



NEWS

Catholic school board directors reflect on highs and lows of COVID-19

New PVNC education director Joan Carragher credits working with Michael Nasello, who retired Dec. 15, for setting positive groundwork to address pandemic priorities

By Catherine Whitnall Kawartha Lakes This Week

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Not many would say COVID-19 created “beautiful surprises.”

But that’s how Michael Nasello, who retired from his education director position with the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic School Board on Dec. 15, sees the impact the pandemic has had on education; at least partly.

“It’s led to so many opportunities to learn new skills and be more creative and innovative,” said Nasello, citing examples of “warm and engaging” graduation and retirement ceremonies, deeper connections between staff and parents, and being able to bring together thousands of young minds with the click of a mouse. “It’s meant learning how to meet in different ways and use time more effectively. We’ve been able to connect virtually in ways we couldn’t in person and creating new opportunities that may we never thought about before, or thought were even possible.”

Nasello considers his time with the board as a “wonderful gift.” He feels privileged to have served the Catholic school community for the last four years and appreciated the “trust given me by trustees, staff and our families”; especially during the pandemic.

“I’ve built so many strong relationships and there is such a great cohesion in this board. It made it easier to deal with the pandemic and not ever knowing what was around the next corner,” said Nasello.

This included assisting students who were isolated from peers and teachers in the early months of the pandemic, supporting those who struggled with online learning – both academically and financially – and the “lingering anxiety” of students and staff associated with returning to school amid a predicted second wave.

“But we’ve been fortunate to manage and move forward,” added Nasello.

The majority of high school students completed courses in the first quadmester, mental health supports are stronger than ever, and teachers have developed or enhanced intuitive skills; picking up on nuances of what students “are saying and what they’re not,” he said.

Nasello is also confident he’s left the board in good hands.

“I have been very fortunate to have worked with Michael for the last four and a half years,” said Joan Carragher, who has taken over the reins. “We’ve been working side by side on solutions since the beginning of all this.”

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Looking back, Carragher said the pandemic gravity hit home when retired board psychologist Dr. George Dimitroff died April 12 due to complications from COVID-19.

“I think that put a very real perspective on the seriousness of all this,” said Carragher, noting it’s a key reason why the board has made physical and mental health and safety a priority. “And we will continue to do so moving forward.”

Carragher added other matters of major focus include staffing, maintaining online resources and complying with public health directives.

“We know that we can get through this. We know it’s not going to change much from January to June ... but I’m hopeful that, with a vaccine now being made available, we may be able to return to something a little closer to normal by September.”

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