



Sandra Pupatello

Minister of Education

Interviewed by Nelly Kelders, Program and PQP Coordinator
Written by Carole Clune

Sandra Pupatello was sworn in as the Minister of Education on April 4, 2006. Previously the Minister of Community and Social Services, Minister Pupatello has been in the provincial legislature since the 1995 election.

Although new to her current portfolio, Sandra Pupatello is committed to excellence in education and is proud of her government's record in public education. "We are starting to see the results," she said commenting on recent improvements. "We need to tell the people our story."

A Windsorite, Sandra Pupatello maintains strong involvement in her home community. She received her early education at St. Angela Catholic Elementary School in Windsor and recently reconnected with the former principal of that school, Sr. Shirley McAuley. She also attended Kennedy High School where she was involved in a wide range of extracurricular activities. While attending Kennedy she participated in the Rotary Exchange Program which took her to South Africa. She spent a year at the University of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and won national colours in volleyball.

Sandra Pupatello's involvement with Rotary continued. She served as the general manager of the Rotary Club of Windsor while maintaining her affiliation with several other community organizations. She was president of the Fogolar Furlan Club of Windsor for two consecutive terms and was the executive director of the Essex County Kidney Foundation of Canada. In recognition of her community service, she was named an honorary member of the Rotary Club of Windsor. In addition, she is a Paul Harris Fellow and was named Italian of the Year (1996) in Windsor Essex County.

Sandra Pupatello first became interested in politics in secondary school, sparked by a visit by former Deputy Prime Minister Herb Gray, who represented the federal riding of Windsor West. She volunteered during his election campaign and developed a great admiration for him. In many respects he became a mentor and role model.

Another political figure whom Minister Pupatello admires is the late Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. She recalls attending Trudeau's funeral in Montreal and being struck that he "continued to thumb his nose at protocol even from the grave", as she watched the controversial Fidel Castro walking with Trudeau's family after the funeral mass.

In her dual portfolio as Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, Sandra Pupatello is encouraged by the number of women who are involved in education at the administrative level. She sees professional opportunities in education expanding. Due to attrition and retirements, many more teachers will be needed in the near future, as well as many more school administrators.

Political involvement does not occur naturally to most young women. Minister Pupatello credits such women as Lynn MacLeod and the late Judy LaMarsh for setting the groundwork and providing role models for female political candidates. Minister Pupatello has continued in this tradition by organizing a conference, Windsor Women in Politics, which is a non-partisan endeavour to which high school students are invited to listen to speakers such as political writer Shaugnessy Cohen. She proudly notes that some of these young people are currently employed in her office.

Minister Pupatello provided us with information about several current issues in education.

Teacher Performance Appraisal

The proposed changes to the Teacher Performance Appraisal legislation will be the first item for discussion when the Working Table on Teacher Development convenes in September, Minister Pupatello assured us. She pointed out that the provisions for dealing with the frequency and timing of appraisals for experienced teachers have been moved already from statute to regulation to allow for timely changes after consultation.

A Principal in Every School

The Ministry has recently introduced funding to provide for a principal in schools that have 50 or more students and funding for .5 of a principal in schools with fewer than 50 students. Minister Papatello pointed out, however, that even if boards use this funding exactly as allocated, twinning in some small schools across the province may still be necessary.

We will continue to rely on the judgement of boards to make decisions regarding twinned schools and teaching principals in areas where small school circumstances make them appropriate. It is our government's clear policy intent to ensure that funding is provided to boards so that all schools, regardless of size, can have an adequate administrative presence.

Peace and Stability

A high priority for the McGuinty government is to establish and maintain peace and stability throughout the education sector. The government will work with the education partners to ensure this happens. One of Minister Papatello's goals is to have a generation of students who do not know the meaning of "work to rule".

The Provincial Stability Commission was set up to review system-wide concerns that arise from the current collective agreements. The Catholic system did not sign on to the four year contract framework. The government has expressed its commitment to encourage the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association to discuss this further and to participate in such structures as the Provincial Stability Commission establishes, in order to deal with these issues.

The Role of the Principal

Sandra Papatello knows that principals are the single most significant school-related factor influencing students, after individual classroom teachers. This government sees the primary role of the principal as instructional leadership. "Effective leadership and guidance from a principal is critical to creating a positive learning environment for teachers and students in our schools," she said.

Supports are being provided to principals to assist them in focusing on instructional leadership. She gave some examples.

- The Ministry has streamlined the appraisal process for new teachers to reduce the amount of paperwork that is required.
- There is a pilot study of alternative school management models to learn best practices in reducing the administrative burden in order to support principals as instructional leaders.
- A Minister's Principal Reference Group has been established to bring expert opinion from the ranks on the role of the principal. The intent is to provide a strong voice for individual principals and vice-principals on issues related to schools.
- The Ministry has established the Institute for Education

Leadership to support leadership development for principals, supervisory officers and directors of education. Four million dollars have been provided to support the activities of the Institute in developing school and system leaders.

Student Supervision and Safe Schools

Another important issue for principals is the provision of suitable supervision for students in the light of increasing planning time for teachers in collective agreements. In many schools principals have been forced to reduce playground areas, close parts of facilities and undertake many hours of supervision themselves in order to provide adequate supervision.

Principals know that student safety and supervision are areas that cannot be compromised. The Ministry is looking at these and related issues in teachers' collective agreements. Recently the Ministry's Safe Schools Action Team has conducted a review of the *Safe Schools Act*, including its regulations and related policies and administrative practices. As part of this review, the team conducted broad public consultations in six communities and received about 100 written submissions from organizations, school boards



Minister Papatello meets with students

and individuals. Over 700 parents, teachers, students and other community members from across Ontario provided input. As a result of these consultations, the Safe Schools Action Team has recently provided a report called *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: an Agenda for Action*. The recommendations of this report are being studied this summer and a response is expected from the Ministry in the fall.

Anti-bullying

In an endeavour to eradicate bullying from schools, the Ministry is acting in partnership with the three principals' associations to develop materials for bullying prevention. Training is underway and will continue throughout the next school year. It covers the obligations of principals under the *Education Act* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. This training will include teacher instruction in the future.



In addition, a number of resources are available to schools, teachers, and administrators. They include \$1,500 for elementary schools and \$2,000 for secondary schools to support this program. A bullying registry and school climate surveys are available on the ministry website. The Ministry safe schools coordinator provides expertise and support to boards. Depending on the recommendations of the review of the *Safe Schools Act* additional training may be provided for administrators.

Retention and Building Capacity

A significant number of experienced principals will be retiring in the next few years. Administrative retention and succession planning are important concerns. The Ministry is working to retain Ontario’s experienced principals by providing professional supports and resources to meet the current challenges of educational leadership, starting with the assurance of respect within the educational community. “We are committed to restoring the respect principals deserve in the education system,” Papatello reiterated.

She pointed to the work of the Institute for Education Leadership:

We envision that the Institute will elevate the level of dialogue and understanding of leadership and effectively model the kind of collaborative leadership we want to see happening in schools and boards. The government has provided \$4 million to support leadership development of principals, supervisory officers and directors of education.

There will be many new principals in the system in the near future. The Ministry recognizes that supports are necessary to assist them in their role. Following on the commitment made in *Leading Education: New Supports for Principals and Vice-Principals in Ontario Publicly Funded Schools*, the Ministry is looking into how best to encourage and support the development of new principals in their first years.

In addition, consultations have been held on the development of a province-wide appraisal process for principals that will focus on professional growth. This process is particularly important for new school administrators. Discussions on this matter will continue with the Minister’s Principal Reference Group. A self-review tool for boards to assess their policies, procedures and approaches is currently being piloted. One aspect of this review tool is to capture a board’s approach to leadership training, activities that are in place to support this training, and practices that assist principals in building capacity as instructional leaders.

Transparency, Respect and Accountability

Papatello is proud to be the new minister of education working with the “Education Premier”. She pointed to the improvements that have been made by her government already to the education system, and particularly applauds the work of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat as a positive step in the direction of quality education.

In the future, she will build on these successes through multi-faceted approaches with transparency and respect as imperatives at all levels. Local decision-making is highly valued but must be predicated on accountability, she explained.

Minister Papatello understands that the role of the principal is complex and full of challenges. She has great confidence in Ontario’s principals who play such a critical role in meeting these challenges and is willing to provide the supports necessary to assist them. She is enthusiastic about the successes the system has achieved in recent years and optimistically looks to the future.



Sr. Shirley McAuley, former elementary principal and Minister Papatello at the steps of the Legislature