

**December 3, 2007 Inaugural Board Meeting**  
**Student Trustee Invocation**  
J. Serdetchnaia and S. Soltaninia

**INVOCATION**

Student Trustee S. Soltaninia made the following comments.

*"We have reached an important point in the year. For Jen and I, this time serves as the approximate midway of our one-year term. For all of us, today is a time of reflection, where we can look back at what we have accomplished and re-evaluate our goals for the future.*

*Throughout the past months, I have maintained that students are the most important stakeholders in education. Although this statement is still true, I have realized that students are only part of the equation. Another vital part of the school system is its trustees. Some of you have completed your first year as trustee, others close to your 20<sup>th</sup>. But I urge you, no matter how long you serve on this Board, consider first the best interests of students. Remember that you are in a position to make changes and impact lives.*

*At a time of reflection, like this one, I think of what this Board stands for. Its mission statement and various initiatives have surrounded me for the past ten years. I have opened countless agendas, walked through several responsibility lanes, and read many posters; however, only this year, my last in public education, have I become truly aware of the various aspects of the Board.*

*Today, I hope that you will examine your role at the Board against a model that we are all familiar with. We remind our students often that "Character Matters", but we must also practice this ideology. Although all ten of the character traits are important, there is one which, in my opinion, is the most relevant; empathy. Whenever you visit a school, read a policy, or vote on an issue, place yourself in the shoes of a student. It is my complete belief that only as a student does one truly see the flaws and successes of this Board.*

*Lastly, throughout your term here I encourage you to be ambitious. It is easy to lose motivation and become immersed in meetings and responsibilities; however, remember that none of the achievements of this Board would have been possible without the decisions made at this table. Remain motivated and determined to impact the lives of York Region students.*

*I would like to end with a passage that I first found in my journey to becoming Student Trustee. It's author is not known, but it sits in my York Region Presidents' Council Conference Manual and serves as source of encouragement.*

*“We do not choose to be born. We do not choose our parents. We do not choose our historical era, or the country of our birth, or the immediate circumstances of our upbringing. We do not, most of us, choose to die, nor do we choose the time or conditions of our death. However...*

*We decide what is important and what is trivial in life. We decide what we want to invest our time and energy in to, and which path to travel. We choose the goals that we want to pursue with every last bit of our heart and soul, and we choose what we leave on the backburner.*

*It is the manner in which we go about making decisions in our lives that acts as the sculpting tool for the person we are.”*

Student Trustee J. Serdetchnaia continued by making the following remarks.

*“We sit here today with a shared passion and a common goal. Our goal is the development of education in York Region and the improvement of the learning system as a whole. We may not be striving toward this goal for uniform reasons. Some of us want to improve the educational system to benefit our children and our children’s children. Others strive to enhance our daily reality, whether in the role of the student, teacher, administrator or staff. In the end, all of us hope to achieve a better society through education.*

*I think at this point the status quo calls for a quotation and so I will conform. American author Elbert Hubbard once said, “It is a fine thing to have ability, but the ability to discover ability in others is the true test.” In my opinion, the indicator of a true educator, the educator indicator, is his or her capability to encourage each child to find his or her true talents.*

*Fortunately for me, a student in the system, I have had a number of teachers who have been exemplary with the educator indicator.*

*To start with, I have an appreciation for the marvellous educational system in Canada. Living in Russia for the first nine years of my life, I experienced quite a different approach to educating youth. From an early age, each student is almost given just one path to follow, since the Russian educational system is concentrated on mathematics and the sciences. Had I not had the opportunity to enter a Canadian school after immigrating in 1999, I don’t believe I would have developed the same kinds of literacy and communication skills that I have today.*

*Immigrating to a new country is never easy. It means learning a new language, adapting to a new culture and adjusting to a new environment. Many children in the Canadian education system are faced with this very challenge. With all of the obstacles, it may be easy to feel lost in school and even alienated at first. In fact, it could be the teacher that the student is assigned to that makes all of the difference.*

*When I moved to Canada at the end of my third grade year, I was lucky to be in the class of a very encouraging teacher. I was shy and afraid to socialize with the other kids. My teacher identified this and attempted to draw me out of my shell by encouraging me to participate in class. In addition, I felt homesick for Russia, which my teacher mediated by asking me questions about my home. Overall, my grade three teacher was able to identify my capabilities among all of the challenges I was facing as a newly-immigrated student.*

*I can also say that my eyes were first opened to my potential when I was in sixth grade. Again, it was a teacher that helped me to recognize future possibilities. For example, I had always liked to write. In the sixth grade, it was my teacher who, for the first time, labeled my interest a talent. He encouraged me to enter contests and try to get published. I have followed his advice with successful results.*

*Not only is the educational system meant to inspire students that already do well, but it is also meant to support those who do not. I greatly admire teachers that have a keen interest in helping students adapt to the educational system and find their own niche within.*

*So we sit here today for the sake of the people involved in education. Together we will make decisions that will benefit all parties in education. Together we will improve the system. Together we can do it if we are passionate about happier students today and look forward to a brighter future tomorrow."*