

Stouffville Tribune

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EDITORIAL

With their votes, York Region electors have sent a clear message to their municipal councils.

The environment, its protection and preservation, is an important issue that councils would do well to address seriously and quickly.

Take Thornhill, for instance, where Erin Shapero, a 25-year-old environmental activist whose concerns about preserving Markham's green space pushed her ahead of seasoned former hydro commissioner Paul Hyatt to earn the ward seat.

In Richmond Hill, Councillor Brenda Hogg was rewarded for her unwavering stand on stopping development on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

She was elected as a regional councillor by her voters, who likely hope she'll carry their save the moraine message to the region and far beyond.

In King Township, the battle between growth and green space saw a heated race between incumbent Mayor Margaret Black and challenger Jane Underhill, a King councillor whose anti-development stance, anti-Big Pipe campaign, brought her within 19 votes of Black's victory. A recount is occurring.

In Georgina, incumbent Rob Grossi was ousted by newcomer Jeff Holec, who also expressed concerns about developers and their influence in his community.

Lake Simcoe-lovers either chose to elect the person who promoted a soft anti-growth campaign or reject the man they believe opened their community to undue, rapid growth. A recount is also occurring in this tight race, where 35 votes separated the contenders.

And in Newmarket, Councillor Dave Kerwin, who has long been an environmental activist, was returned to the fold.

It should come as no surprise to municipal councils that these people have been given public support for their views.

York Region's Official Plan Report Card process uncovered a public concern about the region's unbridled growth, about the loss of green space and about its importance to the quality of life in our communities.

Mayors should be aware of and responsive to the voters' message this year — the Oak Ridges Moraine is a political issue; the extension of Hwy. 404 is a political issue; the cleaning of Lake Simcoe is a political issue.

And voters have elected the candidates who have promised to do something about these concerns.

OPINION

Premier Harris takes third Florida vacation in a year...



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Educating in Canada different than in Asian schools, says teacher

I am writing in response to Tom Chan's letter, "There's an enormous difference between educating and teaching," printed on Tuesday, Oct. 31.

As head of student services at a very large multicultural secondary school in Toronto and a teacher for 25 years, I feel most confident dispelling many of Mr. Chan's perceptions.

As I read his letter, I couldn't help but wonder how many languages are spoken in Asian schools?

Surely, it couldn't match the number of diverse languages of the many immigrant students in our schools in Toronto?

Within a class at most Toronto schools, one would be hard pressed to find a majority of students who would say that English is their first language.

Critical thinking is the key element that teachers strive to convey to their students. How difficult is this for a student who may be struggling with English?

How do they follow the intricacies of the lesson? How do they form the correct question?

How do they write down the correct answer? Think about the enormous challenge facing the teacher.

Mr. Chan describes Asian schools as perfect with 40 students in a class and teachers keeping perfect order.

I can only imagine that the method of teaching was Socratic.

I would suggest to Mr. Chan that classroom discipline is extremely easy when you do not allow any discussion or movement within the classroom.

Socratic teaching has its place but does not work for every student. For example, many students cannot learn from textbooks alone.

For them learning only happens when they are actively involved in the process. This means active listening, requiring them to ask questions and debate points.

This also helps to develop critical thinking skills.

Public education addresses the needs of all students and those needs extend far beyond the curriculum.

Many of our students are socially and emotionally needy.

Teachers are often the only support that these young people have.

In addition, schools are dealing more and more with issues of violence and emotional trauma amongst our young people.

Making comparisons between school systems in different countries is a risky business. Teachers are dedicated to their students no matter what country.

Mr. Chan, please don't be so quick to criticize the teachers in Canada until you have better insight into the challenges we face.

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Dave Teetzel

Arts conference goes against the grain, thank goodness

Talk about going against the grain.

Last weekend, the York Region public school board hosted Arts & Education 2000, a three-day conference intended to promote the value of teaching kids the arts.

The prevailing wisdom is, of course, "Teach 'em technology, teach 'em business, teach 'em the skills employers demand. An arts degree won't get you anywhere."

That wisdom has led to the arts being the first part of the curriculum to be slashed when times get tough in many jurisdictions — although not necessarily in this region.

Of course, trends in education come and go. Back when I was in primary school, education was falling under the influence of the flower-power generation.

It would reach the point where teachers hesitated to correct a student's spelling for fear of stifling creativity.

But by the time I was at the post-secondary level, I was being branded an "artsy" by my friend who was taking engineering at U of T and all his yellow construction helmet wearing buddies.

Today, my friend's anti-artsy attitude is the mainstream — and it's easy to see why. For one thing, my anti-artsy friend makes a lot more money than I do.

Probably there are students in high school with an aptitude for technology who will be earning a lot more than me in a couple of years.

But have you ever been stuck at a party with someone whose entire life revolves around RAM and gigabytes?

That's when you realize the information age is useless if nobody has anything interesting to say.

So I'm encouraged to see the art and music and drama teachers fighting back. They spent the weekend at Unionville High School developing what they hope will be national policies on arts education.

It's important to develop well-rounded young people who can relate to one another and to the world around them, who are creative enough to provide interesting content for all the dotcoms — and creative enough to adapt when their tech training becomes obsolete about a year after they graduate.

"The power should shift from the techies to the storytellers, from the scientists to the artists," Evan Solomon, executive editor of Shift magazine, told the forum.

Obviously I'd second that, but I wouldn't want to see the pendulum swing so far back that school becomes the kind of extended finger-painting session that characterized my early education.

Arts and sciences shouldn't be an either-or proposal. A good education integrates both, obviously.

LETTERS POLICY

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