understands the system as well as we do, no one knows better what is needed. This is the time to create our future. This is the time for us to step up and help guide our province forward. This is the time for us to help Ontario follow a better path, one that enhances the social and economic fabric of a diverse, dynamic, and prosperous province.

I call on all of you, leaders within the Federation, you are all leaders, to consider my words today and contemplate how you can make a difference in the upcoming election and in the next round of bargaining.

First – talk to your colleagues – talk to your fellow members – talk to other unionized workers in your workplace, whether they are members of OSSTF/FEESO or not. Talk to non unionized workers. Talk to anyone

who will listen. Talk about the upcoming election and why it's important to elect an education-friendly government, why it's important for all Ontarians. Conversations are powerful and so are the connections you make with people.

Get involved and get them involved, even if it's only a commitment to vote in the next election. Ideally we'd like everyone to Vote, Volunteer and Donate but let's focus on the vote right now. Think about it for a moment. OSSTF/FEESO has over 60,000 members. That's an average of 500 members in each riding in Ontario. Some ridings will have a few more, some a few less. But, if we go with that number of 500 for a moment, I want you to consider this.

Eight ridings in the last election were won by 500 or fewer votes – four of them went to Progressive Conservative candidates. Imagine if each of our 500 members in one of those ridings were able to convince ONE other person to join them in voting for an education-friendly candidate in their riding bringing that number to 1,000 voters. There were 16 ridings that were won by 1,000 votes or fewer in the last election, and eight of those went to the Progressive Conservatives. Imagine if each one of our

members could get more than ONE person to vote for an education-friendly candidate. And, you also know that our comrades in other education unions in Ontario can do the same. I will remind you that 16 PC MPP's who were elected in June of 2018 decided they will not run in 2022. Think of the possibilities.

Those of us in education, health care and the labour movement, and those of us who care about public services have the power to influence this election with the simple act of voting.

But winning an election requires more. I'm asking each and every one of you to perhaps step out of your comfort zone and consider working for an education-friendly candidate in your riding, full disclosure, I did exactly that this week. I told them I would send money too as soon I can. Consider pledging your support locally, especially if that candidate is someone OSSTF/FEESO has endorsed. Any political party or candidate will tell you that one of the main reasons why elections are won is because of the number of volunteers they had working on their campaigns. Talk to a colleague, bring a family member or friend, and sign up to volunteer for a candidate. Our election organizers are working with local leaders to

connect members with local candidates and campaign managers as they are announced. Watch for that information, share it with your colleagues, friends, and families, and get involved. What we absolutely do not want is to have any of us present today to be sitting at home on June 2nd watching the election results and regretting not doing more. Now is not the time for regrets. Vote, volunteer, donate.

We cannot afford another four years of a Progressive Conservative government. Ontario cannot afford another four years of Doug Ford and Stephen Lecce and the rest of the cast of Conservatives who have shortchanged education and public services since 2018 and who have demonstrated a complete lack of respect for what you and our members do. Instead, we must come together for a common cause to bring in a government that will strengthen public education and rebuild Ontario. We exist as a union to better the lives of our members and to protect public education.

Nous pouvons et devons y arriver.

Et j'ai bonne confiance en vous tous pour y arriver ensemble.

Thank you for listening. I look forward to spending the weekend with you, the activists of OSSTF/FEESO. I wish you productive debates.