

## **March Student Trustee Reports**

Sepideh Soltaninia

### **STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT**

At this time, Student Trustee S. Soltaninia made the following remarks.

*“Good evening Madame Chair, Mr. Director, trustees, superintendents, ladies and gentlemen.*

*March has been a very busy month. Amongst the bustle of homework, snow storms, and holidays I found that a lot of what both Jen and I dedicated our time to had a common theme of character development.*

*I must say, before this month I was one of the biggest character development skeptics. I distinctly remember walking past posters wondering why the Board was trying to make me value optimism or courage. I doubted that, amongst an environment of student academic achievement, character really did matter. In elementary school, I snickered at Honesty Lane and tuned out when I was reminded to be fair and empathetic, to take initiative, be respectful, and learn to persevere. To be honest, I felt that character development was smiling posters and the preaching of something intangible and immeasurable. At the end of the day, it was much easier to learn math or study history.*

*One specific memory stands out in my mind when it comes to character development. Last year, in my philosophy class, my teacher handed out a piece of paper containing ten words which were instantly recognizable. In a classroom where we questioned our existence daily and learned about parallel universes, where my teacher had a Ph.D, here again was I presented with the same, what I believed to be trivial, ten words that I saw back in elementary school. However, that class shed some light on how philosophical character development really is. How difficult it is to teach without preaching, how its intangibility poses significant problems, and most importantly should it be valued in a school system?*

*This month, Jen and I began working on the Character Award, an idea that presented itself two years ago at this very table by the then Student Trustees. Our task was to define the criteria, the process, the application and nomination form for this award. Given almost total freedom to ask what we saw fit and to define our person with character, Jen and I embarked on what, I did not know at the time, would be an attitude altering initiative.*

*I thought that the process would be easy, that I had a clear image of a person with character in my mind and that they could effortlessly be identified. That was before I met Steve Rensink and Gunter Meyer. Thanks to these two Character Matters Facilitators, I was introduced into the world of character development, its history, its process, its initiatives and most importantly its significance. I began to question that person in my mind, began to ask myself if character was shown*

*through actions such as extracurricular activities or through daily deeds such as helping others, being courteous and polite. I wondered how we could truly judge a person with character based on what they said about themselves and realized the value of what others thought also. As a group, Jen, Steve, Gunter, and I even questioned the position of happiness in our lives; its significance, the value we give it in society, how important is it to a person with character to be happy and to pursue a life of personal fulfillment while still being selfless and empathetic. In the end, I found myself in one big philosophical argument with myself, constantly changing and moulding that one concrete image in my mind. I cannot express how helpful and knowledgeable both Steve and Gunter have been. Their dedication to character development, their passion, and their commitment is unprecedented. There are no two people more fitting to run the Character Matters program.*

*This entire process has been a very important learning experience which will stay with me long after my term as Student Trustee. I realize now that there is no better place than a school to teach about character and to recognize those that exemplify it. We must be careful not to preach it or to force feed it to our students, but to illustrate it through what we do, what we say, and how we act as a Board. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to help create this award which you will hear more about in the near future and hopefully see handed out at the graduation ceremonies in June.*

*Thanks to hardworking individuals like Steve and Gunter, I can say that I am a character development convert, a believer in the value of preparing and teaching individuals who think both intellectually and ethically.*

*Thank you".*