

January Student Trustee Reports

Sepideh Soltaninia

STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT

At this time, Student Trustee J. Serdetchnaia made the following remarks on behalf of Student Trustee S. Soltaninia.

“Good evening Madame Chair, trustees, superintendents, ladies and gentleman.

January is a strange month for students. The New Year is a fresh start where we can ponder goals and plans for the future; however, one must not ponder for too long as January also signifies the end of a semester and the beginning of exams. For many students, especially those in grade twelve, exams are a really stressful time filled with feelings of anxiety towards the future.

It is also this time that many grade twelve students begin to examine their grades and sometimes evaluate their pitfalls. Traditionally, a student who has not failed a course but is dissatisfied with their mark would remain dissatisfied, repeat the course at summer school or night school or even remain for an extra semester to upgrade. Now an increasing number of students are turning to private education for a fresh start. Students are not transferring from public schools to private ones, rather they are spending their weeknights or weekends at small private schools that have been authorized by the Ministry to grant credits.

Although this venture appears innocent, it has presented several problems for students, teachers, and for public education.

Many students taking these private classes are benefiting greatly from the smaller class sizes and the extra attention. Almost all the students and guidance counsellors I have spoken to have also heard of mark inflation happening at some of these schools and of students simply paying for their marks. I would like to stress that many of these schools are legitimate institutions and that many students attending these private facilities conduct research before they attend to ensure its authenticity. Nonetheless, there seems to be some schools that engage in mark inflation and without further supervision, the possibility of more such schools appearing is high. A problem this presents is that the diploma students receive is from a York Region District School Board high school and that only the mark and credit of a specific course is from a private high school. Thus, some students and guidance councillors worry that universities might not realize that the credit itself is not from a York Region District School Board school and that students, whose marks may be inflated, may be compared amongst students from the same school. Schools are giving diplomas based on credits over which they have no control or supervision.

I believe that the existence of such private schools can be used as a learning tool for public education. Personally, it was extremely easy for me to find several students in my own circle of friends who were attending such schools. I believe that we, as a board, should examine these schools and reflect on why students are attending them. Public education is meant to be public and dissatisfied students should not feel that their only option is to pay for education. In speaking to the private schools themselves, I found that even they cited small class sizes as the main reason why students are attending their schools. One private school told me that if classes in public schools were smaller, she would certainly see a decrease in students. With the growing population, I understand that smaller classrooms may be difficult to come by; however, it is the personalized, one-to-one attention which smaller classes foster that I believe should be more greatly incorporated in York Region classrooms. Also, summer school and especially night school classes should be more accessible and available to students so that they can receive credits they need from a public, York Region District School Board institution.

As a board, we should consult our guidance councillors to see what problems they encounter regarding this topic and what they believe should be done. They are the experts on such issues and their knowledge is extremely valuable. In addition, we should speak to the Ministry and ensure that these private schools are monitored and that they are correctly and lawfully issuing credits. Most importantly, we should ensure that our schools meet the needs of students so that students can rely on the public, and not the private, system.

Thank you”.