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President's Message

One hundred fifty-eight. Over the past eight years, I have written 158 president's messages. Looking back: when I began as president, we had two annual general meetings and had difficulty reaching quorum for either one. We had one extra-curricular day, one personal day with pay, one without, and we were paid over ten months. In those days we were not even thinking of carrying over a personal day and no-one had taken a sabbatical in years; the maternity leave top-up a woman received depended on when she gave birth; we had no dental plan, and no health plan. All of the above have seen significant improvement since 2010 and, add to those the solid majority you have given to the Short Term Disability Plan and I can safely say the working conditions of teachers in the Interlake are improved compared to when I began this journey. The credit for this progress is a collective one. I have played my part as anyone in my position would have, but these gains have been earned by the hard work of the members of the ITA Executive, MTS staff, and members from across the province. Union work is never a solitary exercise. Unions exist to correct the inherent power imbalance between employers and employees and we do that by acting together. We now face a government that has mused about changing the way we bargain and has presented legislation that contemplates limiting what we can bargain. The Interlake Teachers' Association through the Manitoba Teachers' Society has joined other unions from across the province in fighting these provisions. We work together on a large scale; we work together on a small scale, but we always work together. In a few weeks my time as your president will end. Cathy Pleskach will take over as president and I have no doubt that, under her leadership, this organization will continue to grow in strength and cohesion. I will be in a different role, but I will always be part of the union, an organization that gains its strength because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Thank you to current and former members of ISD Senior Administration and Board for the always civil discourse, useful advice, and movement toward common goals; thank you to current and former members of the ITA Executive for your candid comments, open debate, and for volunteering your time; and most of all, thank you to you, the members of the Association, for supporting your union and for me in my time as president.



Moving Ahead means Looking Back

A message from your President Elect

As the clock ticks from June 30th to July 1st, teachers will likely be found in one of two states. Some will be awake, enjoying the first weekend of summer, sitting with family or friends, at a campground, or on a patio, or binge-watching Netflix shows missed during another busy school year. Others will be in the midst of blissful sleep that has finally come as the stress and demands of school are left behind, and as the flood of pure exhaustion has finally won.

On July 1st, I will be ITA President, and that responsibility brings change. Teaching half time will mean less time embedded in life at WCI and no longer teaching some courses I have taught for many years. Geographically, I will be in a constant state of change (or “flux” for those who science), as I move about the division during school visits. And soon, when asked a union-related question, my first words can no longer be, “You should call John about that.” Actually, those will probably be words I still use from time to time, so I am thankful that we have a sound and experienced executive in place as we move forward, albeit with changing roles and in challenging times.

Ironically during a time when teachers are supposed to be resting and regrouping, this summer is sure to contain a regular dose of education-related publicity. We can likely expect a decision on the Bill 28 injunction filed on behalf of over 110, 000 public employees, including educators; the majority of Locals will be without a collective agreement, as most expire June 30; and teachers will come back to schools in September being asked to do more with less. We all know there are more challenges on this list, but I am supposed to be preparing you for two months of relaxation, so let’s lower that heartrate again...

To face these challenges, MTS and ITA have already begun to own the narrative regarding cuts to public education and the impact on classroom resources and on students (#Kidsnotcuts). While you recharge this summer, your executive will attend training for our new roles; we will work closely with MTS staff to plan bargaining strategies in whatever form that may take; and we will prepare for a year of hard work engaging you in your union. We are excited to get started, and as you begin to close up your classroom and mark that last exam, be assured we have power in numbers. Be well, get the rest you’ve earned, and thank you for all you do for our students.

