

April Student Trustee Reports

Sepideh Soltaninia

STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT

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

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

Since the beginning of this year, I have heard a seemingly magical word repeated over and over again. This word is usually said in one of two ways: as a secret quietly uttered under one’s breath, taken back almost as quickly as it is given; or as an exclamation ringing out with barely contained excitement. So what is this word? Ladies and gentlemen, I am talking about “conference”.

In September, I joined the York Region Presidents’ Council (YRPC) as the incoming student trustee. As the only member of the executive who had not experienced “conference”, I was constantly mystified by the emotion that other members felt at the mere mention of the word. An annual leadership-building event held in late spring, the York Region Presidents’ Council Conference invites about one hundred and fifty students from York Region schools to attend an extended weekend at a camp north of the region.

Throughout the planning process that began at the beginning of the school year, the other members of the executive were careful to keep me in the dark about the details of “conference”. They wanted me to have a first-hand experience as a delegate. I was promised a weekend that would pry my eyes open to opportunities I had never imagined and of making lifelong friends.

Needless to say, I was somewhat skeptical. After all, I am a grade twelve student and I’ve been to countless conventions, conferences, workshops and so on. How would this one be any different?

On Thursday, April 3rd, this was my question as I was plunged headfirst into the world of “conference”. By Sunday, April 6th, I had my answer because the 2008 YRPC conference had made good on its promises.

The conference attacked leadership from three perspectives: reflecting on who we are and the leaders we are right now; connecting with the people around us to put leadership into action; and planning leadership for the future.

There were several rules at the conference, one of which was; you are “conference” years old. Grades and ages are temporarily suspended for the weekend. Delegates are placed in groups of about twelve, each led by a student skill-builder through numerous exercises. Throughout the weekend, I became comfortable enough with my delegate group to share some of my innermost thoughts and private experiences with them.

At the same time, one of the most important aspects of “conference” was to focus on life beyond “conference”. “True leadership isn’t to attend a leadership conference. True leadership is to go out there and do something,” said motivational speaker Stu Saunders. Giving back was a recurring theme. Over and over, we were reminded that we ourselves are the most important thing that we can give back. We need to apply what we learn to serve and help others.

This leads into what impressed me most about “conference”, that it is not a weekend, it is a lifestyle. We were reminded of the value of care and optimism and the importance of taking initiative and finding our passions. These are reminders that any person, student or adult, grade nine or grade twelve, athletic or academic or both, can benefit from.

I am happy to say that I am now one of those people constantly repeating that special word in a whisper of barely contained excitement, “conference”.

Thank you”.