

**7 December, 2012**

**Dear Friends of Willowdale Schools,**

This has been something of a roller coaster week for trustees and staff, and certainly the parents, and especially the students of the TDSB. There are three issues I particularly wanted to highlight for you:

### **1) Labour Update**

The situation in regards to negotiations between the TDSB and its five labour union locals and between the province and the provincial union leaders is evolving by the minute. Education Minister Laurel Broten announced yesterday that one-day strike walkouts by the elementary teachers' union locals will be permitted provided 5 days notice is given to families prior to such walkouts. If, however, the walkouts last longer than one day, Minister Broten says that the province will "re-evaluate" the situation and that she has all the necessary legislation already in place to end any strike action that "puts student success and safety at risk." The elementary teachers' local in Toronto will be in a strike position on Monday, December 10th. Their union had already said that they would give 3 days notice prior to walking out. Whether the Minister or the unions will prevail with respect to timelines remains to be seen. As far as I know, there has not been discussion of notice with OSSTF.

The TDSB is regularly updating strike and labour situation information on its website: [http://www.tdsb.on.ca/\\_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=10639&menuid=41024&pageid=34390](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=10639&menuid=41024&pageid=34390).

You can also expect to hear through your school, through the Board's Twitter account: @tdsb and through this e-newsletter of further developments. I would suspect the media may also report on this matter as well. In addition, I would recommend the People for Education website as a good place to learn more about what is going on: <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/>

### **2) Deep Operational Review**

Last June, the Board had to make very tough decisions indeed in order to cut \$110 million from its budget and balance the operating budget for 2012-2013. Part of the cuts were a commitment to find \$10 million in savings through improved efficiencies and Board processes. The Ministry of Education offered to send a team from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) to evaluate and make recommendations to the Board on how to find these savings. The Board welcomed this support from the Ministry and the report was received, first by the Ministry. Last week, the Board finally had a chance to see a summary of this report and yesterday the trustees finally got to see the full 70 page report and meet with the PWC team to ask questions. There was a lot to take in. The report (not, it was made clear, an audit, but just relying on information supplied by staff) suggested a number of efficiencies that might be found and savings that could be made in the TDSB's operations and financial management. I would say from observing the reactions in the room that trustees are appreciative of many of the recommendations and glad to work further with staff on putting in place measures to better track activity, improve accountability and reporting, streamline reporting structures and achieve savings in purchasing practices. There is

a sobering amount of work to do. Interestingly, though, the report did not at all acknowledge that the TDSB had already begun work on quite a number of the recommendations prior to the report.

Unfortunately, the PWC team did not seem to be aware when writing the report of the constraints placed on us by collective agreements, which will certainly make achieving a large part of their recommendations regarding reductions to staff or outsourcing challenging to accomplish within the timelines they suggested.

Unfortunately as well, they repeatedly indicated that we should stop doing anything that is not part of our "core mandate" or does not meet Ministry "benchmarks." This is particularly problematic because, if the TDSB were to go by the "core mandate" as set out by the province's funding formula, there are a lot of things that are a part of Toronto education that would not be covered. Swimming pools for one. Adult education. Breakfast programs. Our partnerships with Me to We, Future Aces and Roots of Empathy. As for "benchmarks," the report writers advocated that we should stick to the Ministry's benchmark for building costs. Of course, this benchmark of cost per square foot for new construction was calculated by averaging construction costs across Ontario. Would that any of us who were trying to build in Toronto could get prices closer to those available in North Bay. But, more interestingly still, the PWC report recommends we use modular units (somewhat like upgraded portables) to add onto schools in Toronto. They did not seem to be aware that even these modular units exceed the square footage cost of the Ministry's benchmark.

The other odd thing about the report is that many, many of the recommendations, in order to be accomplished, would require substantial IT investment and the bringing in of outside experts (also a large investment). Curiously, there was no attempt to look at our IT department to see what condition it is in or to help quantify the extent of what would need to be accomplished to upgrade our IT, which, as one of the PWC consultants said, is the "foundation of modern business" practice. And there was no attempt to consider how much these costs would detract from the supposed savings we are to make from now until 2015.

To read the full report, go to:

[http://www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/about\\_us/deep\\_operational\\_review/docs/TDSBResourceAllocationReviewReport-FINAL\\_NOV\\_27\\_2012.pdf](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/about_us/deep_operational_review/docs/TDSBResourceAllocationReviewReport-FINAL_NOV_27_2012.pdf)

### **3) Facility Services Update**

One area of the TDSB services that has been particularly criticized, both in the PWC report and in the media is the Facility Services Department. The Department, under new head Angelos Bacopoulos, who was brought in last year, has been taking action to increase oversight and management of staff and the accountability and efficiency of its services. It has been made clear that small jobs can now be completed by onsite caretakers and new monthly audits flag strange work orders. For more information, go to:

[http://www.tdsb.on.ca/boardroom/bd\\_agenda/uploads/Jul\\_11\\_2012/Operations\\_and\\_Facilities\\_Management\\_Committee\\_%28Special\\_Meeting%29/120711\\_Facility\\_Accountability.pdf](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/boardroom/bd_agenda/uploads/Jul_11_2012/Operations_and_Facilities_Management_Committee_%28Special_Meeting%29/120711_Facility_Accountability.pdf)

#### **4) Why do we have jobs without people and people without jobs?**

The future of student well-being was explored at our ward meeting on November 29<sup>th</sup>. First, Mr. Emil Boychuk presented the "Perfect Talent Storm," a metaphor for what is currently happening in the current and future job market. The presentation is attached, which includes some excellent resources for further reading. Note in particular the book "The Decade after High School: A Parent's Guide," which can be downloaded from the site for the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC): [www.ceric.ca](http://www.ceric.ca). For the second half of the meeting, Superintendent Sue Pfeffer and AY Jackson Vice Principal Helen Vokas, led participants through an interactive discussion on the possibilities for the future of TDSB's schools as part of our Kindergarten to Grade 12 programming consultation. Many great suggestions came forth and were added to input from across the city, which is currently being tabulated and organized and will be reported back to the trustees and to the public. When the board-wide summary report is ready, we will share it through the WSN.

#### **5) Traffic Issues Meeting for Ward 23**

We had a really good turnout for our traffic issues meeting for the schools that are located within Councillor John Filion's Ward 23. Nearly every school was there and those that weren't had sent in summaries of their concerns. At the meeting, we went over all of the concerns and Councillor Filion began the discussion around what might be done to address some of these concerns. We will be meeting again in the new year to follow up on what has been addressed and to look at what else might be done to improve the traffic safety around our schools. I am hoping to do a similar meeting with Councillor David Shiner for Ward 24, but have not yet been able to get a date when he is available. We will let you know as soon as the date is set for that meeting. Thanks to Markus O'Brien from Councillor Filion's office for putting the minutes for this meeting together. Please see them attached.

Also on the topic of traffic and thanks, a thanks as well to Councillor Filion for helping to get special permission to park on the street around Earl Haig during the recent parent-teacher interviews. It was a great help to the day's going much more smoothly.

#### **6) December 10<sup>th</sup> is Human Rights Day**

Following World War II, the United Nations was formed to protect human rights and stabilize international relations between countries. Its charter made specific reference to the protection of human rights. This was later expanded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights signed by the United Nations member states on 10 December 1948. December 10th remains a significant date for all of us. It is a time when we should reflect on our commitment to ensuring and promoting equity, justice and dignity as fundamental rights for everyone. Thanks to Patricia Hayes in the TDSB Human Rights Office, attached is a brief on this year's Human Rights Day theme, "**The right to participate in public life**".

## **7) Shared Experience, Exploration & Discovery (SEED)**

SEED Alternative High School is offering a specialized portfolio preparation program for students interested in pursuing university or college art/design programs. Emphasis is on a studio-based thinking framework through project-based inquiry. It is located at 885 Dundas Street East, at Broadview Avenue. Interested students should bring samples of their artwork and current sketchbook. For more information: 416-393-0564 ext. 30100 or [pamila.matharu@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:pamila.matharu@tdsb.on.ca).

## **8) The Nutcracker**

Each year, many TDSB students join The National Ballet of Canada in the magical production of The Nutcracker. This ballet has thrilled audiences of all ages with its beauty and spectacular dancing. Set in Imperial Russia, sister and brother Marie and Misha, pass from childhood to maturity in this Christmas adventure. This year's show will run from December 19<sup>th</sup> through January 5<sup>th</sup>. For tickets: [http://national.ballet.ca/performances/season1213/The\\_Nutcracker/](http://national.ballet.ca/performances/season1213/The_Nutcracker/).

## **9) Looking for a job?**

JVS Toronto is an employment agency offering support and resources for people looking for employment. See the attached calendar for the December workshop schedule and information on the Centre's services.

## **10) Happy Hannukah!**

To those of you celebrating Hannukah (the Festival of Lights) this weekend, I wish you much happiness and joy with family and friends. May all your latkes be crispy and your applesauce sweet :-). To learn more about the significance of this ancient celebration, please go to: [http://www.tdsb.on.ca/\\_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=15&menuid=21885&pageid=19061](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=15&menuid=21885&pageid=19061).

**Take care, everyone. I will be in touch again soon.**

**Yours,  
Mari**