

Health and Safety 2011-2012

YOUR JHSC OT REP

Hello and welcome to a wonderful year ahead as a teacher for the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board!

My name is Valerie Longo and I am your JHSC (Joint Health and Safety Committee) Occasional Teacher Representative for 2011/2012. It has been my pleasure to represent and serve you for the past three years. Two years ago, I completed the required courses and became an accredited WSIB (Workplace Safety and Insurance Board) member.

I have observed that in previous years, only a small number of members would approach me during our General Meetings or at different school locations to voice their concerns. As a Rep who continues to work in your best interests, I believe that this year, it would be more effective to formally introduce myself and to provide to you, my email address so that you may quickly convey all questions and/or concerns. Email is a quick, efficient and dependable tool. Unless I am away, I check it each day of the work week and usually respond before the end of the next working day. For any questions or concerns I do not have an immediate answer for, I will communicate that to you but will follow-up with whomever does have the answer. While representing our members for the last three years as an elementary school councillor as well as the JHSC Rep, I was readily available to address all issues. I plan to do the same as a fulltime JHSC Rep but now the focus will be on health and safety matters exclusively. I want to assure you that all information presented to me will remain confidential unless lives are at immediate risk.

As a fellow certified OT, who has taught with this board for 14 years, I can confidently say, with all the challenges of LTOs and daily occasional teaching, it is a splendid and rewarding way to teach. However, I am also aware that health and safety issues affect us, whether we are retired, career occasionals or those looking for fulltime positions just as much if not more than full-time staff. We may feel our voices and concerns are not important or not heard. We may even feel that we will be overlooked for LTOs, daily occasional positions or even fulltime positions if we “complain”. Well, this is the forum in which to be heard. They are *not* complaints; you are providing reports – of unsafe and/or unhealthy situations.

Situations that you might like me to bring to the table during our JHSC meetings could be anything from loose stair treads, paint fumes and mouldy odours to dangerous gym equipment (please note that all gym equipment with loose or missing pieces or any other problem is supposed to have a red tag on it however, such is not the case in all school gyms leaving the OT and his or her students at risk since some equipment dangers are not immediately visible). These are only a few examples of many. Do not hesitate to report *any* health and safety issues. I would need you to identify yourself (to confirm that you are a member of the DPCDSB), the school name and address, the date and if applicable, the time of the observed concern and a detailed description of the problem. Timing is everything though. The sooner it is reported to me the better chance we have of doing something positive about it.

The lack of provision of classroom keys continues to be an issue that we bring to the table at every meeting. It is reasonable to assume that if an intruder enters a school with a weapon, an unlocked door leaves not only the Occasional Teacher at risk, but also the lives of the children he or she is responsible for. I need to know what schools (primary and secondary) are giving keys out and those that are not. If some schools can provide keys, then why not all? We can only build a strong case with information to back us up and that information needs to come from you as I do not teach at every school board-wide. Perhaps photo ID is the answer with a key mechanism installed for OT's as well as full-time staff; the locking mechanism for OTs however, could be engaged and disengaged before and after each assignment (much like hotel key cards). Another possibility is leaving existing photo ID such as a driver's license at the school office and collecting it at the end of the assignment when the classroom key is returned. At this stage, simply put, we need data to present and logically back-up our argument.

Additionally, I understand that there are still schools, both primary and secondary, that lock their staff washrooms making it virtually impossible during time constraints to use the facilities. I need to know what schools are still doing this as this is unacceptable.

While taking my WSIB courses, many things stood out but one thing in particular really stood out. It was when our instructor told us, "ALL accidents are preventable". Impossible, I thought. Upon further discussion, it was pointed out that if *all* health and safety procedures were followed regarding machines and equipment, if *everyone* left enough time to complete a task and if *all* infractions were reported and dealt with immediately, there would not be any accidents. It is just that people, being people, like to take short cuts, they often do not leave enough time to complete tasks and do not necessarily report and/or correct problems immediately. Let's see if together, we can make some positive changes!

Please never, ever feel that by reporting an unsafe or unhealthy situation, it will affect your ability to find work or continue working. Providing health and safety issues to me not only gives you a voice, but may eventually help to improve our working environment and ultimately those of the students as well.

Our first JHSC meeting of this school year is on Thursday, September 29th. Please feel free to email me at valerie.longo.jhsc.ot.rep@gmail.com with any questions or concerns. I cannot promise I will have all the answers right away but I can promise to do my best to find answers for you and if necessary, bring the concern to the table for management (i.e. the School Board) and the workers (i.e. the teachers) to discuss and try to resolve.

One last reminder concerns the minutes of previous meetings. They are sent to every school and are to be posted in *all* staff rooms. Please let me know if you do not see them posted in the schools you work at.

Remember, where possible - prevention is everything!

May God bless you all and have a safe, healthy and happy school year!

Valerie Longo JHSC OT Rep