

Ontario Student Trustees' Association

# The Papercut: The Student Voice

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## *Education, education, education*

*“The Youth of a Nation are trustees of Posterity.”*  
*Disraeli*

**JONATHAN SCOTT**

What is education? And what should education be? How can we make education better?

We should explore its roots, analyse what a school was meant to be. Only by becoming acquainted with the idea of education, the concept of gathering pupils into a collective community of learning, can we plan to make this central to the hope of a society better.

We know what is wrong: violence, bullying, a lack of money, resources, optimism. Schools could be so much better. We often explore what is lacking in the system, the disconnect between the possible and reality. Building better schools, framing futures, is the task of school board trustees. Ryerson said, “The first object of a wise government should be the education of the people”.

As students, we want to understand the concept of schools, appreciating the good things in our classrooms while planning the better, centres of educational excellence that can be formed.

This journal is our place to shift through ideas, to talk about how to steadily make the difference in educational policy, to close the gaps and serve our peers.

In this, the first edition of *The Papercut: The Student Voice*, we’re thinking

through what schools are and could be. We confront the notion of “specialised schools” head-on, suggesting that communities of learning, with diverse groups of students sitting in the desks together, is an important tenant of society.

But, we also recognise the need to tailor programmes to special needs—gifted students, special education and unique takes on curriculum for those with unique needs. It’s finding the balance, the challenge of diversity, that matters.

We look at how students can work with their teachers and principals. Tracing schools back to their earliest incarnation, we also project a new vision for Ontario’s schools, a recipe for ensuring student success written by students.

Students serving students is what the position of student trustee is all about. In some ways, our position is cutting edge. Hence the title of this paper: we use paper to advance issues, reflecting the standard that the pen is mightier than the sword. We speak with the collective voice of Ontario’s diverse student population.

This journal is a way to share ideas, to suggest possible solutions and challenge standards. Enjoy the exchange of ideas, enjoy reading the student voice.



## Mean girls: watch your back

LAUREN MILLAR

Four earth-bound goddesses grace the hallways of North Shore High School, wearing their designer outfits and flawless countenances. Students and teachers are immediately drawn to their divine-like appearance that seems to be accomplished so effortlessly. Referred to as the “Plastics”, these four girls undeniably rule the school and are treated like royalty.

The “Plastics” are from the movie released in 2004, “Mean Girls”. For those who have not seen the movie, (the two of you still out there) Cady Heron (Lindsay Lohan) is a 15 year-old girl who spent most of her life home schooled in Africa by her zoologist parents. Right before her grade-eleven year, Cady and her family relocate to suburban Illinois where for the first time she attends high school.

Within her first few days, she is given a crash course in the various cliques of the student body: the jocks, the cheerleaders, the stoners, the cool kids and so on. Much to her own (and the school’s) amazement she is taken in by the top clique, those Plastics. It does not take Cady long to recognise the manipulative, backstabbing ways of the girls and the school itself. It is a new world, scarier than her times in the jungle.

But is the movie based on truth? Unfortunately, far too many of its horrors are real-world inspired. Although “Mean Girls” is extremely exaggerated, and comedic, the fact that bullying amongst girls has risen is true—and it is no laughing matter.

The American Justice Department says a quarter of teens are bullied. The difference between male and female bullying is that male is usually physical and far easier to recognise and, ideally, to stop. Female bullying, on the other hand, rarely involves physical actions, and is usually on a more psychological level. It is done not only to raise one’s personal self-esteem, but in the case of the movie “Mean Girls”, to impress one’s peers. It puts the bullies exactly where they want to be—in control. This usually happens in large groups, where a group of girls (like the Plastics) has the ability to sway people into going against another individual.

It is easy to put the blame on the “popular” clique and state that all female bullying is brought on by them, but this is not true. Bullying comes in all shapes and sizes. Since anyone is capable of doing it, many people unfortunately do. Over the past few years, the traditional “steal-your-lunch-money bully” has started

to fade in high schools, but this has made way for bullying’s new frontier: cyber bullying. In the movie, the girls create a “Burn Book” where they write mean things about their classmates.

Yet, the movie chooses to ignore the role that the internet plays in the lives of teenage girls today. While “cyber-bullying” has become the buzzword, it is not just an invention of the media. The

American “i-SAFE” survey recently released statistics stating that 90% of middle school students have been bullied online. The unfortunate statistic goes hand in hand with the reality that only 15% of parents polled know what cyber-bullying is.

What makes cyber-bullying so threatening is that unlike “normal” bullying, the bully can choose to be anonymous, emotional reactions are unknown and students are led to believe that anything they can say online could affect them in real life.

Luckily, the Ministry of Education’s definition of bullying now also recognises cyber bullying. The definition states bullying “may also occur through the use of technology” such as email, cell phones, text messaging, internet websites or other technology. This brings light to an increasingly problematic situation. Facebook and online ways to be friends are a brave new world, and a new avenue for teasing and taunting.

Overall, stories about high school bullies tend to focus on the victim, leaving the perpetrator to be viewed as a nameless, faceless blonde laughing at her prey from the top of the cheerleading (and social) pyramid. This focus, while necessary to help develop an awareness of the damage such bullying can do, obscures the necessity of dealing with the bully herself.

Unfortunately, this is something that the school cannot handle by itself, and girls themselves need to start recognising this behaviour as wrong and standing up against it. It is only when this is done that girl bullying will cease to exist. “Mean Girls” ended perfectly. Cady Heron was able to establish understanding between the cliques. She found out who her true friends were and conquered social segregation.

The ending—reaching that understanding—was “feel good”. It should also inspire us to create our own endings, for it is finally the time to see social hierarchy in schools collapse.

*Lauren is Communications Officer for the English Public Board Council and grade-eleven student trustee for Hamilton-Wentworth DSB.*

**“Although ‘Mean Girls’ is extremely exaggerated, and comedic, the fact that bullying amongst girls has risen is true—and it is no laughing matter.”**

## Bullying bites

CHYNNA RESENDES

My feet thump against the school path, as I run as fast as my overweight body can take me. This boy was not the first or the last kid to call me names and tease me.

At a young age, I would reach for a bag of potato chips rather than an apple. My mum did not realise the weight gain in its early stages; neither did my school.

It is imperative that schools have programs for students to learn about proper nutrition and the basics to a good lifestyle. At the time, teachers should have noticed my excuses for not participating in gym class. I think that teachers need to be keen when it comes to a child's health. Especially seeing that in many cases, poor nutrition as a child can be a reflection of an unhealthy living style for an adult.

My lack of nutrition was not the only problem that I faced. I faced exclusion at school. I was lucky if my so-called friends were in a good mood and wanted to play with me. In grade 4, I really started to pack on the pounds. Nicknames began: Tubby, Chunky, Chubs, Chubby Chynna, Fatty.

My mum would explain to me that teasing is a part of life. After all, she was teased as a child. So, I gained a little more confidence, knowing that this bullying phase would pass. I assumed it would pass once I lost my baby-fat. That's what I used to call it. It made me feel less insecure than I really was.

I was tired of school. This era really shot me into a stage of depression. I developed such a rotten attitude that made it that I was not even worthy for a friend. I was a very negative person in that era.

I hated school. I look back now at those early years and find it hard to believe that not one teacher noticed. Not one noticed that I always sat alone when my 'friends' would run fast for tag. Or that my name was always coined with a negative word. That I sometimes cried at recess. Usually I did not even go

**“My mum did not realise the weight gain in its early stages; neither did my school.”**

out. I stayed inside to help with the library. The library was my safe spot. The one thing in my life that I had control over! I could control the organisation of the books, but not the organisation of my life, separated parents, weight issues.

Ironically, I moved myself out of physical activity—which I needed. I do recognise my own culpability but feel a teacher, a guiding adult, could have helped by stepping in.

Out of my entire experience as a veteran to bullying, the hardest part to deal with was the bystanders; people watching the situation unfold and doing nothing to stop it. It really hurt to now that I was alone, especially if a teacher could not help. I felt that I was stuck in a rut.

I decided to lose weight. After I lost the weight, I was teased and gossiped about because I was too thin. It was rumoured that I ate nothing but Slim-Fast bars and I threw up. In school, there is no justice. I was teased for being too fat, too skinny, too smart, too dumb. It's absolutely terrible that bullying occurs because of one's appearance, personality, religion, race, culture, or economic status: things that no one can control.

In my story, I overcame my experience with bullying. I was able to learn from the mistakes that others made by hurting me, and vowing to never hurt anyone like that. I gained so much optimism and hope that I could accomplish anything and be who and what I wanted. Every time that I see bullying occur, I do my best to stop the situation and prevent someone from being hurt.

My story has a happy ending, but many do not because they may result in serious depression, absenteeism from school, trouble at school and self-destructive behaviour, and even possibly suicide. Schools shouldn't be places kids fear.

*Chynna is a grade-eleven student and a trustee with the Windsor-Essex Catholic DSB.*

## Making classrooms engaging

EMILIA LING

As our civilisation evolved, our teaching methods and our ideals have changed. Over the ages, schools have developed significantly. The earliest schools consisted of elders passing down knowledge to younger generations. It is only recently that our modern day idea of schooling, where qualified educators instruct students using curriculum-based materials.

During the times of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle, schooling was not for the general public, but mainly reserved for the wealthy and the privileged. Nonetheless, the benefits of education were well appreciated. As Plato once eloquently said, “You ask what is the good of education in general, the answer is easy; that education makes good men, and that good men act nobly”.

At Plato’s Academy, Aristotle was taught by Plato for over twenty years. Plato’s ideal schooling system started out with the educators themselves. He thought that in order for a student to succeed, the educator must first care deeply for their student, for their future, their well-being and for the cultivation of their ideals. Plato taught by this principle, and helped mould some of the greatest minds in history, including Cicero, Plutarch and, most notably, Aristotle.

Had Aristotle not been schooled by Plato, one of the greatest minds of all times might not have been honed. Aristotle went on to discover many theories, including his educational theory. In Aristotle’s educational theory, he devised a method in which education should be taught. Aristotle believed that reason and habit were crucial components to the method of education. He felt that as a teacher one should lay out material through laws of reason first, and then use repetition as means of enforcing the material. As Aristotle stated later in life, “to be conscious that we are perceiving or thinking is to be conscious of our own existence”.

When Aristotle created his own school, the Lyceum, it redefined the ideal classroom-style schooling. Most of his discussions with his students occurred while they strolled around the Lyceum gardens. His students became known as peripatetics, which is the Greek descriptive word for “walking about”.

**“The educator can be described symbolically as a gardener, one who must care and tend to the seeds before they may bloom into vibrant flowers.”**

At the Lyceum, the students were ruled by themselves. Every ten days, the students would elect a fellow pupil to oversee administrative duties. Students were encouraged to rule and organise themselves; they were not confined to a classroom setting all the time: they lived out their education.

At Aristotle’s Lyceum, students mainly conducted scientific and historic research, and in this way, they were able to absorb and understand knowledge through finding means of reason by themselves. Aristotle himself used his student’s research in his scientific endeavours. His teaching methods influenced many great minds, including Alexander the Great, who he tutored before he opened the Lyceum.

In modern-day society, the standard school is a far reach from Aristotle’s Lyceum, or even Plato’s Academy. However, it seems that one idea has survived through millennia. In both the Lyceum and the Academy, it was apparent that the Aristotle and Plato had a strong sense of knowledge and caring for their students, and for their field of work. This logic helped Plato and Aristotle produce model students who went on to discover many new things.

The educator can be described symbolically as a gardener, one who must care and tend to the seeds before they may bloom into vibrant flowers. In order for a school and its students to thrive, one must start from within. As said by Plato, “The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future in life”.

The direction of the idea of education should similarly inspire us to realise the best benefits of education and to engage in a participatory and well-rounded style of learning, a texture of thought that will serve as a life foundation.

*Emilia is a student trustee with the District School Board of Niagara.*

## Advancing the student vision

ANDREW PAWLUCH & JONATHAN SCOTT

Now we need to lift our ambitions. Progress has come. But progress is a process and progress alone, advancement alone, is insufficient. We are striving towards a grand and ever-evolving goal; we must continue towards improvement with the same sense of optimistic urgency as ever.

We must complete the process of change in Ontario's education by advancing the student vision.

In the milieu of education reforms over the past decade has been the development of the student trustees' role. Every school board in Ontario now has at least one student trustee, a student elected by her peers to sit at the board table, empowered to represent her peers in formal decisions through a non-binding vote. Student trustees are gaining credence and, through the provincial association, a unified vision for education.

It is this vision, this directive straight from the students, which is key to improving our education in Ontario. The student vision details what must be done to progress our quality of education, to make good schools genuine centres of excellence and to tackle the pockets of deep educational disadvantage still existing across Ontario. This vision from the very individuals who education is meant to serve provides the perspective to make successful solutions.

Ontario's schools need an infusion of vision: our schools need money, innovation and inspiration. Students can be trusted and counted upon to make meaningful contributions to our schools.

The funding formulae, the lifeblood of schools, needs to be reformed. It must be made equitable and dynamic, strong for all regions and sufficient to ensure an exemplary standard of education across the province—in both our cities and in our hinterlands.

This funding retooling must address the disadvantaged in our system: students with special needs, students with behavioural problems and children living in poverty, whether from the cities' violent neighbourhoods, single-parent rural families or aboriginal reserves.

Every student sees their success differently. But success for the system is success for all students. Schools must be equalisers, providing students with a fair chance to define their own futures.

Our schools need to continue to make advancements in science and math, preparing students for careers unknown by today's technology—diverse jobs based on innovative thinking.

**“Ontario's schools need an infusion of vision: our schools need money, innovation and inspiration.”**

But our schools cannot merely crank out thinkers: the quality of our citizenship, the very fabric of the social understanding bonding our public schools together, must be taught. Our schools must educate citizens.

Schools should teach character to help create safe schools. Schools must be green and teach environmental responsibility. Students need to be informed Canadians, well-versed in our

history and knowledgeable of our civic process. Bilingualism must be embraced as the blessing it is by fostering better methods of teaching and engaging students in their second language.

Informed, prepared citizens require diverse opportunities. School boards must provide meaningful extra-curricular activities—art, drama, sports and opportunities for leadership. Schools should teach healthy eating choices to ensure pupils have the capacity to reach their potential. This means more funding to help offset varying student-activities fees and to fund a larger breadth of learning opportunities in schools.

Students desire the chance to explore education, experiencing the diversity of life. Albert Einstein once said, “All true learning is experience. Everything else is just information.” Education should be an experience as pupils receive the skills they need to advance their hopes and dreams to fruition; they need the chance to put their skills into practice.

The student vision is one where we are prepared for our future, gifted with an understanding of our citizenship and provided with the chance to explore our talents. We envision a system focused on education, not evaluation, where learning is pre-eminent and students are engaged and inspired to grasp their future with optimism.

Premier McGuinty strives to be “the education premier”. Students are on the frontlines of his vision. We have answers for our own future; we have the student vision—inside ideas and fresh perspective. Let's work together, as students, parents, teachers and MPPs, to imagine what a school can—and should—be.

It is only when we collectively take ownership for education that we truly achieve a system worthy of the confidence of the government, the public and, most importantly, the students.

*Andrew Pawluch is the student trustee for the Rainbow DSB and is president of OSTA-AECO. Jonathan Scott is a student trustee with the Simcoe County DSB and the Director of Communications. Both are grade-twelve students.*

## Administrating relations

### SEPIDETH SOLITANNIA

Before becoming a student trustee, I was external affairs officer on my student council. I worked frequently with other student councils on school events. I was surprised by the disparity between the types of events allowed by different administrations. Occasionally, an idea that had become tradition at one school was rejected by another school.

I had to wonder if the reason had to do with what principals allowed as events. I began wondering more about student-administrator relationships within our schools. How do they differ? How are they similar? What makes them successful and how can they be improved?

So I decided to conduct a survey.

Representatives of different secondary school student councils, were first asked to give a numerical rating of their relationship with administration. The response indicated relations are generally positive.

The respondents were then asked, “do you ever feel that your administration is dismissive or hostile towards your ideas?” The most frequent answer was “sometimes”.

Students knew how to improve the working relationship between principals and students: the most frequent comment was a greater need for administration presence at student council meetings. Everyone understands that administrators are busy people; however, taking the time to visit their school’s student government is vital in establishing a working relationship. As one student wrote, “students need to feel like they are understood and not dismissed”. Principals also need to be more open to new ideas and willing to change, the respondents felt.

Students felt a lack of understanding from their administration about what it’s like to be a student. As a possible solution to this complex problem, the student councils outlined it best when they noted that better commu-

nication and a greater administration presence is important.

Finally, the students were asked “what advice would you give other student councils regarding an effective student-administrator relationship?”

Once again, good communication was the most frequent comment. Some students also noted always asking for the administration’s input and keeping them updated on the council’s plans.

Overall, from the answers to my questions and from the largely high rating of the student-administrator relationships, it is clear that, from a student perspective, there are healthy relationships within our schools. Although, like any relationship, they can be improved, the hard work and

dedication of our administrators is well-known and appreciated by the student governments.

I decided to present my findings to my Board, hoping superintendents would take back what I had said to administrators. I also had the privilege of attending an Ontario Principal’s Council training meeting, where teachers were training to become Vice-Principals. Armed with this information, I spoke to them about the importance of strong student-administrator relationships. They were very interested in hearing what type of relationships students wanted with their administrators. I was elated to see how seriously they valued the opinions of students.

Students working with principals is a good thing. Perhaps with better working relations, we can see similar events at every school and more effective communication between students and administration.

*Sepideth Solitannia is a student trustee for the York Region DSB. She is a grade-twelve student.*

**“Students felt a lack of understanding from their administration about what it’s like to be a student.”**

## Gifted education

JEN SERDECHNAIA

Gifted.

The word even has a special ring to it. It is reminiscent of presents and birthdays. When you're given a present, you're happy. Why wouldn't you want to be gifted?

At the age of eleven and in grade six, I wanted nothing more than to attain that special title. It seemed that those who were gifted had a unique ability and an extraordinary future ahead.

Having immigrated to Canada at the age of nine, I had missed the EQAO test that would have determined my fate once and for all. Thus I spent my time wondering what the gifted students were doing in their class while I was in mine. I wondered whether their Track and Field Days were different (perhaps closer resembling the Olympics?). I imagined the intensity of their math class. I thought of the activities they might be doing after school.

Turns out my chance to find out came in grade seven. I was tested for the gifted status through particular activities administered by a specified teacher, such as memory games, recognition of patterns and breadth of vocabulary. After undergoing the test, I awaited breathlessly for the verdict.

It came in the form of a parent-teacher meeting to which I was denied access. Both my parents came home and sat me down at the kitchen table to deliver the crushing news. I was not identified gifted.

As a twelve-year-old with her heart set on a concept, I cried for days. What did this mean? Did it mean I wasn't smart? That I wasn't good enough to be with the gifted students? That I had no future prospects?

So what does it mean to be gifted? Typically, gifted students are in the top two percent of the national average based on their IQ (usually 130 and up). According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, gifted-

ness is defined as "an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences".

Regardless of the meaning, gifted is a profile that I did not fit. I felt so rejected.

**"Schools must serve all students and, if special programmes are required for those with problems or those for whom learning is a breeze, it's important to remember that all students have access to success."**

Years later, I entered classes with gifted individuals in high school as a motivated student. Getting to know them, I saw that there was a great variance in intelligence, motivation and talent just like with other students.

Becoming friends with them, I learnt of their stories of struggle with segregation, discrimination and maltreatment from other kids. No doubt like me, these bullying kids wondered why they were not special enough to be gifted. Their ignorance and confusion turned into discrimination.

In the end, I think it comes down to education. Gifted children should be made aware of what it is that is different about them. Students that are not should be educated about the difference as well, so as not to discriminate or feel rejected.

Being gifted does make a student special, but it also does not mean that not being gifted does not. In the end, schools need to serve all students and, if special programmes are required for those with problems learning or those for whom learning is a breeze, it's important to remember that all students still have access to success.

*Jen is a student trustee with the York Region DSB and is a grade-twelve student.*

## Refuge education

### Editor's Comment:

*One of the largest questions being asked when we think of "what is a school" involves questions of pluralism and schools focused on identity. We present two articles—one written during the debate on Africentric schools in Toronto in a local paper, the other by an African-Canadian student.*

We are all in the world. What good can ever come from separation and segregation? What is multiculturalism if it descends into ghettos? Are we a community of equals or a community of communities? Out of many are we one?

Can breaking society, a pluralistic community of equals, into distinct groups ever been beneficial? Is there any greater purpose that necessitates splitting up a society? Even if such a necessity exists, will the solution be successful?

In essence, should the Toronto District School Board create an Africentric school? This hugely controversial debate has become polarised. Accusations of racism and political positioning abound. The important question, the theme of the issue, the centre de coeur, is being obfuscated by the politics.

One crucial point not often reported is that this Africentric school is not the first alternative, separated school in Toronto.

The TDSB already has one aboriginal-focused school to teach Ojibwa rather than French and focus on native culture. This school isn't alternative for discipline or student-success reasons but to offer a specialised programme. In some ways, this enriched focus was the intention of a blacks-only school when it was originally proposed by diverse experts, including Stephen Lewis.

The Africentric school was meant to be like an arts school: a unique twist on the curriculum, not a refuge for the treatment of the social ill that is gangs and the gross poverty in parts of the afro-canadiens community in Toronto.

Yet, for some reason, the school was billed as a refuge, a way to remove students into a haven, to separate delinquents. The idea was not to help kids learn their culture but to save kids from the ravages of the ghettoised culture.

This distinction is likely part of the problem. We have no problem with the TDSB motion to approve an expanded curriculum to incorporate cultural education. Indeed, we welcome this move and feel it is a good game plan to quell the religious-schools debate too by creating a mandatory world religions class from a pluralistic standpoint. There is nothing wrong with using education to solve problems. The problem comes from tampering with education itself,

removing kids from the real world of multiculturalism, artificially creating boundaries and enforcing distinctions.

The biggest undercurrent to the debate is the reality in Toronto's education system: there already are three schools that serve as refuges for students having problems fitting into the regular system. TDSB has three LGBT schools.

Does the question then become: if gays have three schools shouldn't races whose members are the categorised (read stereotypically) gang offenders merit a haven school just as much as homosexuals? Isn't the abuse similar in both cases? The goal of the homosexual school is to shield from abuse, not to try to change lifestyle; the goal of the black-focused school is a hybrid of both.

### "Out of many are we one?"

Society is not about withdrawal. To save children at risk both of not graduating and of descending into a hell of emotional and societal poverty, schools must be better. Teachers must be better.

The system must work better. The solution is not to create refuges, caverns of convenience, divorced from the nature of the real world.

The Charter does not allow for blacks-only schools; any student or teacher wanting to attend cannot be denied entry, cannot be discriminated against based on race. Creating an Africentric school therefore is merely a window dressing; a relatively well-meaning way to help that won't help in the end.

It is difficult to support segregating students, promoting differences over commonality. Citizenship isn't conditional. Education, to be truly public, must mirror the real world. Sheltering students from the bigotry and abuse of others or corralling students into a world to reform and aid in success may produce the opposite: gays who are unconditioned for a world still too bigoted and afro-canadiens either unused to a pluralistic work force, susceptible to a Petri dish of gang breeding, or both.

Schools need to work better. Education needs to work better. Parents need to work better. Parents need to remember they are the first educators. The system needs to make learning easier not through segregation but through a coming-together, through communication and the breaking of barriers.

This necessity is easier said than done. Yet it must be done. Society is answerable to what will happen if schools and parents fail.

*Originally published by The Bradford West Gwillimbury Times by Jonathan Scott.*

## Africentric schools

**NERISSA-KAY BRADLEY**

Martin Luther King. Ella Baker. Maya Angelou. Rosa Parks. These are just a few names of the civil rights predecessors that advocated for freedom and equality. Boycotts, protests and marches were all an integral component in the struggle towards equal opportunities for every black person. Coupled with perseverance and passion, the goal of these advocates was to succeed, to advance and to educate. Since the early 1960s these efforts have advanced a societal view of integration in the United States. Education for black students then was a privilege. What then can be said of education today?

Canada, as a multicultural society, strives to show equality to all people, to be a place of opportunity for everyone. Today integration is no longer the struggle that it once proved to be.

But, in 2008, we find a problem much different than in 1960's America. Canada, a country rich in diversity, has approached a barrier regarding the success of black students in the current education system. On January 29<sup>th</sup> 2008, the Toronto District School Board voted in favour of the induction of Africentric schools and pilot programmes focused on culture and history. This comes as quite the shock for Canadian culture, as it will be the first black-focused school in Canadian history. So what is the purpose of such a school? It has been estimated that 40% of black students drop out of school in Toronto before graduation. Undoubtedly this statistic is staggering. But what does this school seek to promote? I suppose the real question is if this is a solution or simply an impulsive action to please constituents.

I can see both sides of the story, but don't necessarily believe that this is the answer to the drop-out rate. "Increasingly, it is being recognized that the issues of dropouts and dropout prevention cannot be separated from issues affecting our total economic and social structure. These issues include poverty, unemployment, and discrimination, the role of the family, social values, the welfare cycle, child abuse, and drug abuse" (*Peck, Law, and Mills 1987*). What then has been done to combat these fundamental issues?

On one side of the spectrum, it can be proposed that culture and history can be learnt anywhere a student goes. Though students will choose to attend the Africentric school and all students will welcome, there is no question that this school will be predominately, if not entirely black. By no means am I against black schools, I just do not see how this is the answer to the dropout rate. Simple questions need to be asked before implementing a program and building a school. Separation is not the answer; what is necessary is united approach to ensuring that students are engaged, assisted, and motivated in their school systems.

**"All a student really needs is an environment where they will find encouragement, engagement, education."**

Though some may see the approval of Africentric schools as a dream come true, others see it as a limiting factor, or slap in the face to what our African-American advocates have worked towards in our history. Most importantly, it is necessary for students to be integrated into a diverse environment so they obtain a more open mind and are able to respect different cultures for their future careers.

It is my suggestion that instead of focusing on a "black" school, the school board should model a school that has been designed to cater specifically to the at-risk students. The objective of such a program is to ensure the success and graduation of students with high dropout rates and low income.

Such a school should be the board's focus; rather than segregating one non-homogenous culture, TDSB should adopt an education structure and philosophy that seeks to solve and act on the issues at hand.

A successful system is only created when the mindset holding that race-based schools are essential to the student success is deterred.

Fundamentally, all a student really needs is an environment where they will find encouragement, engagement, education and belonging. If all of these are present, race would not be an issue of success; thus, success would be a reality for those students who had once been left behind.

*Nerissa is a student trustee with the Windsor-Essex Catholic DSB and is a grade-twelve student.*

As the largest student stakeholder in Ontario's education system OSTA-AECO represents the 1.9 million students in the English Public, English Catholic, French Catholic and French Public school boards. The association promotes the unity without conformity of all affiliated student trustees in order to advance the student vision in Ontario.

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Student trustees are elected by their peers to bring the student voice to district school board tables. Through a non-binding vote, they present their peers' perspective to improve the quality of education in schools across the province.

## A student vision. A united voice

[www.osta-aeco.org](http://www.osta-aeco.org)



The opinions herein are reflective of individual student trustees and are not necessarily reflective of the policies of OSTA-AECO.