

December 4, 2006 Inaugural Board Meeting

Student Trustee Invocation

Director of Education B. Hogarth explained that the York Region District School Board has had Student Trustees for a number of years. The Board thought it would be most appropriate for the Student Trustees to deliver the Invocation this evening.

At this time, Student Trustee K. Hart delivered the following remarks.

“Good evening Mr. Chair, Mr. Director, staff, ladies and gentlemen, and an especially heartfelt welcome to our incoming Trustees.

It is a pleasure to be able to welcome each Trustee at the outset of their term, both seeing familiar faces and new colleagues I hope to come to know well over the next year. Jeff and I were in your position last April, and we know first-hand how exciting this time can be.

Today you join not a Board, but a family; a group of people so ardently dedicated to students that York Region has become one of the top school boards in Ontario. We are the third largest and fastest growing school board in Ontario, and serve over 100,000 students in upwards of 179 schools. Our diversity and character initiatives are setting new precedents and are quickly becoming model programs for other boards. Within a Board of such size and caliber, you have the ability to effect change on a grand scale. For, the great aim of education is not knowledge, but action. Both in our administration of it, and the act of learning itself, thoughts are most effective when made into actions.

This does not mean that it will always be easy; in anything worth doing there will be problems, or times of fatigue or self-doubt. But take these as an opportunity to draw off each other; the joy of this Board lies in the teamwork it requires to function, and the wide support system you have within it. As Jeff and I have found, your co-trustees will be an endless source of ideas, information and support.

I would like to share with you a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson, which says “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” Each and every person around this table has their own reason to be here. Whether we have a child in school, a teacher who inspired us or simply a passion for serving the community, we all have a motivating cause.

Motivation is the catalyst of all change. It is what drives us to action. As a student, every day I see my peers dedicating themselves to succeed in school, I see teachers wholeheartedly dedicated to what they do, and most notably I live

at least eight hours of my day, five days per week, within the walls of a York Region school. In that respect, Jeff and I are lucky to never be at a loss for inspiration.

For instance, in grade eight my best friend and I were walking around our school getting last-minute signatures on our year book. We stopped by the principal's office, and as he signed our books, he asked us how we felt about leaving elementary school for high school. It turned out my friend was, in fact, quite nervous and suddenly broke down crying. Instead of sending her back to her teacher, or sending me off to console her, he brought out a plate of cookies and a box of tissues. For more than an hour, we sat in that office talking about our memories, fears and futures. It was nearing the last few days of school, and I am sure our principal had places to be and things to do, yet he stayed to comfort two distraught 13 year olds. As I grew older, I realized just how significant this was, and how much he must have truly cared for his students. His genuine concern for others was a personal motivation for me, and is one of the reasons I sit before you today.

Regardless of what has brought each of us to this point, we sit here now ready to better education, and in doing so better the future. We may come from broad backgrounds and even broader motivations, but we unite in our purpose. For the over 100,000 York Region students, we are responsible for preparing them to first enter the world, then to run the world.

The best advice I can offer at this point is to keep that fire alive. Never lose that passion, never lose sight of the reasons that have brought you to this table today, and above all do not forget our ultimate goal of helping students succeed.”

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

“Hello and good evening. Nelson Mandela once said, “After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb”.

In grade one, I was diagnosed with a severe learning disability; one which I still struggle with today. In elementary school, my grades were below average and I did not know if I would even be able to survive high school. But in grade nine, something happened that changed my life forever. It allowed me to focus, overcome obstacles, and achieve goals. It not only allowed me to survive in high school, but it allowed me to graduate as an Ontario Scholar. Many students ask me what changed, what allowed me to go from being “disabled” to successful. The answer is simple. It is one thing. I acquired a “fight”. A “fight” is quite simply a goal. It is the reason why you get out of bed in the morning, the reason why one is dedicated to their goal; your “fight” is what gives your life direction, where your purpose and your passion meet; because without passion, purpose cannot exist.

In grade nine, I decided that I was going to change the way administrators thought about students in Special Education; that is my goal, that is my passion, therefore, that is my “fight”. I do well in school because every good grade I receive brings me closer to my goal. Every time I succeed I give other learning disabled students around me hope that they too can succeed.

Tonight I come before you to pose a question. What’s your “fight”? Why are you passionate about education? What changes do you dream of making? I ask this question because in our “fight” lays the key that unlocks the door to success. When you have purpose, obstacles become opportunities, problems become puzzles and dreams become reality.

Tonight you enter not just a school board, but a family dedicated to student achievement. A Board dedicated to providing any and all tools necessary to allow students to succeed. Congratulations to you all, to those who have sat around this table before and to those who are new. Kimberly and I look forward to working with all of you.

I remember the feeling of sitting in my first Board meeting; half excited, and half scared. Over the past few months, you have all climbed a great hill, and you have all achieved a great goal.

York Region is truly an amazing Board. Tonight you are surrounded by people who have dedicated their lives and careers to a common goal. We believe in our students’ success, dreams and goals. If my teachers had not believed in me I would not be standing here before you today.

So on this day, I invite you to search your dreams. Dream of the future, but not at the expense of the present; dream of the present with a goal for the future in mind. What is your “fight”? What is your passion? Walt Disney once said, “If you can dream it, you can do it.” So how can we as educators help students find their passions, their “fights”, and their goals?

Thank you.”