

Stouffville Tribune

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EDITORIAL

Board's treatment of trustee lacks character

The York Region District School Board has come up short on the character count.

East Gwillimbury/Whitchurch-Stouffville Trustee Bob Burrows rightly took the board to task last week for its questionable handling of his request to determine the cost of the board's character education initiative.

While the board refused to release financial information to the democratically elected member of the board, Mr. Burrows said a reporter from the Toronto Star received the details from the board's public relations officer.

Education director Bill Hogarth's reply — "I'm not denying trustees information, but I'm not going to respond to requests that are taken totally out of context and are totally, totally unreasonable." — smacks of imperiousness.

His suggestion hiring more staff would be necessary to meet the request ridicules not only Mr. Burrows' integrity, but that of the taxpayers to whom Mr. Hogarth is accountable.

And, like good sheep, in a move defying common sense, the board denied Mr. Burrows' request to be provided the same information given to the reporter.

Mr. Burrows is not the only person questioning the character education expenditure.

While the initiative itself is more than laudable, some eyebrows are being raised at the decision to embark on the program at a time when the board is publicly bemoaning a financial crisis caused by government funding cuts.

For goodness' sake, teachers and parents are telling us there simply aren't enough textbooks to go around in some schools.

"For anyone to suggest money was taken away from textbooks for character education is naïve and inappropriate," was board chairperson Bill Crothers' arbitrary response.

Then prove it. Mr. Burrows' quest was straightforward and his question fair.

"It's not appropriate to withhold information from a trustee (that staff) is so willing to give to a reporter," Mr. Burrows said.

He's absolutely right.

The board's actions make a mockery of its Character Matters! initiative: respect, responsibility, honesty, empathy, fairness, initiative, perseverance, integrity, courage and optimism. Failure on all counts.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Character initiative money better spent on school books

Re: Trustee can't get numbers; Saturday, March 2.

As a high school student, it appalls me to read how the York Region District School Board has been spending taxpayers' money on character education.

I have seen posters and heard presentations regarding character education and I find them to be a big waste of money when schools still don't have enough textbooks or good equipment.

There aren't even enough high schools around for kids in my area. Instead, I must take a long bus ride every morning and afternoon. The money that went towards character education could have been used to build more schools.

Regarding character education, what is its real importance? What difference is the board trying to make with character education?

Just because it tells students how to act does not mean we would actually change who we are to meet the board's standards.

If it made any difference at all, would we still be hearing about bullying in school?

Would students be getting better grades from character education? Students don't need posters and speeches on how to become the "perfect" person; we gradually change when we experience more of life.

I think cutting out character education and using that money for more important

matters would benefit everyone. A tax cut would help parents, since much of their hard-earned money has been spent on character education.

REBECCA GUAN
MARKVILLE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Prayers offered for police officer killed in traffic accident

On my way to work in Scarborough last month, I heard on my car radio the horrific news of an accident where a female police officer named Laura Ellis was killed at Brimley and Huntingwood intersections.

I pass through this intersection every day, as my workplace is only two minutes away from it.

On that day, I had to avoid the area as it was closed for a police investigation. As I approached the intersection the next day, I stopped my car, got out and offered my Hindu prayer to give eternal peace to the departed soul, as I understand very well how painful it is to lose a loved one.

Since the day of the accident, I play Hindu devotional songs on my car stereo while passing through that intersection.

I dedicate the music to the memory of Laura Ellis and offer my sympathy to her family, friends and entire police force.

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David Teetzel

Beware politicians pointing fingers

Y ou have to feel for Sean and Suveera Hopton, the Richmond Hill couple whose son was flown to Buffalo shortly after he was born because no hospital in the Greater Toronto Area could care for him.

For a new family to be uprooted, for a father to have to drive four or five hours one-way to visit his wife and baby is a trying circumstance.

But we should be wary of those who try to turn compassion into political capital.

In the midst of national soul-searching over health care, it's easy to see this incident and several similar ones as yet another failing of Ontario health care.

"It's disastrous for these women and their babies," said Liberal health critic Lyn McLeod.

Well, it's sad, frustrating, probably infuriating, but it's not disastrous.

Disastrous is when a baby dies and the sad truth is, until quite recently, many of the premature babies who live today didn't make it.

The Hoptons' child weighed less than 2.5 pounds and measured 15 inches. He suffered from bleeding on the brain, undeveloped lungs, a blood clot and low blood pressure at birth.

Today he is alive, unfortunately still in hospital but, on a bright note, he's closer to home at Mount Sinai Hospital.

The fact these babies live is a sign of how much our health care has improved. One side effect of more premature babies surviving is busier neonatal wards.

I am in no position to disagree with Markham Stouffville Hospital president Dr. Jim MacLean, who says the current system doesn't allow enough leeway for emergency situations.

But the specific situation that led to the recent transfers to Buffalo was a viral outbreak at two of the three hospitals equipped to handle high-risk births.

Certainly, sending the babies to another city was preferable to exposing them to disease.

Should the system have the capacity, as Vaughan-King-Aurora MPP Greg Sorbara says, to accommodate such situations? Of course, it should.

Did it ever? You have to wonder. Especially after Vicki Janes of Keswick shared her story of being flown from Buttonville to Kingston to have her baby — and nearly being sent to Buffalo.

This case happened 12 years ago, long before Mike Harris could be blamed for creating a health-care crisis.

This suggests, in recent history, parents have faced difficult situations with the health-care system, regardless of the political party in power.

The goal should be every baby should get a happy, healthy start in a hospital close to home and every political party should be creating policies that work toward that.

But they should all be very careful about throwing stones when that ideal is not achieved.

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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