

July Student Trustee Report
Jeff Ferguson and Kimberly Hart

STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT

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

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

Tonight will mark the last report I give to the Board. This comes at a time of great reflection in my life, where I’ve finished countless years of schooling and reached the end of my time in public education.

It is difficult to give my farewells, as this Board has become so much a part of me over the past year. As a student, the majority of my time is already captured by classes, homework and extra-curricular activities. Being able to dialogue with trustees and administrators in addition to that has no doubt made this a year where I have lived and breathed education and what a breath of fresh air it was. Your dedication to the success of students is noted and greatly appreciated. Many of you are not just administrators, but parents and active community members. You hold a genuine desire for student success, and by this alone I know the Board is heading in the right direction.

I have seen many positive steps taken over the course of my term. The increased participation of student trustees on Board committees is one. Jeff and I were able to participate openly in discussions about issues and policies within the Board. By discussing our views at these early stages, we became well-versed with and content with the outcomes by the time they reached the Board table.

Communication was one of our largest areas of attention. We are pleased to have extended the scope of involvement of student trustees with the York Region Presidents’ Council. One way in which we have achieved this is by lengthening the student trustee update and providing packages for representatives to take back to their respective student councils. By extending the chain of information, we can make a greater number of students more knowledgeable about their education and the system which supports it.

We have also extended communication to include more community partners. I was able to work closely with the Vaughan City Youth Councilor over the latter part of my term to discuss how to better engage youth. I hope this partnership grows to include many, if not all municipalities in York Region as many towns have similar youth-led advocacy programs. This seems like a logical continuation, as student trustees are already involved in student organizations such as the York Region Presidents’ Council, York Region Student Athletic Council and Ontario Student Trustees’ Association. Each of these affiliations gives us the opportunity to dialogue with students and act on issues that are

relevant to youth today. From the numerous positive experiences I've taken away from these groups this year, I can only encourage more networking with the student groups in York Region. Ultimately, the more students we are able to reach, the more effectively we can represent them.

I have learned many things over the past year. One of the biggest challenges has been realizing the time and effort that must go into making a change. As a large Board with over 110,000 students, hundreds of thousands of community members and many other stakeholders in education, reaching a consensus is no simple task.

Progress takes time and student trustees in particular have to heed this since we have a relatively short term in order to make change.

In this, we look to our incoming student trustees to build on our wisdom, add their own experiences and define the time they spend during their term as they see fit. We accomplish this through communication and the overlap between their elections and the conclusion of our term. During this time period, Jeff and I were able to share our knowledge, thoughts and ideas about our term as student trustee. By having this open dialogue, I hope to lessen the daunting learning curve that each incoming student trustees faces in September. This also helps to create greater continuity in the student trustee position, as initiatives are passed on with time to gain greater momentum.

I have already had the pleasure of meeting with the two incoming student trustees and know they will serve their peers, the Board and their community well during their term.

To the trustees who are serving their second, third or more term on this Board, thank you for your contribution to public education. Your decisions have no doubt played a role in forming who I am today. To trustees serving their first term, the policies you consider and the motions you pass truly do impact the lives of tens of thousands of students. It is a great responsibility but I have no doubt that countless students will benefit from the decisions you make over your term.

To all trustees, superintendents and administrators, your enthusiasm and readiness to help at all stages of education have been greatly appreciated. It has been a pleasure to serve this term as student trustee.

For the final time, thank you for your time this evening."

Student Trustee J. Ferguson continued with the following remarks.

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

If you were to look back in time on my life, about five to six years to be exact, you would see a very different person than the one that speaks before you this evening. To say the same in a blunter manner, when teachers saw my name on their teaching lists back in grades 2 through 8, jumping for joy wasn't exactly their first reaction. In fact, I believe that I still hold the Crossland Public School record for getting sent to the office within so many minutes of the opening bell ringing on the first day of school.

I can remember when I was in elementary school, if you did something wrong, you had to fill out something called an action plan. If you were to go into the principal's office when I was in Grade 6, you would see many books and binders and if you were to look on the right shelf you would see a black three inch binder. This binder was labeled 'Action Plans' and contained every action plan filled out by any student at any particular time for the entire school. Just to give you an idea how much time I spent in my principal's office, the action plan binder was organized by grade and not only did the size of my section blow other grades out of the water, but it rivaled the other divisions.

During my term as Student Trustee, I had the privilege of attending a Gala at which Director of Education Bill Hogarth was honored as educator of the year. As many of you know through attending this event, Premier of Ontario Dalton McGuinty gave a short address. He referenced a story about a student that was once told to him by a math teacher. At this teacher's school many students were flunking mathematics and after a couple of years, the math department at his school finally decided to create an 'Extra Help Centre' for the many students who couldn't cope. About a year or so after the Help Center's creation, the teacher was approached by one of the students. The student said, "I'd just like to thank you for all the extra time and effort you've put into helping struggling students such as myself succeed. I can't imagine what I'd ever do without it." The teacher replied, "Well it's good to hear this is helping. Isn't it hard to believe that it didn't exist last year?" The student turned to the teacher with a look of confusion, wondering how such a resource couldn't have existed before their time and after a moment of deep thought the student looked up at the teacher and said, "So you're saying that before you just let us fail".

The first time I heard this story I was left spellbound. It's amazing how much clearer a picture looks when you actually see it clearly and as many of you know, sometimes students do the best job of cleaning the lens through which we see.

I wanted to retell that story because it explains why this Board has grown to be so close to my heart.

No matter how many good reasons I gave my principals, vice-principals, and teachers to give up on me, they never did. No matter how hard things got, they refused to let me fail and no matter how many hours I spent in the principal's office, every time before I left I was told the same thing, "Jeff, you're not a bad

person, you just making bad decisions, but don't worry you'll get through this. We believe in you." Even the secretaries would say those exact words to me as I left the office because they wanted to make sure that I knew that they believed in me too. In fact, I spent so much time in the office the secretaries, principals, and I became rather good friends. Of all the principals that helped me believe that I could succeed two of them rise far above the rest. The first is Steve Young, or as I called him "Sparky". Sparky had a way of connecting with students unlike any other. Over the time I knew him, he acted as not only a role model but as a mentor who changed the way I approached and solved problems. Of all the things he did for me nothing compares to what he did for me in grade seven. He convinced me to go to a place called Arts Camp!

The second principal was Val Taylor. Although she only stood a few inches above or below five feet tall, when a group of thirteen year-old boys were brawling outside, and male teachers were diving under desks for cover, Val would march out to the brawl and with the twist of her finger, have a line of six thirteen year-old boys with their heads down following her back to her office.

After the many hours I spent sitting in her office, Val and I became great friends. Regardless of what I did, or how frustrated she was with me for doing it, she always made sure that I left her office with a smile on my face.

It was almost as if Sparky and Ms. Taylor knew what I was capable of and they believed that it was only a matter of time until I unleashed it. Nevertheless, they are two people that changed my life forever.

In grade seven I went to Arts Camp and met another man that would end up changing my life as well; the Director of Arts Camp, Frank Smith. Just as soon as Sparky and Val Taylor had finished straightening me out, Frank Smith taught me how to take my experiences and use them in a leadership capacity to help other students. If I had to sum up Frank Smith in one word, only word that comes close enough to suffice and that is "legend".

But of all the people that have touched my life, one teacher cannot even be compared to the rest. York Region may have its monthly North Star, but this teacher embodies so much more. If I had to give this teacher an award, I wouldn't call it the North Star, I would call it "the Sun". Her name is Janice Sadler. I am deeply honored and forever grateful that I had the privilege to have one of your teachers as a Mom. When she wasn't at school saving the livelihood of the Special Education students in her classroom, she was at home saving mine.

Whether it was my Mom teaching me how to cope with my learning disability, staying up until the small hours of the night in the basement learning studying techniques, or the love and support my step-Dad and sister provided, I could always depend on my family.

Over the past year, I have had the honor and privilege of being a part of this Board. I have had the opportunity to do things I never thought I'd be able to do, and go places I never dreamed I'd be able to go. Above all, I have been fortunate enough to meet a group of people who are deeply passionate about kids. As a trustee I have come to recognize the Board of Trustees as not just a group of colleagues, but a family in which I have been invited to belong. For that I thank you. I would like to thank Bill Crothers, a man who has been the Chair of the Board for the past fourteen years, for his wisdom, inclusion and leadership. I would like to thank senior staff for allowing the position of student trustee to flourish and making Kimberly and I feel right at home.

Of all the staff members that worked to ensure our success, none worked harder than Manager, Trustee Services Lori Barnes and her administrative team. I think I speak for all of us when I say, thank you Lori.

Above all, I would like to thank Bill Hogarth, for his leadership, direction, and dedication to ensuring that every student in this Board receives the best education possible. I was once told that the greatest honor for a teacher is knowing that they've made a difference in a student's life. I would like you to know that you've made a difference in mine, and for that I thank you.

So thank you to all. Thank you for changing the lives of tens of thousands of students everyday. Although I'm not sure what kind of endeavors I'll find myself on in the future, I promise that I won't let you down.

Thank you."