

Ward Forum Notes from May 3, 2010

Principal **Usha Glen** welcomed us to **Rippleton** and spoke about some of the activities taking place at her school.

Starting off the evening **York Mills CI** students told us about a terrific fundraiser they organized to benefit **Park Lane Public School**. Park Lane is a special school for children with cognitive and physical disabilities. The purpose of the fundraising event was to raise money for a Snoezelen Room (total cost about \$150,000) a wonderful peaceful sensory space designed to promote relaxation through the gentle use of aromas, tactile, audio and visual stimulation. **Windfields Junior High School** has also joined in to help raise funds. It is gratifying to see our schools helping each other. That's what it's all about...after all we are called a *family* of schools.

Our superintendents of schools spoke about the District Reviews that took place this year at **York Mills, Rippleton and Gateway**. These reviews involve central Board educators who spend a full day in the school and visit every classroom. I have a motion to be considered by the Board to involve community members in these reviews in future years.

Next was our guest speaker, **Kathleen Wynne** MPP, past Minister of Education and presently Minister of Transportation. Kathleen told us about her responsibilities now as Minister of Transportation including oversight of bridges and the thousands of kilometers of highways in the province.

Kathleen also discussed the "hot topic" of revamping the sex education curriculum which was in the works when she was Minister of Education. Noting that data from the Safe Schools Report was used as a framework for the revisions of the health curriculum, Kathleen indicated that homophobia, sexual orientation and sexual violence were the top issues that needed to be addressed. Mental health professionals and parent groups agreed with proposed changes, however because of recent public

opposition, the province has decided to consult further on this issue.

Kathleen also discussed the new Early Learning policy that includes full day learning for kindergarten children beginning this September. **Harrison Public School** is the only school in our ward that has been designated for early learning beginning this fall; however the goal is to have all the schools in our ward offering a full day kindergarten program by 2015. As many of our neighbourhood schools are bursting at the seams Kathleen did indicate that provincial funds will need to be earmarked to build or retrofit the spaces necessary for early learning in the future.

She also addressed other issues such as specialty schools and answered questions from the floor.

As for my report, I spoke about my role on the Boys Strategy committee which is examining ways to improve the performance of boys in school. The Board has approved a feasibility study of opening a school for boys only, a school for girl only, a choir school and a sports school. I personally did not support the gender specific schools because the evidence is inconclusive that they improve student achievement and I feel that they might inadvertently do more harm than good.

I also discussed the necessity of principals to be more transparent with school funds and the need of parents to keep track of fundraising money. This issue arose out of concerns at **Owen**. I expect new guidelines to be in place shortly for all schools

This is Asian Heritage Month. I have been quite interested in providing curriculum so that students learn about World War 11 in Asia. I am working with a group called **ALPHA** who is organizing an international conference in Toronto to inform teachers and students about this topic.

My report included a brief discussion about the overall budget for education and proposed changes for parent involvement in

principal selection.

I also acknowledged that **Zane Schwartz, a Leaside High School** student, who was elected from over 150 secondary schools to the position of Student Trustee on our Board.

Once again it was satisfying being together to discuss education.

I am contemplating a new format for these meetings for next year and I may cancel the last meeting of this year because there are so many special activities in our schools. I will let you know in advance.

In an effort to keep connected however I have begun using Twitter. For those who have not yet used this new communications devicego to <http://twitter.com> and sign up with a user name and a secret password. You then can check my tweets and provide feedback if you wish. I hope to include interesting facts about education and highlight community events.

Thanks,
[Gerri Gershon](#)
Trustee, Don Valley West
416 395 8408