

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

We're robbing children of bright futures

Schoolworks! likely had every intention of creating shock waves with the release this week of a rather lengthy list of Ontario schools that are falling through the cracks of the educational system.

The Edmonton-based parent and community-oriented educational research company used last year's provincial standardized test results in reading, writing and mathematics to rank schools with the highest combined sum of failure rates.

The standings separate the grades 3 and 6 students who failed to meet the provincial standard in each tested subject from those who achieved level 3.

About 1,900 Grade 3 schools and 1,700 Grade 6 schools from across the province had the dubious honour of making The Top 150 Failing Schools list.

York Region has 58 schools on the list — practically every community is represented, yet Georgina schools dominate the mix.

Why do this? Why the exercise in public humiliation based on what we all know is but "a snapshot" — as some local educators are fond of calling the standardized tests — of what is occurring in our classrooms?

Because Schoolworks! wants parents to grab this list and wave it in the face of the people responsible for running our schools. In fact, it wants the entire community to look carefully at the rankings for trends and patterns that affect the future of our children.

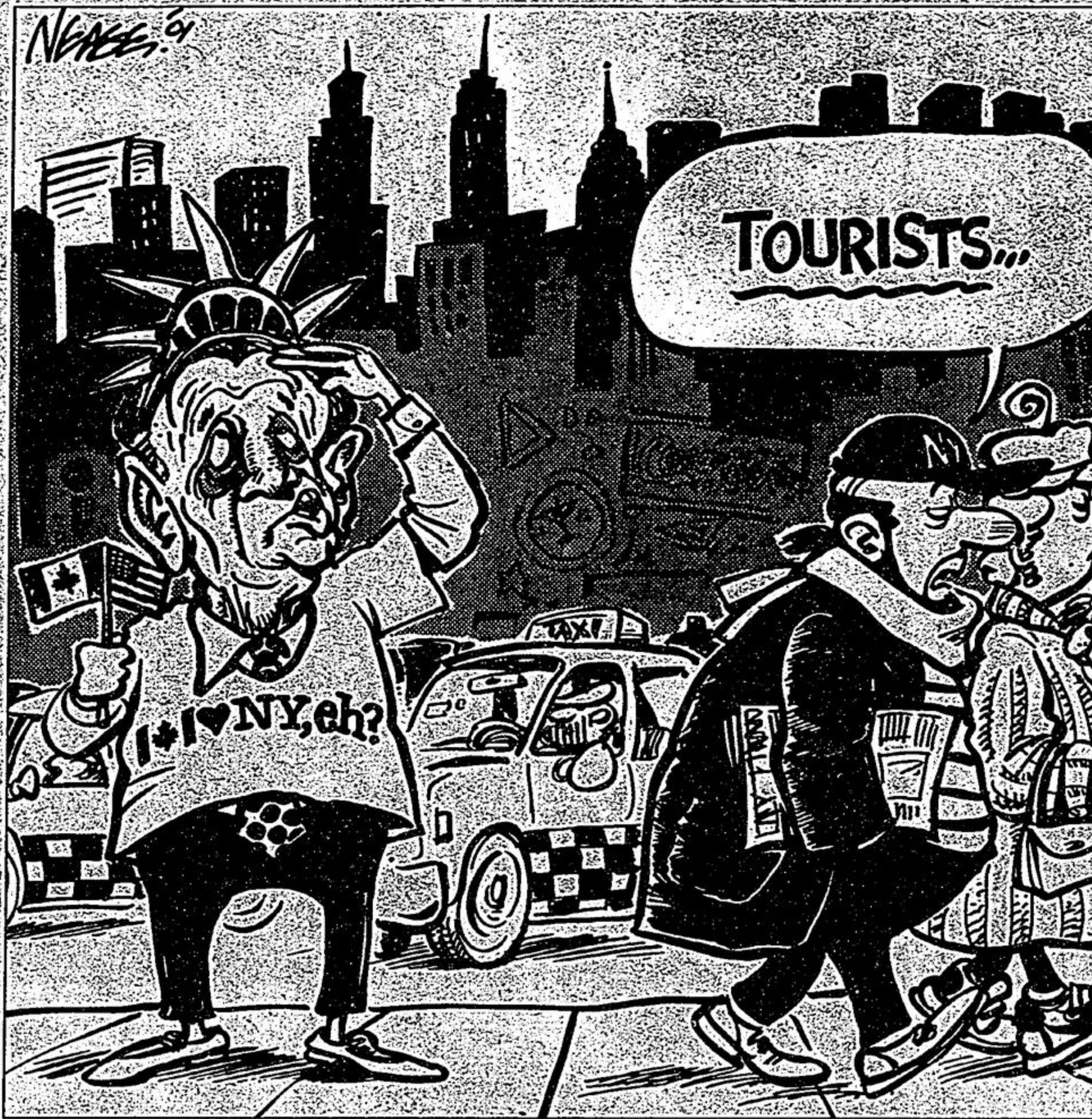
Because Schoolworks! strongly believes certain groups of students continue to suffer as a consequence of ineffective educational policies emanating from inadequate governmental and school board monitoring systems.

It's disappointing our school boards are brushing aside the concerns with the same tired, shop-worn platitudes.

The school boards and Ministry of Education, for whatever reason, have been reluctant to address the issues, to ask direct questions about socio-economic status, cultural and family background and teacher turnover in a bid to develop effective programs to help under-achieving students.

It's a travesty that we continue to rob certain children of the opportunity to have a bright future.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Markham Hydro is only electricity distributor in town

Your article of Oct. 9 quoted Mayor Don Cousens incorrectly that delays in approval of a merger of the hydro utilities of Markham, Aurora and Newmarket were causing a loss of utility customers to competitors. Markham Hydro is the only distributor of electricity in the town, so there are no competitors for that aspect of the business. What is competitive is the supply of the electricity commodity itself.

Retailers have been calling on Markham residents and businesses to offer them contracts for the electricity commodity. These contracts will only be effective upon market opening and regardless of whom a customer contracts with for the commodity, Markham Hydro will still be the delivery agent.

If a customer chooses not to sign a contract with a retailer, Markham Hydro will buy the electricity commodity from the spot market and supply it to these customers at our cost. Many people are confused about electricity deregulation and its many complexities.

We continue to communicate information to our customers on an ongoing basis, explaining industry changes and the new electricity market. As always, our staff is happy to answer questions regarding these changes, or address any other concerns and can be reached at (905) 477-3844.

MILAN BOLKOVIC
PRESIDENT, MARKHAM HYDRO
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Bowes did his homework before resigning from Stouffville BIA

Re: Bowes resigns from BIA board, Tribune, Nov. 24.

I was at the Whitchurch-Stouffville council meeting when the attack on Harry Bowes was happening. Mayor Wayne Emmerson did a good job of airing both sides of the incident.

The Stouffville Business Improvement Area is in need of more funds, period. The creative ways they try to solve their problems are strange. They first had a shortfall last year of \$2,000. This was covered by a loan from the town for \$10,000, payable over the next three years. Did they run a deficit? You do the math.

Next, to cover the cost increase for next year, the BIA decided to formally expand the geographic boundaries. This would mean the new businesses would pay the BIA tax rate, which went up last year and may go up again depending on budget expenditures.

The main expense for the BIA is the salary for the co-ordinator, which is needed. Maybe Eric Lismanis should be given these duties as he is the economic development officer for the town and should be bringing businesses to the downtown core.

Did Harry Bowes spread rumours? I believe he was informing the businesses of their legal options. He also highlighted the facts the rates were going up. He had done his homework.

FRED ROBBINS
STOUFFVILLE

LETTERS POLICY

Stouffville Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The newspaper reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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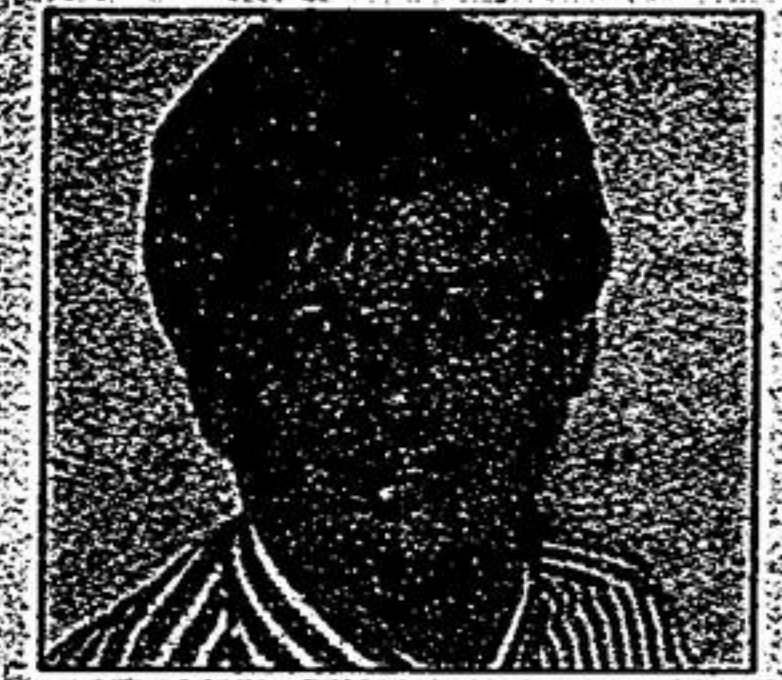
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David Teetzel

Transit plan a Catch-22 for York Region

York Region councillors got down to the crux of the transit Catch-22 last week.

Faced with a five-year plan to radically improve the transit system, at a cost of \$200 million, Vaughan Regional Councillor Michael Di Biase balked, suggesting the report's projected increase of 5 million riders was unrealistic. He recommended the region make its improvements gradually and gauge public reaction throughout the process.

According to the report, unless the region's service is a lot more frequent and convenient, it won't attract more riders. According to Di Biase, unless there are a lot more riders, an upgraded transit system will just burn up a wad of taxpayers' money.

This same debate is going on among residents. Our readership survey in Richmond Hill included a question about transit. Responses were split almost evenly between people who ranked it as very important and those who couldn't care less.

In short, those who use transit consider improving it a top priority and those who don't resent seeing empty buses rumbling down the street.

It doesn't take an expert to see why more people aren't using York Region Transit now. Just try to take transit from one municipality to another.

A trip from King City to Hillcrest Mall in Richmond Hill takes 15 minutes by car. The public transit method — a combination of GO Train and local bus — takes 40 minutes.

Until you bring that down to 20 minutes, transit isn't an option for travel between these neighbouring towns.

Perhaps the strongest argument for giving York Region a first-class bus system is it's probably the only way to secure the projects we really want.

Vaughan is lobbying to have the Spadina subway extended to its city centre. Richmond Hill is making a pitch to have the Yonge subway extended to its borders. Markham is pushing for an LRT along Hwy. 7.

The region is calling for the federal government to join a three-way funding agreement.

But why would the feds or the TTC sink good money into transit for York Region if local politicians won't do it?

I recently joined the ranks of one-car households and life would be a lot easier if there were a reliable bus between my home and the region's employment centres. I suspect there are others like me, people who either grudgingly spend money they don't have for a second car or "tough it out" with only one.

These people are the market for York Region Transit, but to reach them requires buses that run to all parts of the region, all day at convenient times.

If York Region isn't prepared to spend the money to do this, it should get out of the public transit business altogether.