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**Leading Education's Advocates**

August 18, 2020

TO: Alexander Brown, Board Chair and Carlene Jackson, Director of Education (Interim)  
CC: Craig Snider, Acting Associate Director, Business Operations and Service Excellence

### TORONTO DSB

This past year has been a school year like no other, with the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures starting in March, collective bargaining, and of course the opportunities and challenges of working with a government that is now halfway through their mandate.

That's why we've increased our efforts to ensure our multi-year priorities continue to guide the work of the Association as we advocate for outstanding programs, pedagogy and resources as well as a social and educational environment that nurtures the values of universality, inclusion, human rights, respect and kindness. Similar to other jurisdictions throughout the country and the world, we have been and are adjusting to a new normal that includes providing remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While this transition has been the focus of much of OPSBA's recent work, it does not mean our advocacy has stopped. For example, we recently convened our consultative working groups to meet and discuss important factors and conditions that must be taken into account for a safe return to school. From that, our best advice was relayed to the Ministry of Education in a public submission and we were encouraged to see that most of our concerns were addressed in the government's framework. We will continue to work with our member boards to monitor implementation challenges and concerns and ensure these are shared with the ministry.

As we plan for next year, we will be looking closely at our conferences and events, and seeking to bring in appropriate speakers, have discussions, provide professional development and more to ensure we are doing everything we can to fight all forms of racism. We must also examine our operational activities to see what changes may be necessary, and whether there are additional policy or advocacy positions we can take in support of the fight against racism. We want to find ways to increase the representation of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) running for Trustee or OPSBA positions, and look to provide the ability for these critical voices to be heard more easily by our Board of Directors, Executive Council and work teams. As an Association, we are also looking to enhance our professional development in this area and to establish more community connections with marginalized groups. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with your ideas.

As a non-partisan organization, we have a 32-year history of building positive and mutually respectful working relationships with politicians and staff from all parties represented in the Ontario Legislature. These relationships allow us to successfully represent the voice of our members on the many issues that affect our students and communities.

Minister of Education Stephen Lecce attended our Public Education Symposium (PES) in January and also addressed our Board of Directors in September 2019 and May 2020. Our second Advocacy Day at Queen's Park in November brought more than 50 public school board trustees and student trustees to Toronto to meet with MPPs and political staff, reinforcing OPSBA's advocacy position on key issues, such as the importance of investment in public education, Indigenous Education, curriculum, mental health supports and the value of democratic, locally elected trustees. The day began with a news conference that released the results of [polling and research](#) done in partnership with Nanos Research. This type of work has been reinforced by our Board of Directors, who directed the Association to plan more strategic government relations and public affairs activities.

OPSBA represents over 1.3 million students, or nearly 70% of the entire K-12 student population, including all 31 English public school boards as well as 10 school authorities. Collectively, this makes our organization the number one stakeholder voice for education in Ontario. Your school board is clearly a very big part of who we are and what we do. We advocate for public education every day, and the government knows that we have the weight of all of our members behind us.

Our experienced [Labour Relations](#) team successfully concluded and ratified central agreements with all education bargaining units. We are fortunate to have strong staff with outstanding expertise and credibility working to ensure student achievement and well-being are at forefront of all discussions and decisions. School boards continue to work toward implementation with the support of OPSBA Labour Relations staff.

While much of the advocacy work can be seen in our public submissions and meetings with key stakeholders, there is a great amount of day-to-day work that is done behind the scenes. OPSBA staff have direct and constant access to both the bureaucracy and political staff in the government as well as in the opposition parties. These relationships allow for conversations and the sharing of information to further support our common priorities.

OPSBA continues to be represented on a number of key government working tables and our work has resulted in a number of successful outcomes. Here are some additional highlights:

- ***Legislative Submissions and Government Consultations*** -- OPSBA has engaged in a wide range of advocacy work related to the provincial government's legislative and regulatory agenda, including [submissions and letters](#) regarding:
  - [Ontario's Plan to Reopen Schools](#)
  - [2020-21 Education Funding](#)
  - [Bullying in schools and anti-bullying initiatives](#)
  - [Northern Ontario concerns](#)
  - [Education Development Charges](#)
- ***Mental Health and Well-Being*** – OPSBA continues in its role as a founding member of the [Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health](#). OPSBA and the Coalition's advocacy has led to the maintenance of mental health investments in the public education system for 2020-21 and beyond.
- ***Indigenous Education*** – OPSBA's [Indigenous Trustees' Council](#) continues to support the educational needs of Indigenous students, and to ensure all students are educated about the history and culture of Indigenous peoples. OPSBA continues to be a leading advocate in education in this area.

- **The Role of Trustee** – OPSBA updated a [series of resources](#) to support trustees and school boards for Local Government Week 2019. We also worked with OSTA-AECO to promote and award two new scholarships for graduates – the [Ontario Public Student Trustee Scholarship](#) and the [Public Property Assessment Network Scholarship](#). In addition, as part of OESC, we have shared and promoted the new and revised [Trustee Professional Development Program](#), which now includes a Certificate of Completion.
- **French as a Second Language** – OPSBA continues to lead a three-year Ontario Labour Market Partnership project with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development entitled [Meeting Labour Market Needs for French as a Second Language Instruction in Ontario](#).

**Our programs and services are highly cost effective.** The financial benefits of membership far exceed not only the membership fee itself, but the outcomes that could be achieved by boards acting individually. Our collective voice is a strong one. Working with our partners at the [OESC](#), our interventions on copyright tariffs, natural gas rates and electricity rates have continued to create significant savings for all school boards and cover membership fees many times over. When this is combined with the other benefits created through our coordination and advocacy, the real value of board membership is clear.

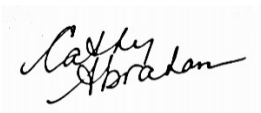
Examples of 2019-20 savings realized for:	
TORONTO DSB	
Savings in Copyright Fees: \$ 586,230	Savings in Energy Costs: \$ 3,931,000

*Please note:* For the third year in a row, the OPSBA Board of Directors has approved a 0% increase for total membership fees. We have therefore kept the total membership fee (31 school boards and 10 school authorities combined) the same for four consecutive years. There may however be a slight change, up or down, to your individual board membership fee based on the fee model which is composed of a base amount and a percentage of your Board Administration and Governance Grant.

The 2020-21 OPSBA membership fee for your board is \$ 393,561.

Thank you for your continued support as a member of OPSBA and for your dedication to public education. You can learn more about the valuable services OPSBA offers your board by visiting [www.opsba.org](http://www.opsba.org).

Sincerely,



Cathy Abraham  
President



W.R. (Rusty) Hick  
Executive Director

Attachment: Invoice for the 2020-21 OPSBA membership fee