

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.” – Mother Teresa

My first year as leader of PTU has had its ups and downs. Nevertheless, I feel that overall we are headed upwards and we have made some ripples in the water.

Paul Pompa retired at Christmas and was replaced by Pasquale Machado. She brings her experience and perspectives from the Laurier Teachers Union. Ann Granger brings her knowledge and wisdom from her past involvement with the school board. The office is filled with discussions and debates that surround not only day-to-day events but also new outlooks on the union’s position at the school board level. We have been called a “different union” and that’s pretty exciting.

This year we had some new Executive Members join the ranks. The discussions at our Executive meetings have been dynamic and engaging.

The first thing on my agenda, when time permits, is to hear the voices of the teachers. I have visited many schools this year, in particular Elementary Schools and Vocational and Adult centres (some High Schools). This is my favorite duty as leader. I really enjoy meeting the hard-working and dedicated teachers. I am preoccupied with making sure that the school board is aware of the many issues coming from these visits. Most of the concerns brought forward are matters that deal with special needs students, behavior issues in the classrooms and dealing with difficult principals. These issues are making the lives of teachers more difficult and we are making sure the school board is aware of these problems.

The highlight of my year was addressing the Minister of Education, Sébastien Proulx, in December, and participating in the round table discussions during the public consultations surrounding education. I had the privilege of representing the English teachers of the Montreal area and meeting union leaders from the French school boards.

Delegates asked PTU to look into a plan for Dental Insurance. A referendum was held, with the results to be announced by the beginning of June.

The Oversize Class Grievances for the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 were rejected by the arbitrator. However, this is still a significant concern. We still have grievances for 2015 and 2016 and PTU, with the help of QPAT, will be working very hard in the coming year to resolve once and for all this problem.

Human Relations is a big part of my job. This year, we filed six grievances on behalf of our members. Meetings with QPAT, the lawyers of QPAT and the members take up a considerable amount of time.

So far this year, we have done two surveys. The first one was to do with International students in the Youth Sector. The results supported the teachers and the lack of resources for these

students. These results were given to the Director of International Studies. There have been many management changes at the school board level and the hope is that there will be improvements. We also did a survey on the Monitoring of Support for Students. The results were discussed at the Special Needs Parity and Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC).

A PTU VAR Committee was formed in June 2016. The implementation of our recommendations was approved in late April 2017 and we feel that the work that was done will be important for the 2017-2018 school year.

I coined the phrase “a dark cloud” over our School Board in an interview with Global News revolving around the ethics violation of Suanne Stein Day. In addition, I was interviewed live on Global News surrounding the International students in the Vocational Education sector. My main message was that the government is not investing the funds needed in public education.

PTU pushed forward with the development of a School Council Workshop in collaboration with the School Board. A big thanks goes out to Roger Plourde and Barbara Randle for representing the union. School Council is the key platform where teachers’ voices can be heard, and we feel that this is the place where teachers can make change. So far, the feedback has been positive, and several schools and centres have received the training. We hope to continue this work in the fall.

Local Negotiations are moving slowly. However, we want to take our time and do the job thoroughly. We have had the delegates and executive members contribute to the Youth Sector demands and we have formed local negotiation committees in both the Vocational and Adult Sectors.

At the Educational Policies Committee (EPC), we have asked to participate in the development of the Evaluation Policy of the School Board. A sub-committee was formed and we had our first meeting in May. This is our first breakthrough in actually being part of a working committee and we hope this is just the beginning.

Since January, I have been speaking at the Council of Commissioners meetings. In March, I spoke about choice for parents and competition between schools. In April, I asked about integration and how special programs at the elementary level have actually been segregating our students. As a result, I was invited to be part of a Long- Term Planning Committee sub-committee by Noel Burke, the Chairman of the Council of Commissioners, in the fall.

I am a guest at the QPAT Executive and participate in discussions at the Provincial level. QPAT has been very active this year. The new president, Sébastien Joly, has been busy fighting the Minister of Education, in collaboration with the French unions, in trying to prevent the insertion of the Financial Education course and the cutback of the relevant Contemporary World course.

Next year, I will continue my visits to the schools and centres, and continue to allow teachers’ voices to be heard at the school board level. PTU will also keep a close eye on school board practices and condemn those that violate our Collective Agreement. Most importantly, I will continue to fight for the teaching profession and for a safe and healthy workplace.

Submitted by
Heidi Yetman