

September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017

Dear Catholic District School Board Chair,

On behalf of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association – l'Association élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO), please accept our best wishes for a productive and successful 2017/18 academic school year.

We write this letter today full of excitement, optimism and eagerness to work collaboratively with all stakeholders and indeed Catholic District School Boards to ensure that the voices of our Catholic students are amplified at the provincial level, ensuring powerful representation throughout the education system.

OSTA-AECO is the official representative of 1.9 million English-speaking students in Ontario's publicly funded education system. Our General Assembly consists of student trustees from across the province. Together, we serve as official stakeholders in Ontario's education system and advocate on behalf of the students we represent.

OSTA-AECO's internal structure consists of two Board Councils: the Catholic Board Council and the Public Board Council. This organization is designed to allow for a holistic representation of student voice; we stand together as Catholic and Public student trustees. Our unity makes us stronger as we learn from one another, share best practices and stand up for students from all walks of life.

OSTA-AECO seeks to promote inclusivity, respect, character and kindness within our own organization and indeed every school community in Ontario. Simply put, we believe that students of differing abilities and backgrounds will seek collaboration and ways to work together productively as long as they feel respected by their peers and welcomed in their schools. As the representatives of these students, we try to replicate this fundamental relationship at OSTA-AECO.

We firmly believe that both Board Councils are equally empowered and make it our mission to ensure that both receive unquestionably equal support and standing within our organization. At our Annual General Meeting in May 2017, our General Assembly voted to amend our constitution, mandating that a candidate seeking election to the two positions that speak on behalf of the entire association (namely the President or Public Affairs Officer) must now be moved or seconded by members from both our Catholic and Public Board Councils. This bylaw serves as a check and balance and ensures that OSTA-AECO's General Assembly, both Catholic and Public stand firmly behind those who speak on behalf of all students. This aligns with our longstanding procedure to never take a public position as a whole association without the endorsement of both Board Councils.

OSTA-AECO stands firmly behind Catholic education and remains unreservedly supportive of continued funding for all four school systems.

The continued support of OCSTA has been an inspiration to us. This support encourages us to continue striving to ensure that the students we represent continue to have a strong advocacy presence at the provincial level.

### **Northern and Rural Ontario Student Trustees**

This year, we are introducing supports to offset the potentially prohibitive costs associated with Northern and Rural Ontario student trustees attending our conferences, by lowering conference fees and supporting travel costs on a case-by-case basis. We are calling this program OSTASupports and will be revealing details soon.

### **OSTA-AECO Conferences**

At our conferences, we ensure that an optimal balance of time is allotted for engagement in workshops and professional development as a General Assembly and in a student trustee's respective Board Council (Catholic or Public). Board Councils receive a generous allotment of time to speak to best practices, initiatives and issues unique to their school system. A Sunday morning Mass is always included in our official conference agenda, allowing Catholic student trustees from both the Catholic and Public Board Councils the opportunity to celebrate their faith. We are always welcoming of student trustees who are not Catholic but desire to experience the holy sacrifice of the Mass just as any Catholic parish would welcome those outside of the faith to celebrate a Catholic Mass.

OSTA-AECO is committed to the safety and well-being of all conference attendees. Each event is supervised by adults from our association's Board of Directors, who serve in accordance with strict supervision procedures. OSTA-AECO's Board of Directors is comprised of four past student trustees, appointed by the OSTA-AECO Executive Council on a biennial basis. They maintain a legal and fiduciary responsibility to the organization and provide supervision during conferences. At all times, 24 hours a day, there is a male and a female supervisor on duty. In addition, OSTA-AECO mandates that all Directors have verified criminal record checks with vulnerable sector screening, and that a minimum one male and one female Director have First Aid and CPR training, as well as ASSIST Mental Health Training. These measures ensure that all school boards can send their student trustees to OSTA-AECO's conferences in full confidence that their safety and wellbeing is of the utmost importance.

If you were to ask any student trustee, past or present, they'd undoubtedly tell you that attending an OSTA-AECO conference is one of the most valuable experiences for a student in this role. We also recognize the importance of student trustees attending OCSTA conferences so that they can foster helpful relationships with their adult counterparts. We will continue to encourage attendance at OCSTA conferences, and we're hopeful OCSTA will encourage student trustee attendance at OSTA-AECO conferences for the educational and developmental benefits provided to students at these exceptional tailored events.

We invite you to personally experience an OSTA-AECO conference by attending any one of our upcoming events and seeing first-hand the attention paid to student trustee programming, safety and the overall well-being of all in attendance.

At the 2017 OCSTA Catholic Trustees Seminar, University of St. Michael's College Professor Randy Boyagoda spoke about "Cosmopolitan Catholicism." He discussed the importance of Catholic leaders, and indeed student trustees, going out to the secular world and spreading the message of servant leadership rooted in Gospel values. Catholic education has prepared student trustees for this role and further, to find that common ground and to make the world a better place for all of humanity.

To strengthen the Mission of Catholic education in Ontario we ask Catholic school boards to support student trustee membership within OSTA-AECO. The Catholic Board Council section of OSTA-AECO will continue to work collaboratively with OCSTA to ensure understanding and clarity on the positions and priorities of publicly funded Catholic school boards. We hope this letter has shared useful insight on OSTA-AECO and we would be pleased to answer any questions that you might have of our organization.

*"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'." – Mark 16:15*

Warm regards,



Dasha Metropolitansky  
President  
OSTA-AECO



Ben Smith  
President  
Catholic Board Council



Shams Mehdi  
President  
Public Board Council