

President's Message

August 15, 2023

Special President's Message

As you may have heard through the media, in July a retired OPC Member lost his life by suicide. We extend sincere condolences to his family, as well as students, administrators, staff and families within our school communities who have been directly impacted by this. Although we cannot know all the circumstances surrounding this tragedy, we do know that for the past two years, he had been struggling to deal with an incident and charges of racism that were directed at him during a professional learning session focussed on equity issues. During that time, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) did not act on requests from the OPC local (TSAA) to investigate the reported mistreatment.

On July 21, we released [a public statement](#), calling for increased supports for principals and vice-principals who find themselves in situations in which they feel threatened or unsafe. We reiterated that employers have an obligation to provide a safe working environment and to protect their staff from bullying and harassment.

We want to affirm our support for ongoing equity, diversity and inclusion training for administrators and all school staff. As leaders, we want to be at the front of reconciliation, equity literacy and training to recognize and dismantle systemic racism and oppression. For this training to be impactful and meet its goals, school boards must ensure that staff and/or external consultants hired to deliver professional learning conduct themselves in a respectful and accepting way. Boards also have a duty to uphold policies and legislation on workplace harassment and workplace safety during those sessions, and afterward if concerns are brought forward.

All participants and presenters in training sessions need to take an approach that is grounded in humility and empathy, and that honours the humanity of everyone in attendance. Open and respectful dialogue is crucial to this very important work. We have communicated our position on this with both the TDSB and the Ministry of Education.

We hope you enjoy the remainder of your summer.