

November 23, 2006 Board Meeting

Student Trustee Report

At this time, Student Trustee J. Ferguson made the following remarks.

“Good evening, Mr. Chair, Mr. Director, Trustees, Staff, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Over the past several months, Kimberly and I have been fortunate enough to sit on both the Race Relations Advisory Committee and the Special Education Advisory Committee. As our experience has grown, the need for student committees becomes more relevant each day. As Stan Korolnek mentioned in his report to the Board – on behalf of Race Relations – there is great interest in the development of a Student Race Relations Advisory Committee. Kimberly and I are very interested and anxious about the creation of a Student Race Relations Committee. We have been approached numerous times by members of the York Region Presidents’ Council expressing their interest in Race Relations. One of our goals for the month of December is to gain some serious ground in the development of this committee.

Kimberly and I are also very interested in creating a program that allows students to get more involved with Special Education. Just as it is important to have students in Race Relations, we believe that it is essential that students in Special Education are able to express their opinions and voice their concerns. We believe that if students have a role in construction of their education they will be excited and motivated to learn.

On November 8th at a YRPC meeting, the South Asian Alliance made a presentation to student delegates from across the region. The South Asian Alliance - or SAA - was founded in 1999 by individuals from the University of Toronto Mississauga Campus, the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus, and York University. Over the years, this non-profit organization has grown, and in 2000, the University of Toronto St. George Campus, McMaster University and Ryerson University joined the alliance. In 1999 the South Asian Alliance had 600 members, today they have over 10,000.

The South Asian Alliance is an organization dedicated to not only preserving South Asian Cultures, but teaching others about South Asian culture, history and heritage. Last March, the South Asian Alliance held a Culture Show at the Hershey Centre with over 4000 people in attendance. The venue allowed University Students to “showcase their talent through creative themes, costumes, backdrops, and a unique combination of Eastern and Western Dance forms.” It not only allowed South Asians to celebrate their culture but also allowed other cultures to experience it first hand.

The South Asian Alliance came to the YRPC because they want to extend their reach to High School Students in the Greater Toronto Area through a program called "The Next Generation". They are hoping that this new program will make the transition from high school to university smoother for students.

I believe that the presentation by the South Asian Alliance really projected the demand for a Student Race Relations Advisory Committee in the York Region District School Board. The students are there and willing. Students do want to be involved with race relations, and they want to know how.

Last night, the YRPC held their annual Corporate Rotations, which is their biggest event of the year next to the Conference. At Corporate Rotations representatives from various organizations come to the YRPC and set up booths for school delegates and students from across the region. Students can then approach these companies and listen to the representatives talk about the services that their company provides. It's a win-win situation. Companies get to advertise to various student councils, while students have the opportunity to talk to these companies to see how their services can improve their school's spirit. The entire evening is tied together with a raffle draw, free samples, and a whole lot of fun.

In the raffle draw, some of the top prizes were; a YRPC sweater, a gift certificate for American Eagle, Starbucks mugs, two tickets to a Raptors game, and a trip to Quebec courtesy of Breakaway Tours. Some of the companies that attended YRPC Corporate Rotations included; Air Bounce, I Realize, Campus Hoodies, Needham Promotions, Breakaway Tours, Z103 Dance Tours, and the University of Waterloo. The event was a complete and total success. Kimberly and I cannot wait for the YRPC's next event, which will be a Public Skating Social expected to take place on December 2nd.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "I cannot live without books". On the 9th of this month, I attended a teacher training session at Prince Charles Public School for Kurzweil, a technological literacy development program. Kurzweil allows teachers to scan written text into itself; the program then displays the text on the screen while the student follows along as the program highlights each sentence and word as it reads the text out loud. This allows students to process text through two channels, visual and audio, instead of just one. In fact, this program allows teachers to enter audio sticky notes and footnotes into the scanned document. This allows teachers to insert question tabs into different parts of a text. If a teacher wants to insert a question after a particular paragraph all they have to do is insert an audio sticky note. Then once the student is done reading that particular paragraph the student clicks the question icon the teacher has entered and Kurzweil will read the content question to the student. The student can either answer the question by typing, or they can answer the question by leaving a voice message. Kurzweil has the capability to export just the questions and

answers that have been scattered throughout the scanned document into a word document. This allows the teacher to print off a sheet of just the questions and the student's answers. Teachers can even put their tests onto Kurzweil; it reads the questions and then all the students have to do is answer the questions. They hand the test in by saving the document to the teacher's computer drive.

The reaction of teachers to the program can be summed up in one word, "Wow!" I was amazed by the excitement displayed by the Principal of Prince Charles Public School - Steve Baber - and his staff. They were thrilled with the capabilities of the program and watched in amazement as they lined up behind a scanner to test it out for themselves.

Over the past several months, there has been one quote I have heard again and again and that is, "every student can learn". When I was at the training session one of the teachers told us about her experience with Kurzweil. She told us about a 12 year old severely learning disabled boy in her class that could not read. After eight years of schooling, he could not read, and he could not write. She then sat him down in front of Kurzweil. He listened, he read, and he followed along. After just ten minutes of being equipped with Kurzweil, he sat down on his own and at the age of twelve, he wrote his first sentence.

If we are to truly believe that every student is capable of learning, we must also believe that every student is capable of reading.

Thank you."