



President's Memo

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Trans Awareness Week occurred the week of November 13 – 19 followed by the Trans Day of Remembrance on November 20. This was marked at the EdCentre by a flag raising on Monday the 15th. Garrett Metcalfe, the newest addition to our District 13 team, was invited to speak. Garrett brings extensive experience and commitment to matters of equity and anti-oppression. Here are his words:

District 13 OSSTF has a long history of activism supporting our Queer staff and students here in Durham. We are very proud of the work we initiated years ago to get our Gay/Straight Alliances operating in our secondary schools.

Today as we raise the Trans flag, recognizing Transgender Awareness Week and honouring all of the lives lost and impacted by acts of anti-transgender violence, District 13 recognizes that much more needs to be done. We are committed to doing the work necessary to end violence against all of our transgender colleagues, students, and communities we serve.

D13 recognizes the significant harms rooted in our colonial past and the impacts of colonialism that continue to this day. We must work hard to fight the strict binaries of gender rooted in patriarchal colonial systems. We must fight hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity. We must challenge that gender is rooted in biology. We must challenge the cultural norms of blueness and pinkness defining our expression and genders. All sexism, homophobia and transphobia are rooted in these strict binaries and they must end.

As we raise the Transgender flag today, I hope that someday we will not be gathering in remembrance but rather in celebration of the richness, diversity and gifts the Trans community offer to us all. Until that day, we all have a responsibility to continue doing the work to fight Transphobia and D13 is fully committed to doing so.

Farewell to Quadesters – With the ministry announcement on Thursday that secondary schools can return to a semester schedule, we begin the countdown to the end of what has been a tremendous challenge for staff and students alike.

District 13 is absolutely in support of this return. Ever since this summer we have been encouraging the Board to make a return to semesters. The DDSB was not opposed to it but the Ministry of Education, at the time, would not allow it. With every opportunity since then we have been advocating to leave quadesters behind. It was just this past Wednesday when we had the opportunity to describe for a Ministry representative that quadesters were crushing. Provincial OSSTF, along with the other affiliates, had been communicating a similar message to the Ministry as well. This, coupled together with the efforts of school boards seems to have prompted the Ministry to make the change.

We will look back on quadesters the same way that more experienced colleagues look back on the Harris years of government and teaching 7 out of 8. It has affirmed our understanding that a daily prep period is absolutely essential to the work we do.

Across the province there were schedules that did not include a daily prep. Colleagues in those districts indicated that it was incredibly difficult and led to exhaustion. Locally, we were able to arrange a timetable that protected a daily prep even if it came with some strings attached. Article 9.05 (2) of our collective agreement reads as follows:

Full periods shall be assigned as three (3) seventy-five (75) minute periods per day.

Under conditions where we take workload and prep periods for granted, this phrase is a little referenced piece of contract language. It roared to center stage during quadmesters however and carried the heavy weight of protecting working conditions. While imperfect, our current arrangement protected against teaching 4/4 in exchange for providing prep relief to another teacher during a quadmester with one course to teach. While this arrangement agrees with contract language we will still embrace a return to semesters for the 2nd half of the school year. The countdown begins.

Meanwhile, members are reminded that in agreement with the Board, teachers should be taking their prep and are not responsible for creating additional activities for that period. Language in the Memorandum of Understanding reads as follows:

Supervising teachers providing prep relief are not responsible for prepping materials or reporting for the class they are supervising.

Class teachers are not required to prepare materials or lessons for delivery during the supervised prep relief period.

Students during this period can catch up on homework, work on assignments, review course material, complete projects, practice music skills, work on art pieces, read texts, gather research notes, work with partners, or any other tasks that support their success. Having work periods scheduled into the timetable helps alleviate some of the difficulty associated with two, 2.5 hour classes a day which make quadmesters so impossible.

New Teacher Workshops – With over 120 new permanent teachers hired to the DDSB over the last year, District 13 is looking forward to hosting 3 workshops for our newest Teachers' Bargaining Unit members. These sessions will take place November 24, December 1, and December 9. During these sessions new teachers will be introduced to the collective agreement, pension, benefits, sick leave, professional boundaries, professional judgement, anti-oppression, health and safety, incident reporting, District committees and more. The sessions will be held online through Zoom.

Mediation Services Resource Bank – OSSTF's Mediation Services Resource Bank (MSRB) provides dispute resolution services to members who are in professional conflict with other members that does not reach the threshold of harassment. It consists of mediators who live and work across the province. All are Federation members with extensive training and experience in mediation and conflict resolution. In order to preserve confidentiality, mediators are usually assigned from outside the geographic area of the disputants. Please contact the District Office for advice on whether you should request the services of the MSRB in helping you resolve an issue.

Equity and Rights Seeking Advisory Committees – Interest is growing for the creation of Equity and Rights Seeking Advisory Committees here in District 13. In particular, members have come forward wanting to create Indigenous, Black, Women's and Jewish groups. Please reach out to Garrett Metcalfe (garrett.metcalfe@d13.osstf.ca) in the office if you are interested in participating in any of these groups or creating another. We value all voices and will support creating space for everyone in their Federation!