**7 April, 2014**

**Dear Friends of Willowdale Schools,**

I apologize for not getting a full WSN out to you in the last few weeks.  Things have been somewhat busier than I would have liked for a number of reasons.  As a result, there is a lot to tell you!  As always, feel free to skim and find what is of interest to you and your family.  As always, please feel free to get in touch with me should you have comments, questions or ideas about education that you’d like to share.  You can reach me at mari.rutka@tdsb.on.ca or by calling 416-397-3061.

**Ministry Announces Funds for Building**

The Ministry of Education has just recently announced this year’s funding for capital projects in school boards across the province.  It is giving out some $700 million for the building of new school space.  But, out of all this, the largest school board by far in Ontario, the TDSB, will receive funding for just one project, although it has received permission (not funding, alas) to build another 6 projects (including Avondale Public School).  Unfortunately, this means the board must continue to find the capital funding for Avondale and the other projects by itself – meaning that we will need to sell more properties in some parts of Toronto in order to raise the capital to build the space we need for students in other parts of Toronto.  We are grateful for the permissions, but are finding it very difficult to watch the Ministry supporting other boards’ growth pressures with funding while the TDSB, despite a $3.12 billion capital renewal backlog and increased enrolment projections for the future, continues to have to sell properties to address growth pressures from new development.

**Budget Balanced**

With a remarkable absence of contention, at the last Board meeting, the trustees voted to approve a balanced budget for this coming school year’s operational expenses.  This is the first year in over a decade that we were able to balance our budget without changing or reducing staffing numbers except as was related directly to the number of students we have in our system.  Thus, because our elementary numbers have gone up, staff was added.  Because our secondary numbers went down, staffing numbers were reduced.  Because the reduction is fairly slight, it is hoped that the number of staff people retiring or moving away will, through attrition, cover the reduction numbers.

**Mindfulness and TDSB Eco-Initiatives**

Our ward meeting last week was held in the library at A.Y. Jackson Secondary School.  We had a very good turnout of parents and educators to hear from TDSB social worker Chris Freypons about the benefits of using mindfulness practices in order to better handle the stresses of everyday life and better interact with our children.  Chris spoke to the benefits of practicing full and careful awareness of what is happening around you through meditative techniques that can help us and help our children to be calmer and deal better with stressful situations.  Chris demonstrated the practice with a short session for all.

Following our mindfulness session, Richard Christie, who is in charge of Eco-Schools (the TDSB’s award winning program to raise environmental awareness and take action in schools) and who also oversees other environmental initiatives for the TDSB, gave us an update on some of the great work that is being done by students, staff and school communities across the city.  Richard shared with us that some 493 schools and TDSB sites participated in Earth Hour (see below) and that, during this time, there was a 21% reduction in electrical consumption – the equivalent of 10,000 kWh, or enough to serve 1 home for 1 year.  In Willowdale, we learned that we have the proud distinction of having EVERY school in the ward involved in the Eco-School program, with 10 school aiming for the platinum level (the highest level that can be achieved) this year.  We also learned about the initiatives to install solar panels on roofs and solar thermal systems for heating water in schools.  Starting this year, some 311 TDSB schools will get new roofs in preparation for also getting solar panels installed.  These panels will generate electricity for not only the schools but their neighbourhoods. Twenty-two such roofs will be coming to Willowdale schools.  Richard also told us about the new solar curriculum materials for Grade 6, market gardens in some of our high schools, the new green bin program for “advanced recycling” and the active, safe and sustainable transportation initiatives being undertaken at the TDSB.  For more information, you can contact him at Richard.christie@tdsb.on.ca.

**Police Check Implications**

The other topic we discussed at the meeting that is of significance to many parents is the current TDSB efforts to come up with a policy regarding when and how police check clearances should be done for those volunteering within TDSB schools.   As a result of the Jeffrey Baldwin inquest, the unfortunate case of a child who died from neglect in Toronto, the TDSB staff is currently reviewing what to do about police check requirements.  Although I am sure there is no one who does not wish to ensure that proper precautions are taken to make sure that those working with students in our schools have nothing concerning in their backgrounds, there are a number of difficulties around implementing a good policy regarding how to make sure the checks are done.  The length of time it takes to get a police check done, the levels or kinds of police check clearance required, the cost of doing a check and who should pay it and what should happen when a parent is unable to pay it, how often checks should be done, the complications of planning for things like field trips and fun fairs, what happens when students turn 18 and other matters are all being questioned and examined.

Here are links to the proposed policy and to information on how the police do checks:

* The proposed policy related to volunteers needing criminal background checks [http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/ward8/11.%20P045%20Abuse%202290%20(1).pdf](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/ward8/11.%20P045%20Abuse%202290%20%281%29.pdf)
* FAQ's from Toronto Police Services regarding criminal background checks <http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/recordsmanagement/prcp_faq.php#q02>
* TPS's description of the Vulnerable Sector Criminal Background check process <http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/prcp/>

I would be most interested in learning your thoughts on how and when you think police checks should be used with volunteers.  Please feel free to e-mail me your comments.

**Special Education Information**

Just after March Break, we had an evening for parents who were interested in learning more about the special education programs and processes in the TDSB.  The meeting was held at Drewy Secondary School, which is a truly exceptional place for students with very high special needs challenges.  Several members of our special education staff were there to explain how students with special needs are identified, how specific plans are made to support them and to speak to the range of programs offered for special needs in the TDSB.  Ms. Lori McKay and her staff went over IEPs (Individual Education Plans), types of assessment, ILPs (Individual Learning Profiles), IPRCs (Identification, Placement and Review Committees) and many other special education terms and definitions.  A number of parents were particularly interested in learning more about gifted testing, which mostly follows the format of testing for all education needs.  And we learned that as of this coming September, there should be transition plans in place for all special education students to help them as they switch between grades and/or between schools.  For more information about TDSB special education, you are encouraged to go to: <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/EarlyYears/SpecialEducation.aspx>.

At this meeting, we also heard from the curating librarians about the North York Library’s fantastic new IBBY collection of special needs resources.  See more below.

**Information Fair & Guide**

I was really pleased with the turnout at our 5th annual Help is Here Information Fair.  We were lucky that the weather, although cold, was relatively cooperative on the day of the fair and many students and their families came out to collect and get information from 54 community and government agencies and TDSB departments.  In addition, we had Willowdale’s MP Chungsen Leung, MPP David Zimmer and Councillor John Filion (and me!) all there to answer constituent questions.  A very big thank you to Principal Renata Gonsalves and Earl Haig Secondary School for hosting the event and providing many volunteers and to other friends of Willowdale schools who volunteered and, most especially, to Phi Than who did a very great deal of organizing to make the day happen.  For photos of the day or to get a guide to the organizations that participated, you can go to:  <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/ward12/Ward12/HelpisHere.aspx>

**Guide to Community Resources**

Community Support Workers for the TDSB’s Model Schools for Inner Cities programs have compiled a large list of community resources for all of the TDSB’s 22 wards.  This resource guide is now available either by going to each ward’s trustee page or by going to <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/community/modelschoolsforinnercities.aspx>.  Hard copies of the resources will be available at each TDSB school.

**City of Toronto Support Guide**

This month the City of Toronto published their first edition of “Youth Services and Supports in Toronto,” a service directory for at-risk youth and their support networks. Here is the link to the online version: [https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Shelter%20Support%20&%20Housing%20Administration/Files/pdf/S/youthservicesandsupports.pdf](https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Shelter%20Support%20%26%20Housing%20Administration/Files/pdf/S/youthservicesandsupports.pdf)

**Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month**

Since 2009, the TDSB has been celebrating April as Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month. With more than 5,800 TDSB students speaking Spanish as a first language, the TDSB is committed to preserving the rich cultures and traditions of people with Latino/Hispanic roots. These roots represent over 21 countries in the Spanish-speaking world, which extends from Latin America to Africa to Europe. The rich diversity of Latino/Hispanic people in Canada makes many valuable contributions to a variety of fields and disciplines, including art, literature, science, music, cinema, and education.

This month will offer our schools, students, and staff the opportunities to showcase as well as celebrate Latino and Hispanic contributions to our province, country, and the world.

**April 9, 2014 is International Day of Pink**

The International Day of Pink is a day of action, born when a youth in a high school in Cambridge, Nova Scotia was bullied because he wore a pink shirt to school. His fellow students decided to stand up to bullying; hundreds of students came to school wearing pink to show support for diversity and for stopping discrimination, gender-based bullying, homophobia and transphobia. Everyone is invited to wear pink on April 9th this year to make a difference and participate in events and activities that will engage their community and challenge gender stereotypes and discrimination.

Across the world discrimination continues to be the leading source of conflict. Discrimination includes ableism, ageism, classism, heterosexism, homophobia, racism, sexism, and transphobia, among many other forms. Discrimination affects how we work, study, and treat one another, creating barriers, bullying, harassment, hate and violence.  The International Day of Pink is more than just a symbol of a shared belief in celebrating diversity - it's also a commitment to being open minded, to being understanding of differences and to learning to respect each other.

**Music Monday May 5th**

Join Canadians from every region of the country to emphasize the importance of music education as Music Monday turns 10 this year.  On May 5th, many students, schools and members of the general public will join together to perform the same song on the same day, at the same time, uniting the entire country in song. There will be a live webcast to celebrate Music Monday’s 10th anniversary, linking simultaneous events across the country and ending with synchronized nationwide performances of I.S.S. (Is Somebody Singing) with former Canadian Space Agency Astronaut Chris Hadfield, led by Maestro Bramwell Tovey of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. The live webcast will focus on special events in 10 cities across Canada, representing music education from each region. For more information: [www.musicmonday.ca](http://www.musicmonday.ca)

**Healthy Schools 5k Run/Walk**

On Saturday May 24, 2014 the TDSB Health and Physical Education Department will be hosting a celebration of healthy active living for all TDSB schools and community members at Downsview Park.  Registration for the TDSB Healthy Schools 5k Run/Walk is mandatory for all participants.  Bibs will be distributed to TDSB School Groups/Run Clubs prior to the event.  Community Members and TDSB Secondary School Students will receive their bib upon check-in on the day of the event.  Registration Deadline: Friday May 16th, 2014  \*Please note all participants under the age of 13 must be registered by an adult (Parent/Guardian or TDSB School Group Organizer). Register at: <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/5k>

**Parent Reaching Out Grants 2014/2015**

The Ministry of Education has announced that there will be 2014/2015 Parents Reaching Out Grants (PROG) for school councils and regional/provincial applicants.  Grants are available to school councils for a maximum of $1,000 for school-based initiatives meant to strengthen school and community engagement.  Applications must be submitted electronically and the deadline for PROG submissions is Friday, May 16, 2014.  For the application form and more information please visit the ministry website at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/reaching.html>. For additional information, you can also contact michelle.munroe@tdsb.on.ca.

**School Staffing Committees**

At this time of year, the school staffing committee at each school will gather to consider how the school’s grades, school day and teaching assignments will be organized for the following year.   School staff will work on models for how to optimize the use of staff within the school, parents, through school councils will have the opportunity to provide input on the models and the school superintendent for the area (in our case, Ms. Linda Curtis) will review and finally approve the model for each school.  Please be sure to stay in touch with your school council for updates and information.

**Motivating Kids: I Need Help with Homework**

Lester B. Pearson School Council is hosting a workshop for parents titled “Motivating Kids: I Need Help with Homework.”  Parenting coach Terry Carson will be talking with parents about how to put successful structures in place to help homework get done without it becoming a battle.  The talk is on April 29th from 7:30 p.m. to 8:50 p.m. in the school gym at Lester B. Pearson Elementary and Middle School, 7 Snowcrest Avenue.  The event is free, but please rsvp by contacting Principal Angela Caccamo by this Friday, April 11th at angela.caccamo@tdsb.on.ca or (416) 395-2656.

**Homework Help for Math Students**

Homework Help is a wonderful online tutoring resource for Math students from grades 7-10.   Let students know about all the services, including interactive tutorials and live online tutoring.  Students can register and access free tutoring by going to: <https://homeworkhelp.ilc.org>.  Registration is quick and simple; all that’s needed is their Ontario Education Number (OEN) and Date of Birth. Educators and guardians are also welcome to use the site. For further information contact: shelley.lowry@tdsb.on.ca.

**TD Michaëlle Jean Bursaries**

The Michaëlle Jean Foundation is providing bursaries of up to $10,000 each to up to four deserving young people, aged 18-30, wanting to use the arts to make a difference, with the help of a mentor. Deadline for submissions is midnight on April 17, EST. For more information about the program: <http://www.fmjf.ca/get-involved/the-td-michaelle-jean-bursaries/>

**New Circles Financial Awards**

The community agency New Circles has a number of $500 financial scholarship awards for students who have demonstrated service to their community and will be attending a post-secondary institution in September 2014.  To be eligible for an award, the student must reside in one of the following postal code areas: M4A, M4H, M3C, M4B, M4G, M3B, M3A and M2J.  Application deadline is May 9th.  For more information and the application form, go to: <http://newcircles.ca/prom2014/>

New Circles also runs a prom clothing donation/distribution.  You can get information about this as well at the same website address.

**Vote for Haig Talent on YTV**

Two students from Earl Haig’s Claude Watson Program – Curtis Smith and Ryan Hawken with their band, Rebel Coast – have made it through as finalists in the YTV talent series called **The Next Star SuperGroup**.  The live finale takes place on April 13, 2014 and Canada will be asked to vote online or by text for the winning group.  The grand prize is an exclusive management deal with 21 Entertainment Group. For more information: <http://supergroup.ytv.com/>

**Earth Hour**

World Wildlife’s annual Earth Hour was held on Saturday, March 29th from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.  People turned off their lights for one hour as a symbolic act of awareness of the role of energy use and its impact on our planet.   Several Willowdale neighbourhoods held community events as well during this time.

In the TDSB, because schools are not regularly in session on Saturday, many schools marked Earth Hour on the Friday (March 28th this year).  Ask you children to find out what your school was doing for this year’s Earth Hour.

**Got Milkweed?**

The number of monarch butterflies is rapidly decreasing as severe weather and the disappearance of their food source, the humble but beautiful and fragrant milkweed, has disappeared from the landscape.  To help reverse this trend, the David Suzuki foundation has launched the #GotMilkweed campaign.  The goal is to plant a corridor of milkweed through the city of Toronto.  This month, you can buy milkweed plants at a nominal cost by going to <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/issues/wildlife-habitat/projects/the-homegrown-national-park/?mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWfF9wsRokvajIZKXonjHpfsX57%2B8uW6O3lMI%2F0ER3fOvrPUfGjI4CTMdrI%2BSLDwEYGJlv6SgFS7jNMbZkz7gOXRE%3D>

*Check out this video on the campaign:*

<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/blogs/panther-lounge/2014/03/gotmilkweed/>

For $25, volunteers will come and plant milkweed at your school or in local parks.  In conjunction with this initiative, there will be a screening of the Imax film “Flight of the Butterflies” at the Scotiabank Imax Theatre on Saturday, April 12th.  For more information, go to: <http://www.eventbrite.ca/e/flight-of-the-butterflies-imax-3d-screening-tickets-9491191409?mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWfF9wsRokvajIZKXonjHpfsX57%2B8uW6O3lMI%2F0ER3fOvrPUfGjI4CTMdrI%2BSLDwEYGJlv6SgFS7jNMbZkz7gOXRE%3D>

**Clean Toronto Together 2014**

Get together with friends, family, coworkers and classmates to clean a park, laneway or any other space that needs your help. Working together we can eliminate litter, stop graffiti vandalism and keep Toronto clean and green. Events will be scheduled throughout Earth Week (April 22- 27). You can get involved on:

* Friday April 25 - Corporate & School Clean-up Day
* Saturday April 26 & Sunday April 27 - Community Clean-up Days

For more information and to register your event: <http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=d9236056e60c3410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=8131fbfa98491410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>

**Learn about Toronto’s Urban Forest**

What is the urban forest and why does it matter? On Monday, April 14th, learn about Toronto’s urban forest and the benefits it provides our city. Find out how you can help it thrive by getting involved in LEAF’s planting, education and stewardship programs: <http://www.yourleaf.org/event/2014-04-14/benefits-urban-forest>

**Toronto Public Library – Keep Toronto Reading Festival**

Throughout April, join any of the more than 80 events across the city. The centerpiece of the festival is the One Book community read, The Cellist of Sarajevo and in partnership with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Public Library is presenting 22 days of pop-up cellist performances across the city to kick things off.  Bring your phone or e-reader and download the first two chapters of our One Book. For more information: <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/ktr/?utm_source=All&utm_campaign=Issue+73+-+March+19%252C+2014&utm_medium=email>

**IBBY at the Library**

If you drop by the North York Central branch of the public library, 5120 Yonge Street, be sure to check out their fantastic new “IBBY” collection of books for and about children and youth with a wide variety of special needs.  This branch has been selected to house this internationally selected and impressive array of books and resources for young people to enjoy.  For more, go to: <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/ibby/documentation-centre.jsp>

**Global Youth Service Day**

The city of Toronto’s Youth Council will be holding a volunteer fair on April 12th from 1 to 4 p.m. at Toronto City Hall (100 Queen Street West).  At this Global Youth Service Day event, there will be over 40 organizations that have volunteer opportunities for youth, including opportunities with the PanAm Games and the Canadian Cancer Society.  For a full list of organizations or to find out more about the event, go to:

[www.gysd.ca](http://www.gysd.ca).

**Early Years Summer Job**

If you are looking for a summer job working with young children, their parents and caregivers and you are between 18 and 30 years of age, you can apply for a summer position with the Willowdale Ontario Early Years Centre at 155 McNicoll Avenue.  Deadline for applications is Wednesday, this week, April 9th.   You can drop off your resume in person at 155 McNicoll or send it to the attention of the Willowdale OEYC Coordinator, Lisa Werlich at lw.oeyc@adventureplace.ca.  The positions are full time from May 12th until August 8th.    Contact Lisa at the e-mail address listed for further information.

**North York Arts Park Presentation**

The City of Toronto will be holding a public meeting on the new Arts Park that is to be located east of Doris Avenue between Hillcrest and Princess Avenues.  The meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 22nd from 7 to 9 p.m. at Earl Haig Secondary School, 100 Princess Avenue.  The meeting will be in the cafeteria and is an opportunity for the local community to provide input as this exciting project develops.  For more information, contact Councillor John Filion at councilor\_filion@toronto.ca or call 416-395-6411.

**Roy Thomson Hall FREE Noon Hour Choir & Organ Concerts**

Roy Thomson Hall’s magnificent Gabriel Kney pipe organ is featured alongside the artistry of Canada’s finest choirs and organists. Enjoy an hour of beautiful music in the splendour of the acoustically superb venue. Concerts are suitable for ages 6 and up. For more information: <http://roythomson.com/noon-hour_concerts>

**ROM On-line Activities**

The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) has a number of new on-line activities for kids as part of their 100th year celebration.  Go to the ROM Explorers Club page:  <http://www.rom.on.ca/en/join-us/membership/explorers>

You can also check out their “Cool Facts” and upcoming events for families while there.

**Events for Elisa**

*Charity Dinner* - The 15th annual dinner and auction to raise research funds will take place on April 23rd, beginning at 6 p.m.  It will be held at the Paramount Convention Centre, 222 Rowntree Dairy Road, Woodbridge (Hwy 7 and the 400).  You can request tickets by phoning 416-223-1911 or e-mailing gala@alifeforelisa.org.

*Block Garage Sale* - The Sanfilippo Children's Research Foundation will also holds its annual ENORMOUS garage sale on Gwendolen Avenue (south of Sheppard, west of Yonge) on May 10th.  Donations for the sale can be made through Elisabeth at 416-223-1911 or by contacting SCRF@alifeforelisa.org.

**Sugaring Off**

A very old fashioned but always enjoyable outing happens only in the early spring.  Sugaring off is the process by which the sap of maple trees is collected, boiled down and turned into maple syrup.  There are numerous maple syrup festivals and sugaring off demonstrations that will be taking place over the next few weeks.  Here is a list of nearby events from the Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association: <http://www.ontariomaple.com/pages/greater_toronto_area/>

Here too is the link to information on the demonstration done at Crawford Lake Conservation Area, which features the opportunity to compare both the traditional Iroquoian process and the pioneers’ process. <http://ontarioconservationareas.ca/component/mtree/conservation-authorities-of-ontario/halton/crawford-lake-conservation-area>

**Watch out for Water**

With all the snow melting (finally!), it is the time of year when water levels can be quite high in local rivers and streams.  Remember to exercise caution around all bodies of water and to supervise children near such bodies of water, reminding the children to be careful.

**Maybe Measles**

There has been some press recently around several cases of measles reported in the Greater Toronto Area.  As of this last week, there had not been a case reported within the TDSB.  Toronto Public Health has been monitoring the situation and you can go to their website for further facts about measles and updates on it and other communicable diseases: <http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=d363c04e71022410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=74422d6855e02410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextfmt=default>

**Hillside Nature Camp**

Hillside Nature Camp is an exciting and vibrant camp run by the TDSB and based in the soon to be Rouge National Urban Park in Scarborough, Ontario. During the summer, there are weekly sessions held at the camp, whose motto is “mud between the toes.” Each week campers connect with nature, exploring the surrounding woods and wetlands in a safe and fun environment. The camp is open to children 7 to 12 years old. For more information and registration forms please visit <http://toes.tdsb.on.ca/day/hillside/hillside_nature_camp.asp> or call 416-396-6963.

**Summer School Within A College (SWAC) Program**

SWAC, the Summer School within a College program, is a TDSB Student Success initiative, in partnership with George Brown College.  It offers secondary students, aged 17-20, the opportunity to earn secondary school and college credits (Dual Credits) concurrently, with the continued goal for students to complete their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) during the month of July 2014. Courses are delivered by Secondary School Teachers and College Instructors at George Brown College, St. James Campus. For more information, email Laura Reynolds, Student Success/Experiential Learning at: laura.reynolds3@tdsb.on.ca

**Many Elementary and Secondary Summer Opportunities**

The TDSB runs quite a variety of summer programs for both elementary and secondary students.  In addition to those mentioned above, there are Summer Music Camps, elementary summer school programs and secondary summer school programs as well as an ESL summer program for international students that runs during July.  For more information on these programs, go to:

* [www.tdsbsummercamps.ca](http://www.tdsbsummercamps.ca) (summer camps)
* [www.creditprograms.ca](http://www.creditprograms.ca) (secondary summer programs)
* <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/ElementarySchool/BeyondtheClassroom/InternationalLanguageHeritage.aspx> (international language, heritage and culture programs)
* For information about other elementary programs in your area, please speak with your school principal.

**Well, I think that’s it for now.  Will try to be in touch sooner next time.  Meanwhile, I’d like to share this lovely poem with you.  I read it at about this time last year in the Toronto Star and thought it was so true to the season.  It is by W.E. Henley (1849-1903).  I think of it now as we begin to hear again the lovely songs of birds:**

***The Blackbird***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| THE nightingale has a lyre of gold, |   |
|     The lark's is a clarion call, |   |
| And the blackbird plays but a boxwood flute, |   |
|     But I love him best of all. |   |
|    |  |
| For his song is all of the joy of life, |  |
|     And we in the mad, spring weather, |   |
| We two have listened till he sang |   |
|     Our hearts and lips together. |  |

**Take care, everyone!**

**Mari**

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