

Candidates For SOTA Vice President:

Jeff Cieszecki

1. The current government has not funded education adequately to even keep up with inflation. This negatively affects our work conditions and our students. What do you think is the biggest issue with how this government is funding education and how should the union respond?

As a former Education Finance Chair, I am concerned about the impact that the government's phasing out of current funding sources that include the Tax Incentive Grant (TIG) and special levy will have on school division budgets.

SOSD had recent funding increases through equalization and higher student enrolment clawed back by reducing the TIG allotment. SOSD received funding increases of 0% (2019/20) and 0.7% (2020/21), while student population increased 3.4% and 1.2% respectively. SOSD has relied on the local special levy to offset budgetary shortfalls to meet divisional programming needs. It is unclear how the government will replace the \$800 million currently collected by all divisions, and how this will impact SOSD.

What is clear is SOTAs needs to monitor the impact of future funding announcements and mandated cutbacks. SOTA Executive will need to work with MTS, other associations and educational partners to fight these cuts and achieve equity.

2. What aspect of being on SOTA executive will you find rewarding?

I have found my 13 years as a SOTA Executive member to be truly rewarding. I have gained insight into union relations with government and the SOSD that provides a historical genesis of decisions made by our elected officials. This is key when strategizing our response to new concerns.

I have gained an understanding of policies and our Collective Agreement. A clear understanding of these documents provides an informed response to questions and challenges.

The most rewarding aspect is having discussions with SOTA members about issues that affect the teaching profession. Discussions range from the Collective Agreement, government attacks on our profession, or day to day interactions with one another.

Serving as your next SOTA Vice-President would allow me the opportunity to continue my work on your behalf, further developing my experience and leadership knowledge.

Shelley Torz

1. The current government has not funded education adequately to even keep up with inflation. This negatively affects our work conditions and our students. What do you think is the biggest issue with how this government is funding education and how should the union respond?

The government's inadequate funding of education is affecting the workload of members. Class sizes have increased along with needs within the classroom, and supports are stretched to their limits. Child poverty is not adequately addressed by the government, affecting students' ability to succeed in school. These factors all impact teachers' workloads. As the current SOTA Vice President, I understand the unmanageable, cumulative expectations imposed upon members by parents, employers, communities, and education policymakers.

SOTA needs to respond by supporting members to uphold and advance the collective agreement. We must advocate for reasonable assignable time, that extracurricular activities remain voluntary, and ensure SafeWork legislation is respected.

SOTA must collaborate and continue to build relationships with all stakeholders: Superintendent's Team, elected Board, MTS, and government officials. At every encounter we must share the reality of our members workload; advocating for changes on behalf of members and students, and protecting public education.

2. What aspect of being on SOTA executive will you find rewarding?

The portfolio of SOTA Vice President is Professional Development and Member Services. Having chaired and participated on many committees with members in this role as SOTA Vice President, I have found it deeply rewarding to work alongside and facilitate for our members, even more so when I have been able to advocate on their behalf.

The position of Vice President is one of service, building relationships, and taking care of our members needs. Teachers often share that they don't feel that their voice is heard. Hearing members and amplifying their voices evokes pride and satisfaction. I find it rewarding to work with members; listening and advancing their ideas, while supporting and enabling them to gain what they need to continue to succeed at work.

I understand the struggle members have to maintain work-life balance. I would very much like to continue serving members.

Candidates for Member- At- Large

Lindsay Brown

1. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for SOTA Executive for the 2020/21 school year?

In my opinion, the top three priorities for the 2020/2021 SOTA Executive are:

- 1) Mental Health and Wellness Initiatives – I am keenly aware of the ways that rethinking our practice in order to best accommodate the “new normal” of education at a distance is taking a toll on the mental health of our members. As an Executive we will need to think creatively about how we can best provide resources and access to supports for members.
- 2) Collective Bargaining – It remains imperative to keep members abreast of updates regarding Collective Bargaining, particularly now that some divisions have embarked on the arbitration process. There will be many questions about what this means for SOTA members and we need to be there to address questions and concerns as they arise.
- 3) Member Engagement – Informing all members about the roles and responsibilities of SOTA and MTS is an important on-going project.

2. What committee(s) on SOTA Executive are you interested in and what experience can you bring to that committee(s)?

The committee that I hope to continue chairing is the Scholarship Selection Committee. The work of this committee is rewarding and, I believe, essential to supporting youth in their pursuit of a career in Education. Last year I facilitated the work of the committee as we made changes to SOTA bylaws in an attempt to provide more equitable access to the Scholarship. Our committee has grown exponentially over the past few years and I look forward to working with these folks again later this month.

I am also passionate about supporting the work of the Equity and Social Justice Committee. I am a member of the ESJ Standing Committee at MTS, meeting six times yearly with ESJ-minded folks from across the province. The relationship I have built with these members has given me an important perspective that I bring with me to our local committee.

Daniel Buchanan

1. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for SOTA Executive for the 2020/21 school year?

The top three priorities I see for the 2020/2021 school year (outside of the obvious, viral related concerns) would be collective bargaining, continuing to prepare as well as possible for the Education Review to be tabled, and to continue to organize and improve the events that SOTA organizes for our membership. Collective bargaining will continue to be extremely important in the next school year given the arbitration award that was given to LRSD, which will impact our negotiations with the board office. The Education Review will impact many aspects of our teaching and functioning, so we need to continue to prepare for that by attending MTS meetings and workshops. Finally, we have done such a great job with some of our events this year such as World Teacher Day, I would love the opportunity to continue to expand and improve on them next year.

2. What committee(s) on SOTA Executive are you interested in and what experience can you bring to that committee(s)?

I would say that all of the committees that SOTA forms are interesting in different ways whether it be working on justice and social welfare issues through the ESJ Committee or championing or members rights through the Economic Welfare Committee. The knowledge I would bring to any committee would be from my past experience of being the Chair of the Education Finance Committee, Chair of the Public Relations Committee, Chair of Equity and Social Justice Committee, and being a member of the Resolutions and Board/SOTA Advisory Committees. Further, my experiences with drafting and passing SOTA resolutions at MTS AGM as well as participating in the vigorous debate that occurs there and in our own Executive meetings will help develop and enhance the collaborative, goal-focused committees that we form as SOTA members.

Charlene Eckert

1. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for SOTA Executive for the 2020/21 school year?

We will see the release of the Education Review. There will invariably be outcomes that impact teachers in general. If there are amalgamations, Executives across the province will be looking to inform and involve their members.

The recent arbitration award to Louis Riel may lead to more contracts getting ratified in the near future. All provincial locals are up for renewal. While our table team will work hard, Executive helps to bring the needs and concerns of members to that team.

As we return to work in our classrooms from having been away there will no doubt be concerns about how to deal with recovery that may be required for some, or many, students, be they from an academic or mental health standpoint. Executive has monthly liaison meetings with the Division. These are opportunities for both parties to work collectively to find solutions as possible.

2. What committee(s) on SOTA Executive are you interested in and what experience can you bring to that committee(s)?

For the past 2 years I have been the Chair for Employee Benefits. I sought this position based on personal and professional interest. I believe that the combined interest perspective makes me more curious overall to ask pertinent questions thereby learning more. Seven Oaks administers its own Extended Benefits plan. As Chair, I attend meetings hosted by MTS and those just for Seven Oaks. These meetings review current statistics and look at factors impacting the plans. MTS events allow the opportunity to meet other Chairs, hear the needs of other locals, compare what the MTS plan offers and learn about our pension plan.

Last year I took an interest in Collective Bargaining. I attended two MTS sponsored seminars to learn bargaining models and principles. I enjoyed acting out team table bargaining and learning the contents of other Collective Agreements. It was eye-opening at times.

I hope to pursue both again.

Joanne Kosheluk

1. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for SOTA Executive for the 2020/21 school year?

1. Reaching out to Members to ensure that they are being supported through these challenging times of remote teaching and their transition back to in-school instruction. Also making sure that they understand the variety of supports available to us (EAP, online resources, etc.).
2. Getting information out quickly to all Members to ensure that they are informed about issues such as collective bargaining and the potential implications of the K-12 Education Review.
3. Increasing Member Engagement in all SOTA activities and creating initiatives that better suit the needs of our Members.

2. What committee(s) on SOTA Executive are you interested in and what experience can you bring to that committee(s)?

I am interested in continuing to be Chair of the Equity and Social Justice Committee in this upcoming year. I feel that my work on the Committee has just begun and I have enjoyed starting different ESJ initiatives within SOTA (MARL Presentation and the Terracycle 5 School Project). I would like to be able to continue to work on seeing Terracycle Project through, and find ways that more Members can become involved in this wonderful sustainability initiative.

I would also like to work on the Wellness Committee, helping to find ways to better support our Members, both in their physical and mental health wellness. I attended the MTS Wellness training seminar last year, and found collaborating with teachers from across the province very insightful, with each of us bringing our unique perspectives and challenges. The more that we can share our stories with one another, the stronger and more empathetic we become.

Jordan Laidlaw

1. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for SOTA Executive for the 2020/21 school year?

I believe the primary focuses of SOTA Executive for the 2020/2021 school year will be: (a) the social and economic implications of class suspensions; (b) the Manitoba Education Review; and (c) general ongoing business.

Regarding the class suspension, we must follow the directive of Manitoba health authorities. Should the government mandate the ongoing closure of schools, teachers must be supported to continue facilitating meaningful lessons with students. Further, upon the eventual re-opening of schools, we must ensure that safe working/learning conditions for teachers and students are established.

The class suspension has postponed the unveiling of the Manitoba Education Review. While the suggestions have not been publicly shared, SOTA will, understandably, be preoccupied navigating the social and structural revisions recommended.

Lastly, SOTA must continue to engage in its general ongoing business, whether through ensuring access to professional development, addressing issues related to equity and social justice, and ameliorating professional conflicts.

2. What committee(s) on SOTA Executive are you interested in and what experience can you bring to that committee(s)?

While there are a few projects I would be hopeful to be involved with as a part of SOTA Executive, I have a particular interest in being a part of the equity and social justice committee. Many staff and students are systemically disadvantaged based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and so forth. There is much work to be done to ameliorate such injustices.

Perhaps the most valuable perspective I may contribute to this committee would be through my graduate studies. My Ph.D. has investigated theoretical frameworks pertaining to social inequalities and dialogical strategies to negate such injustices.

I am fairly confident I may offer a unique perspective to other SOTA initiatives, as well. Notably, I would be honoured to support teachers' physical and emotional wellbeing. Teaching is a demanding profession; teachers need access to supports and must practice within a safe, nurturing working environment.

Lisa Meyers

1. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for SOTA Executive for the 2020/21 school year?

Communication – Clear, concise, and transparent communication with all levels is important now more than ever! We need to ensure open and regular communication with members, the board, MTS, and the province, where appropriate. These are uncertain times and members have questions that need to be heard and answered. We also need to be sure to make known who Seven Oaks teachers are, what we stand for, and what is most important to us.

Supporting Membership – Continuing to listen to their questions, needs, and concerns. Providing wellness opportunities and ensuring members feel heard, valued, and supported in these new and uncertain times.

Advocacy – Growth, equality, and change don't happen overnight. Through conversation, ideas are sparked but they take time to grow, develop, and be put into action. We need to ensure that these conversations continue to move forward to optimize their potential and to bring growth and equality for all members.

2. What committee(s) on SOTA Executive are you interested in and what experience can you bring to that committee(s)?

Over the past two years I have chaired the resolutions committee which looks at the policy and bylaws of MTS to see how we can continue to challenge, evolve, and grow as a society that represents teachers across the entire province. The first year came with a big learning curve as I had never chaired a committee of any kind before so I was looking forward to feeling more settled in my role as chair this year. Unfortunately, the world has been turned upside down and the lessons I learned the first year don't fully apply this year. I would like another opportunity to feel settled as resolutions committee chair.

I was also serving on the public relations and women in leadership committees this year for the first time and would like to continue my work with them as much of our planning was interrupted.

Julie Springer

1. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for SOTA executive for the 2020/21 school year?

This has been a very different end of the year and we don't know what next year brings. We likely will continue to be challenged with using new teaching practices and we don't know how the Education Review might impact us. As an association, however; we control the ways in which we support each other through trying times. I believe going forward our priorities should be: celebrating, continuing to build community and having a more intentional focus on the mental health of our members. I think all of these priorities are woven together in some aspects. While we are celebrating and building community, we can be supporting each other's mental health needs. Recently, I have talked to many people who are feeling very alone and that is not what we want for anyone. Our focus needs to be on building each other up and making our community even stronger.

2. What committee(s) on SOTA Executive are you interested in and what experience can you bring to that committee(s)?

I am very interested in the Indigenous Liaison and Wellness Committees. I was one of the co-chairs on the Indigenous Liaison Committee this year and I really enjoyed it. I am a graduate of the CATEP program and I have a post-bac in Indigenous knowledge. Being a part of Indigenous learning has been a journey for me to connect with who I am on a deeper level. For me, Indigenous perspectives are not just topics to teach, they are a part of who I am. The Wellness committee interests me because as I grow as a learner and teacher, I increasingly appreciate the importance of mental health specifically. I would love the opportunity to see how I can support and encourage our membership in all aspects of wellness. The only experience I can bring to this committee is an open mind, a caring heart and the desire to help others.

Elizabeth Walker

1. What do you see as the top 3 priorities for SOTA Executive for the 2020/21 school year?

What I believe that the top three priorities for SOTA Executive for the upcoming year are:

- 1.) Member engagement. Because of the climate with our current government, now is the time for members to become involved in order to work together to make sure that we retain what we have achieved in our province so far.
- 2.) Term Contracts. Moving forward I would like to see a more specifically defined section in our collective agreement that would be fair to all teachers new to the profession.
- 3.) Wellness for teachers. Again, with the current climate within our government in addition to what is going on throughout the world, educators are being put to the test. More supports need to be in place to ensure that we don't burnout. Teacher welfare is vital in order for us to be at our best for ourselves and our students.

2. What committee(s) on SOTA Executive are you interested in and what experience can you bring to that committee(s)?

The reason I became involved with SOTA is to help my colleagues if and when they need it. I am interested in Teacher Wellness because I see how stressed teachers can become. It is important for others to have someone to talk to and for them to be listened to. I have taken an extensive mental health counselling course to enable me to feel more comfortable responding to others. I believe that if teachers are well and feel supported, everything else gets taken care of in the schools.

I also have some experience on the Equity and Social Justice committee. With the diversity in all walks of life, it is critical for educators to have an understanding of the inequities that society is faced with. We all need to work at learning meaningful ways to promote and support equity and social justice in our schools.