

A Parent's Perspective on YMCI and the Future - Final

Prepared for Committee of the Whole (TDSB) Meeting, CW:006A, Wednesday, June 12, 2019, 4:30 p.m., Boardroom, Main Floor, 5050 Yonge Street, Toronto

As Related to Agenda Item 6.4 - Update on York Memorial Collegiate Institute

Thank you, Madame Chair and Esteemed Trustees, for allowing this opportunity to address the Committee of the Whole. My intent is to provide the Board with observations of the experience, highlight some concerns, and express hope for the future for our students.

My Experience -

As a parent of a Grade 11 student, and co-chair of the York Memorial School Council, I don't think I could adequately express the level of uncertainty and fear I felt the morning of May 7th when I woke up to read the news of the second fire. It was devastating to see the concern and grief on the faces of the staff, administrators, students, and former principal who gathered at George Harvey that morning. We joined others to watch the battle that was being waged to save the building and I am truly grateful to the Toronto Fire Service, and Toronto Police Services for their efforts to save and protect the York Memorial building.

I was also at George Harvey Friday, May 10th and observed the administrators and teachers working cooperatively to create a working plan so that our students could finish the current year. It was a moving and powerful experience to watch the York Memo teachers, many of them who lost decades worth of materials, notes, and thousands of dollars of personal items in the fire (including vehicles), but were relying on their professional training and leadership skills to get them to where they needed to be. I was extremely impressed by the work of the support staff, administrators, Principals Donna Drummond and Sam Miceli, and Superintendent Marguerite Campbell as they answered questions, directed others and kept the work progressing.

I attended the following Monday, May 13th, morning as the students poured through the doors - were welcomed by their teachers and staffs, oriented themselves, got their new schedules and became familiar with the new space. It was an impressive sight to see

such resilience, courage, and bravery in the school communities as they moved to create the new normal.

I have continued to return to the school - for parent meetings, to ask questions, to check in with teachers, students and staff and, most recently, to attend the Walk-in last Thursday. I've gone to see how what we have asked them to do is actually working - for everyone involved and to be a presence for the students while representing the parents.

Our Concerns - Student Well-being, Equity of Access, Communication

I realize that there is clearly much to consider when looking at the future of these schools. The timing of the budget cuts to the Board could not have been worse for our school communities and we are all legitimately concerned about the effects of these cuts on our schools and our children's education.

With regards to the process of the end of this school year:

- In view of the LOI data, and the barriers within the community, **the timeline for the Board's community consultation and the methods for reaching our diverse population did not adequately reflect goals of equity of access and inclusivity**. Specifically, with the language barriers and likely non-traditional employment situations, the timeline of events may have been a barrier to diverse and inclusive community response to surveys, meeting and open house schedules.
- It has been over a month and **we are still waiting for information as to the cause, and when personal items in adjacent buildings will be returned to us**. Lack of information promotes distrust in the system.
- It is important to acknowledge and address **areas where we did not adequately, and equitably provide for the teachers and the students**. Some examples are:
 - **The DD program** needed to be temporarily supported in another school and the Options Reports did not include this part of our school family.
 - Our students were directly impacted due to **insufficient space for instruction** - despite the reported availability of classrooms.
 - **The portables** described in today's report were installed, but were not in use as of last Friday and this Friday is the last day of classes.
 - **The combined school solution did not take into account the student's needs, for either school, for computer access to complete work for the current school year.**

Our Hopes -

It is significant to me that this Board of Trustees will operate in a parallel timeline as the York Memo and George Harvey students currently registered in grade 9. Any decisions you make as a Board will directly impact the graduating class of 2022.

I believe the TDSB recommendations being made today are the best, and only, option for the coming school year. The differences in program focus, school calendar, and needs and culture could not be easily overcome by merely looking at facts and figures. Forcing the two-school option in the coming year would be, in my opinion, detrimental to both schools.

I choose to be hopeful for our schools. Throughout the school year, the York Memorial School Council has worked to improve communication and engagement within the parent community. The fire has mobilized our alumni and has spurred neighbourhood community engagement - the public support of our schools has and will continue to support and strengthen them. Trustee Tonks continues to support the community efforts with information links on his Ward page. The neighbourhood will no doubt be affected when the Eglinton Crosstown LRT Project's Keelesdale Station located at York Memorial comes online in 2020-2021.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the loss of the York Memorial building has been significant - to the students, parents, teachers, administrators, and support staff on personal, professional, physical, and emotional levels. The process of pushing forward over the last month has had an impact on the York Memorial community, and that of the George Harvey community. I am so proud of all our graduating and rising students who have demonstrated their leadership and resilience in completing the 2018-2019 school year - they should serve as an inspiration to all of us.

As we look to the coming school year, **we must acknowledge and correct our assumptions, look truthfully at the realities** of this community, the schools and of the TDSB, **listen and communicate better to all parties involved**, and ultimately **move forward in equitably supporting future student success**.

Thank you.