

OPINION

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Editorial

Make learning fun to improve education

If there's one thing we have learned about education, it's this: making fun an integral part of learning helps children flourish socially and academically.

York Region Newspaper Groups five-part series, *Passing the Test*, which wraps up today, delved into why some schools perform better than others, pinpointed problems and looked at programs used to boost student performance, teaching methods and ways to make schools better places to learn and teach.

The overall message — reiterated by veteran educators who have taught in schools across the region — is clear: incorporating fresh, innovative ideas into lessons is the best way to improve student success.

For the most part, educators are working toward that goal through new literacy programs, community support networks, teacher workshops and support groups for teachers from the north.

But what the series also indicated is a fact rarely discussed by school board officials: communities with higher incomes where parents have post-secondary education have better academic results than in schools, such as most in Georgina, where many parents have lower incomes and less education.

Hard to swallow for some, but, like it or not, students in schools where parents open their wallets and offer their time consistently perform better in standardized tests.

While affluence is a significant factor in school success rates, there are other ways in which northern or poor performing schools can improve teaching methods and academic performance.

Parental involvement in children's early years of learning (senior kindergarten and Grade 1) is paramount, studies and our series show, especially with programs such as Reading Recovery, where students lagging behind receive intense one-on-one tutoring with specialized teachers.

For their part, boards need to pour more resources into reading programs for early grades. Statistics overwhelmingly show if students fall behind in the first few years, it's much harder to catch up.

Bottom line, we all have a responsibility to ensure students from every corner of the region have a successful education.

We need more parental involvement, innovative literacy programs, teaching workshops, continued board funding and innovative, fun ways of teaching.



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Liberal win has ex-candidate thinking 'what if?'

Wayne Emmerson couldn't help but wonder what might have been.

While the former mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville did colour commentary for Rogers Television's York Region election coverage Monday night, Lui Temelkovski celebrated in a church hall on Markham's Main Street.

Rookie politician Temelkovski had just been elected MP for the new riding of Markham-Oak Ridges.

Last spring, the two engaged in a fight for the Liberal nomination in the riding that reaches from northern King Township in the northwest to southeast Markham. It ended at one of the most bizarre nomination meetings in local history.

An overcrowded Parkview Village seniors centre auditorium in Stouffville was emptied by fire officials. Some members went home or had their vote refused. The newspaper's phone lines lit up the next morning with complaints about how the selection was handled.

The upshot? Mr. Emmerson took the high road and wished Mr. Temelkovski well.

"Yes, that could have been me," Mr. Emmerson said the morning after the election.

"That could have been me going to Ottawa. But it's all over now."

There's more surprise than bitterness in the voice of the mayor from 1995 until last November.

"I really didn't expect Lui to have that much support," he said. "I knew (Conservative candidate) Bob Callow was known in the area, through running before and the police board, but not Lui."

"I just hope Lui doesn't forget about us up here in the rural areas of Stouffville and King. It's a big riding."

For now, Mr. Emmerson is back at his old day job at Schell Lumber on Edward Street.

"I'm not planning on running again. I'm just trying to settle in here again."

"I can't see myself running — at least at this time."

The door to the lumber store sounds at least partially open.

Jim Mason is editor of the *Stouffville Sun-Tribune*.

Letters to the Editor

Canadians need proportional representation

An open letter to new Oak Ridges-Markham MP Lui Temelkovski.

Congratulations on your win. You conducted a clean and honourable campaign and were rewarded by voters.

Canadians expressed a strong desire for a minority government. I regard this desire as very much indicative of Canadian sensibilities.

Canadians overwhelmingly recognize the value of listening to each other and working cooperatively. It is this sensibility that provides one of the strongest arguments for proportional representation.

It is my fervent hope our next Parliament implements a system of proportional representation.

While actual seat totals for the next Parliament are Liberals 135, Conservatives 99, Bloc 54 and NDP 19, under proportional representation those totals would be Liberals 113, Conservatives 91, NDP 48, BQ 38 and Greens 12.

When no party achieves more than 50 per cent of the popular vote, minority governments more accurately represent voters than majority governments, but proportional representation is by far the superior democratic arrangement. Legislators must work together to develop solutions that can be supported by a majority.

This requires members of government be prepared to listen to each other and work cooperatively. Canadians are recognized interna-

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tionally as thoughtful, polite and co-operative people.

We have the perfect temperament to make proportional representation work.

As one of your new constituents, may I also ask that you make strong efforts to ensure Liberal promises to build affordable housing, introduce national daycare and protect and reinvigorate public health care are kept.

I hope, too, you will work with Bloc Quebecois and NDP members to seriously address environmental concerns.

More than 33 per cent of Canadians voted for the NDP, Bloc or the Greens — parties recognized by independent organizations as having strong environmental platforms.

Your constituents in Oak Ridges-Markham are counting on you to listen to and support initiatives that will build an environmentally sustainable future.

PAMELA COURTOT
NDP CANDIDATE
OAK RIDGES-MARKHAM

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