

Ward 7 Education Council
January 31, 2011 – Math Curriculum Night
FOR INFORMATION

www.tdsb.on.ca/atkinson

1. Good News From Schools

- a) King George PS Raising Funds for Needy Schools.....1
- b) Small School Big Bucks2

2. New TDSB Elementary Academies

- a) Registration Kicks Off3
- b) Vocal Music Academy Info4

3. Registered Disability Savings Plan

- a) Information Pamphlet8

4. News Articles

- a) Update from Councillor Doucette, Ward 13.....10
- b) Update from Councillor Perks, Ward 1412
- c) [At Top Public Schools, the Arts Replace Recess](#)13
- d) [Identity of rogue teachers to be made public](#)15
- e) [When students face expulsion from school](#)17
- f) [What Happens When Petulant Parents Won't Share?](#)23
- g) [Marijuana Use Growing Among Teenagers](#)24

King George PS Raising Funds for Needy Schools

December 16, 2011

Dear Dr. Spence, Ms. Atkinson and Ms. Phillips Long,

I have a lovely story to share. As we know Fund Raising is a big issue in TDSB schools. Some schools fund raise thousands, others nothing. This is a huge concern to the King George Community. For our raffle ticket sales this Holiday Concert, buyers had an option to tick off that they would like to donate 20% of their ticket to support a TDSB school in need. A resounding number of buyers ticked this little box so we are going to be donating to a school not as fortunate as King George. Also a young Grade 4 student made many adorable sock puppets and sold them at the concert. Her earnings are all being donated to the school.

I am so proud of our community. As our motto says, King George is "small in size, large in accomplishments". So true.

Jan Davies
Principal
King George Public School

Small school, big bucks

By Omar Mosleh



PHOTO COURTESY THE STUDENT SCHOOL

DO I HEAR \$14,000? Former mayor David Miller played auctioneer at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel for The Student School's fundraiser, where they brought in a record \$14,000 for charity.

The Student School may be small, with only 160 students, but that didn't stop them from making a big charitable contribution by raising more than \$14,000 for needy Torontonians this holiday season.

The Student School is a small Toronto District School Board institution that offers grade 11 and 12 classes and places an emphasis on activism. It shares a building with Western Technical Commercial School.

The money was raised via public auction, with donated items such as a deluxe night for two at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, clothing, gift certificates and other items such as office furniture.

The money goes toward buying essential items such as nightwear, socks, toiletries, food, as well as a Christmas gift, for five Toronto-based youth and women shelters. The sum is the largest the school has raised in the event's 24-year history.

Teacher Mark Fischer said the event has grown tremendously from when they were only raising around \$2,000 to \$3,000 annually. This year, he noted that only about \$8,000 was really needed, but students wanted to surpass a previous record of about \$12,000.

"The energy of the young people means it kind of takes a life born of their direction," he said.

To Fischer, the event aligns perfectly with the school's mandate to engage youth on social and environmental issues.

"When we do fundraising ... We're not doing it for our new backboards or band trips," he said. "What we're trying to do is understand issues, and not only understand them, but do something about them."

Grade 12 student Karah Sullivan decided to volunteer because she recognizes the holiday season can be an especially difficult time for women and youth living in shelters.

"Around Christmas the stresses go up and we find a lot of the time people are running to shelters and they're not leaving with anything but their kid and what's on their back," she said. "It's a really good experience to be able to lend a hand to somebody that really doesn't get much help other than that."

The shelters include the Salvation Army on Keele Street. Fischer said it's a good example of students giving back to the local community.

"The nature of our school is that we're looking to have an impact on our community," he said.

Following months of fundraising, the event culminates with the students being able to see whom they're helping by handing out more than 200 gift bags directly to the shelters.

"It's really fulfilling, especially around Christmas, to give rather than receive," Sullivan said. "For people to lend a helping hand to someone, without them even having asked for it, it shows there's still some good in the world, you know?"

Registration kicks off for five new Elementary Academies

Registration for five new [Elementary Academies](#) has kicked off, providing exciting new opportunities for students to explore their individuality and creativity within the TDSB.

The five new Academies – including Boys’ Leadership, Girls’ Leadership, Sports and Wellness, Health and Wellness and Vocal Music – are slated to open in nine schools across the Board this September. These Academies build on the TDSB’s record of creating programs that promote excellence and encourage the talents of students in new and innovative ways.

“These Academies will promote the talents of our future musicians, artists, health experts and leaders,” said Director of Education Chris Spence. “If we offer programming that interests young learners and ignites a passion inside them to want to learn, then I think we’re going to see something special happening. Students will want to come to school, they’ll want to get involved, and they’ll want to help shape what their school day looks like.”

Students attending an Academy will be part of a culture that balances academic excellence with a focus on personal leadership, character development and innovation. They will be provided a dynamic array of learning options to follow their own path to success. There are no specific admission requirements – just interest and passion.

For more information or to register, visit www.tdsb.on.ca/academies

Information nights are coming up! Learn more:

Academy	School	Date
Sports and Wellness	Shoreham PS	January 18, 6:30 p.m.
Sports and Wellness	James S. Bell JMS	January 24, 6:30 p.m.
Sports and Wellness	Carleton Village J&SPS	January 25, 6:30 p.m.
Vocal Music	Heather Heights JPS	January 18, 7 p.m.
Vocal Music	Ryerson Community School	January 26, 6:30 p.m.
Health and Wellness	Rene Gordon ES and Donview MS (meeting at Donview PS)	January 25, 7 p.m.
Girls' Leadership	Highland Heights JPS	January 25, 7 p.m.
Boys' Leadership	The Elms JMS	February 1, 7 p.m.

Dear Friends:

I wanted you to be among the first to share in the joy – the **Vocal Music Academy @ Ryerson CS** was launched yesterday across the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and across the city! Now the real work begins.

Recruitment for the Vocal Music Academy is now in full swing with our VMA Parent Information Night next Thursday, January 26, 2012 (6:30-7:30 pm) at our school.

Attached is our electronic brochure and FAQ sheet for your information.

Perhaps you have a child, grandchild, neighbour or friend who is interested in the VMA. Please forward this email to them.

We are accepting students from across the GTA from within the TDSB and from outside the TDSB - those in the Catholic Schools, those who are presently homeschooled and those who attend private schools.

Applications for students in Grades 4 – 6 (as of Sept. 2012) are now being accepted for the Vocal Music Academy (VMA) at Ryerson Community School.

For on-line applications please visit: www.tdsb.on.ca/academies

We are hosting a Parent Information Night next week. Here are the details.

Parent Information Night

DATE: Thursday, January 26, 2012

TIME: 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.

PLACE: Ryerson Community School Gym (96 Denison Avenue)

Please forward this VMA information far and wide.

Sincerely,

Craig Tsuji Mark Bell
Principal Vice Principal

Ryerson Community School &
Vocal Music Academy (Sept. 2012)

96 Denison Avenue

Toronto, Ontario M5T 1E4

Tel: 416-393-1340

Fax: 416-393-1337

craig.tsuji@tdsb.on.ca

mark.bell@tdsb.on.ca

VOCAL MUSIC ACADEMY VMA

What's Next

Singing and music will be a dynamic component of an education at the VMA.

We are excited to announce that applications to the **VOCAL MUSIC ACADEMY** are open to any student in the Greater Toronto Area. Students will be accepted in the first year in Grades 4, 5 & 6 for September 2012. There will be no audition process for entry into the school only the desire to sing as part of the school day each day

Application

Apply now on the TDSB website:
www.tdsb.on.ca/academies
or in person at
Ryerson Community School
Application process
starts January 16, 2012
and
closes February 28, 2012

CONTACT INFORMATION

Vocal Music Academy
at Ryerson Community School
Email: Ryerson@tdsb.on.ca
*please put VMA in the subject line
Phone: 416-393-1340

5

VOCAL MUSIC ACADEMY VMA

- ◆ the **VOCAL MUSIC ACADEMY** will be housed at Ryerson Community School, 96 Denison Avenue, Toronto
- ◆ starting September, 2012
- ◆ accepting children from across the GTA - from within and outside the TDSB
- ◆ accepting student applications in Grades 4, 5 & 6 for September, 2012
- ◆ no audition requirement
- ◆ expanding to grades 7 & 8 by 201
- ◆ May apply on-line, in person or by phone
- ◆ Optional attendance forms are not required
- ◆ Transportation is **not** provided by the TDSB

Craig Tsuji, Principal

Mark Bell, Vice Principal



REGISTER NOW! tdsb.on.ca/academies



NEW! **Vocal Music Academy**
@Ryerson Community School



VOCAL MUSIC ACADEMY

VMA

The Toronto District School Board is pleased to announce the establishment of a **VOCAL MUSIC ACADEMY (VMA)**

(Grades 4-8) which will open in

September, 2012



The **VOCAL MUSIC ACADEMY** will be located in the heart of the Kensington Market area, steps from the Art Gallery of Ontario, Chinatown, and the exciting Queen Street West neighbourhood

6

VOCAL MUSIC ACADEMY

VMA

WHAT

Singing, performing and learning about music and performance are at the core of the VMA for boys and girls with a passion to sing and perform. Students will experience music from around the world and learn about the musicians and music that have shaped our world. Also, music will be integrated into many other areas of the curriculum

WHEN

The school will open in September, 2012

WHERE

The school will be housed at **Ryerson Community School, 96 Denison Avenue** (one block west of Spadina Ave. on Dundas St.)
* Transportation will not be provided by the TDSB

WHY

The Vocal Music Academy helps develop our future musicians and artists. This unique program in the TDSB engages students with a passion for music and performance. The VMA is one of the five new Elementary Academies opening in September 2012 that focus on promoting excellence and encouraging the talents of our future musicians, artists, health experts and leaders. These programs offer exciting new opportunities for students to explore their individuality and creativity within the TDSB

WHO

In September 2012, the school will be comprised of two grade 4, two grade 5 and two grade 6 classes. By September 2014, the school will have classes including grades 7 & 8

HOW

On-line applications and in person at the school starting January 16, 2012 and closing February 28, 2012

Go to: www.tdsb.on.ca/acadamies

VOCAL MUSIC ACADEMY

VMA

What To Expect

- ◆ students will have the opportunity to sing every day
- ◆ students will engage in reading, writing, creating and listening to music
- ◆ numerous performance opportunities will be offered in the school and in the community through glee clubs, large ensemble singing groups, musical theatre, small groups, chamber ensembles and solo performances
- ◆ students will develop their musical knowledge and ability by studying many different musical styles, from many cultures and time periods
- ◆ no previous training in music is required - just a passion for singing!

Students who would benefit from the VMA learning environment

- ◆ Students will excel if they demonstrate that they are responsible, organized, independent, self-regulating and have the ability to collaborate
- ◆ Students will excel if they have had additional experiences reading music, singing in school or community choirs, vocal or instrumental music lessons, attended musical camps or participated in music theatre
- ◆ Students will excel if they have the ability to manage curricular and extra-curricular expectations at the VMA



Ryerson Community School & Vocal Music Academy (VMA)

96 Denison Avenue, Toronto, ON M5T 1E4 Telephone:(416) 393-1340 Fax:(416) 393-1337

Principal ~ Craig Tsuji

Vice-Principal ~ Mark Bell

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Vocal Music Academy?

The Vocal Music Academy will help shape our future musicians and artists. This unique program in the TDSB engages students with a passion for music and performance. Singing, creating and performing are at the core of the Vocal Music Academy for boys and girls with a passion for self expression through performance. Students will experience music from around the world and learn about the musicians and music that have shaped our world, history, and cultures.

What will students learn at the Vocal Music Academy?

Students will:

- Engage in a variety of vocal performance opportunities with a strong emphasis on ensemble singing
- Learn about and perform music from around the world and various historical eras
- Discover their creativity by writing and performing their own music
- Learn to think critically about the music they hear, perform and create
- Develop musicianship, artistry, self esteem and confidence

How does the Vocal Music Academy benefit students and the community?

Students will develop musical knowledge, creativity and confidence through an engaging performance based program focusing on choral music. Students will have numerous opportunities to participate in a variety of singing ensembles and will perform for the local community and across the GTA.

Will the teaching staff at the Vocal Music Academy be specialized in this area?

Students will be taught by qualified and enthusiastic teachers.

What are the admission requirements?

All TDSB students will have equal access to the Academies, including the Vocal Music Academy. There are no specific admission requirements - just interest and passion are required.

If a student enrolls in the Vocal Music Academy and then decides it is not a good fit, what happens?

If the Academy does not fit a student's needs, the student is free to return to his/her home school without re-applying through the Optional Attendance process.

Registered Disability Savings Plan

Helping People with Disabilities Save for the Future



RDSP
grant and
bond

ISSD-059-12-10

Canada

Helping People with Disabilities Save for the Future

The Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) helps people with disabilities and their families save for the future.

To help you save, the Government will pay a matching Canada Disability Savings Grant of up to \$3,500 a year on your contributions. The Government will also pay a Canada Disability Savings Bond of up to \$1,000 a year into the RDSPs of low-income and modest-income Canadians. No contributions are necessary to receive the bond. Earnings accumulate tax-free until money is taken out of the RDSP.

What is a Registered Disability Savings Plan?

The RDSP is a long-term savings plan to help Canadians with disabilities and their families save for the future. In general, RDSPs can be opened before the person who will receive the money (the beneficiary) turns 60.



These are the requirements to be considered disabled for purposes of the tax act and that disability plan:

- A. You are blind.
- B. You receive life-sustaining therapy.
- C. The impairment restricts you in one of the following basic activities of daily living:
 - speaking;
 - hearing;
 - walking;
 - elimination (bowel or bladder functions);
 - feeding;
 - dressing; or
 - performing the mental functions necessary for everyday life

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Update from Councillor Doucette, Ward 13

Dear friends and residents,

After a long and extensive consultation process, yesterday City Council approved the 2012 City Budget. This budget has seen a number of changes since the original proposal came out of the budget committee. I am happy to state that a number of important amendments made it through, leading to a budget which will help build a better city.

Here are some of the motions that I supported, having heard from residents that these services were important to you:

- The Children Services Budget to restore the school based childcare rent subsidy.
- That children youth and older adults in priority centres not be charged user fees.
- That the daytime hours to ice-rinks be restored - this includes Lambton Arena
- That we restore funding to the 5 swimming pools - this includes Runnymede C.I.
- That funding is restored to the Community Partnership Investment Programs (CPIP) - this includes several organizations in our ward that rely on this money either as seed money to generate more funds or to pay to keep their programs running.
- Increasing the TTC budget by \$5 million to prevent service reductions - could include 35 Jane, 26 Dupont, 30 Lambton, 41 Keele, 66 Prince Edward or 89 Weston but this will be up to the TTC Commission.
- Restoring funding to the Shelter Support and Housing Administration.
- Restoring funding to the Immigrant Women's Health Centre - 75% of this is funded by the Provincial Ministry of Health.
- Not implementing the new fee at the indoor and outdoor pools - this would have affected Sunnyside and High Park outdoor pools. Swansea and Annette indoor pools.
- Re-instating 3 Corporate Environment Support positions to the Toronto Environment Office Divisions until December 2014 to continue to implement the City's sustainable Energy Strategy and Climate Change Action plan.
- At no cost to the City, to support the provision of additional speech and language assessment and treatment in Toronto, to reduce the current waiting list by 700 children - this is funded by a grant from the ministry of Children and Youth Services for Toronto's Preschool Speech and Language Program - may help children in our ward on the waiting list.
- Re-instating \$3,890 million to the Toronto Public Libraries - this prevents cuts in hours to Runnymede, Annette and Jane/Dundas Branches and no loss of programs.
- Re-instating the Live Green Toronto Community Animator's program till December 2012 at a 50% reduction to their budget.
- Including the Youth Outreach Program in the Recreation Service Review.

I also supported the motion that City Council re-confirm its operating budget surplus distribution policy which states that the surplus be distributed in priority order to:

- The Capital Finance Reserve Fund (at least 75% of the surplus)
- The remainder to fund any underfunded liabilities and/or reserves/reserve funds, as determined by the Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer.

At the meeting we also approved a 2.5% Property Tax increase. I believe the city needs this revenue to maintain services, to put some money away each year to pay down the debt, to put some towards the new streetcars that are coming soon and hopefully to build a better city. This would mean a \$60 annual increase on a house assessed at \$447,090.

I am pleased to tell you that Keele Community Centre and the nutrition program at Warren Park School had been saved at the Budget meeting earlier in the month.

One disappointment at yesterday's meeting was my motion to keep the High Park Zoo open and retain funding in the 2012 City Budget was deemed out of order. The reason given was that there was a

previous motion for City Staff to issue a Request for Expression of Interest to operate the Zoo, which has yet to be completed by staff. I believe the motion was in fact in order. In the previous motion from the September 2011 Council meeting I added a paragraph stating that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation "Convene a focus group of experts to include, but not limited to, Toronto Tourism, Park Staff, Evergreen, park user groups and the Local Councillor, to explore the potential to establish conservancy models."

To date we have held a focus group with interested residents and I am continuing to meet with City Staff. We are in the process of forming a Friends of High Park Zoo group who will be joining the High Park Resource Group that already represent interest groups of High Park. Please contact me if you have any funding ideas, I would love to hear them.

Thank you for all those who showed your support for the zoo. I presented to Council yesterday a petition with 6072 signatures, we had 778 signatures on the on line petition and 1,963 friends on Save High Park Zoo Facebook pages along with many emails and phone calls.

At this point the Zoo has funding until June 2012 so I am working with various City Staff to see how we move forward to make sure one way or another High Park Zoo remains open.

Thank you for your support through this difficult budget period. Your emails and phones calls allowed me to know what is important to you.

Best regards.



Sarah Doucette
 City Councillor Ward 13
 Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen Street West, Suite C46. Toronto ON.
 Phone: 416 392 4072
councillor_doucette@toronto.ca
www.ward13.ca

Daycare Town Hall

Daycare is an ongoing issue in Ontario, and every parent in Parkdale-High Park knows that our community is one of the worst hit when it comes to wait times, daily costs and new daycare openings.

MPP Cheri DiNovo is hosting a Town Hall meeting to discuss these issues. Please consider attending this event to listen to our panellists and share your stories and opinions.

WHEN: Thursday, Jan 26th, 7:00 - 9:00pm
WHERE: Bishop Marrocco/Thomas Merton Secondary School, 1515 Bloor St. W (Dundas and Bloor) In the staff room (follow the signs).

The panel of guests includes: Councillor Sarah Doucette, Ward 14 Councillor Gord Perks, Andrea Calver (Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care), City of Toronto Staff.

For more information please contact Cheri's office at 416 763 5630

A Message from Councillor Gord Perks

January 19, 2012

Dear Friend,

This week, Toronto City Council approved the 2012 City of Toronto Budget. While the press is focussed on reporting the manoeuvring that took place at City Hall, the real story is different. Torontonians themselves re-wrote the City budget. I received over 5000 emails commenting on the City budget. Various hearings and deputation days saw over 1000 people come and speak up for the City we love and want to build. Let's take a look at what we achieved together:

Quickly stated, the budget includes a 2.5 per cent property tax increase for homeowners, a 0.83 per cent tax increase for businesses, and a 10-cent fare increase for the TTC.

Because of the work of you and your neighbours, the budget was substantially changed from the proposals launched in November. Together we:

- Restored the school-based **childcare rent subsidy**;
- Protected **3 child care centres** including St. Marks Child Care Centre in Parkdale;
- Protected free recreation programs for children, youth and seniors at **Priority Community Centres** including our own Masaryk-Cowan CC;
- Restore hours at 10 **ice-rinks**;
- Kept 7 **pools** open
- Protected funding to the **Community Partnership Investment Program (CPIP)** which funds community organizations who provide Toronto's arts events, school nutrition programs, community activities, seniors programs, youth engagement, and newcomer supports;
- Restored funding for the "Well Woman" health program which is provided by the **Women's Immigrant Health Centre**
- Increased the **TTC** budget by \$5-million to prevent cuts in bus and streetcar service.
- Kept **3 homeless shelters** open
- Preserve **Library service** levels including hours, programs, and purchases of books: including hours at Parkdale and High-Park branches!
- Eliminated a proposed \$2 charge for drop-in **swimming**
- Restored the "**community animator**" program which supported neighbourhood lead environmental initiatives.
- Protected the **Toronto Environment Office** allowing the City to continue implementing the City's Climate Action Plan

More information on the Budget is available on the City's Budget 2012 website at <http://www.toronto.ca/budget2012/index.htm> .

I am very proud of our City. Faced with a very destructive administration, we stood up, fought back, and won important concessions. Our next task is to get back to City building. In the coming months, please continue to meet, talk, organize and envision the City we should have.

Thank you all for your work to date, and the work to come.



Gord

December 6, 2011

At Top Public Schools, the Arts Replace Recess

By KYLE SPENCER

In the art room at P.S. 188 in Bayside, Queens, a group of 9-year-olds was busily putting the finishing touches on an enormous poster for the fourth-grade play. Its topic: saving the Earth. Down the hall in the music room, beneath portraits of Mozart and Bach, classmates were breaking into a spirited rendition of “Hear Those Bells” on fluorescent-colored recorders. Cheerleaders in the gym were perfecting a victory chant, jumping, twisting and stamping their feet. And in the library, children in a Suzuki violin class were toiling away at “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” while their music teacher, a professional violist from Iceland, coached them “to stand straight and tall.”

All of this concentrated learning — activities parents commonly think of as enrichment — was taking place not after school hours, but during recess, the once-unstructured midday break that for some elementary school students is slowly being squeezed out of the day.

Jump rope, freeze tag and the jungle gym have some new competition. At some of the city’s highest-rated public elementary schools, recess is now being seen by parents and educators as a time to pack in extra learning.

Free time during school hours has become a hot topic among educators across the country, many of whom worry that children are not getting enough of it. Recent studies, including one published in 2009 in the medical journal *Pediatrics*, indicate that many children learn better and behave better when free time is part of the school day.

The New York City Department of Education does not require recess, although its Wellness Policy recommends that schools provide 20 minutes a day, preferably outdoors.

Nonetheless, the practice of packing enrichment classes into recess has become increasingly common at some of the city’s top-performing elementary schools, where parents see them as a way to fill gaps left by years of budget cuts and an increasing emphasis on standardized tests.

The parents at P.S. 188 — where class size can peak at 32 — are taking the approach that their children, who earn some of the best test scores in the city, need enrichment classes as much as they need free time.

To that end, the school’s PTA, which operates out of a converted bathroom on the first floor, raised \$12,500 last year to support voluntary clubs, which meet once or twice a week at lunchtime and offer subjects that include art, music and computers.

Janet Caraisco, the principal at P.S. 188, has been fitting all of the clubs’ activities into her school’s schedule. “We do a lot of it at recess,” she said. “It’s not easy. But we think it’s important.”

Ms. Caraisco herself runs several book clubs and a musical theater club. Last year, one of her clubs spent weeks engaged in a dramatic reading of the script for Disney’s “Beauty and the Beast,” with students and principal occasionally belting out lyrics in the principal’s neat but bustling office.

For the most part, each of the school's clubs has as many as 14 or 15 members; some students join as many as four.

At P.S. 6, a highly regarded school on the Upper East Side, students can design video games, build miniature roller coasters, learn about electrical circuits and perfect magic tricks at PTA-sponsored recess clubs. "It's a lot of little options, hobby-type stuff geared toward introducing kids to different things," said Steve Tosi, whose son James attends first grade there.

Down the street at P.S. 290, lunch clubs allow students to learn improvisational performance, make comic books, learn sign language and knit.

And at P.S. 372 in Brooklyn, an arts-focused school where special education students learn alongside other students, fourth- and fifth-grade lunch club members can choose from an array including mosaic designing, mural making and embroidery. The school also offers chorus and dance.

Parents say lunchtime clubs give children a chance to learn in a setting more intimate than the typical classroom, and lets them spend time with like-minded students. "They're coming from these classrooms of 30 kids," said Nick Gottlieb, PTA co-president at P.S. 3 in Greenwich Village, where educators run a popular lunchtime program that pairs students with adult volunteers, who read and discuss books with them. "It's quiet, individualized time," Mr. Gottlieb said.

Principals say they work hard to keep students from becoming overwhelmed by recess club options. Ms. Caraisco, for example, does not send lunch club forms home, so students can choose for themselves how they want to spend that time. "We've had times when a parent really wants a child to do a club that the child really doesn't want," she said.

She also sends students to the schoolyard during her weekly book club, if it is clear they are fidgety and need some time to run around.

That did not seem to be the case during a recent meeting of the school's computer club, where a pack of lively fourth graders was developing eight-page travel brochures. Their teacher, Steven David, showed them how to search for data, historical information and pictures.

But what about recess?

Elizabeth Katanov, 9, in jeans and a peace-sign T-shirt, said she was delighted to have extra time to work on computer skills with her friends. On the screen in front of her was a colorful rendition of the Florida state seal. "It's definitely worth it," she said, "especially on bad winter days when you'd have to go outdoors."

Identity of rogue teachers to be made public

December 10, 2011

Kevin Donovan and Jesse McLean

The identity and actions of many rogue teachers will no longer be kept secret from the public, the Ontario government has decided.

Sweeping changes to how the Ontario College of Teachers deals with verbally, physically and sexually abusive teachers were announced Friday by provincial education minister Laurel Broten.

"Parents deserve to know about teacher discipline," Broten said Friday, announcing some changes and saying more will come.

The changes were prompted by a *Toronto Star* investigation published in September. The *Star* found the identities of bad teachers were often being hidden from the public by decisions of the self-regulatory body set up to protect the public trust. The *Star* also found that teachers facing charges of sexually abusive behaviour were allowed to avoid a formal public hearing at the College and plead guilty, often to lesser offences and receive a minor penalty, using a dispute resolution process.

Just before the *Star* published its results, the College quietly announced it had hired retired justice Patrick LeSage to examine how teachers are disciplined. That review is to take until May.

Minister Broten said that, while she supports the LeSage review, parents and the public need change now.

"We are not waiting to take action," said Broten, adding that her ministry is now working with the College on several changes.

Starting Jan. 4, the full text of all disciplinary decisions, most with names included, will be posted on the College's website. Previously, many bad teachers had their names shielded in case summaries written by the College's small army of 19 public relations staff on the order of discipline panels. Those case summaries appear in the College's magazine, *Professionally Speaking*. The actual decision and full details of the teacher's conduct were hidden away in the College's library.

Broten also made it clear that teachers charged with sexual offences will not be eligible for the dispute resolution process. She has asked the College and ministry staff to develop a policy for what type of cases should be eligible.

This move for greater transparency has been advocated in the past by the College's Public Interest Committee, a group of three provincially appointed individuals who act as a watchdog over the watchdog. Their recommendations have largely been ignored by the elected teachers who make up the College.

Broten also said she is paying particular interest to several items LeSage is probing, particularly how the College typically decides which disciplined teachers to name and not name. She is also examining the creation of mandatory penalties for certain types of offences.

The *Star's* investigation found teachers convicted of abusive behaviour were given a reprimand or short suspension and allowed back in the classroom (often in a different school) if they took a course on student-teacher boundaries.

The College's registrar, Michael Salvatori, was in meetings Friday afternoon and did not make himself available for comment.

However, College spokesperson Brian Jamieson said the changes Broten announced came from multiple conversations the regulatory body had with the minister and her staff.

"We identified that we could do something in relatively short order that makes sense and is much more accountable to the public," Jamieson said.

While the College will begin posting the disciplinary decisions online in January, some rulings may still be shrouded in secrecy. Details such as the offending teacher's name, the school and even the school board could be omitted if the College decides it needs to protect the identity of the student complainant.

"We're going to redact or black out anything that would be an identifying detail that would point to a child or any other vulnerable witness," Jamieson said.

Teacher discipline is a hot topic in Canada. Earlier this fall, the government in British Columbia shut down the B.C. College of Teachers and replaced it with a new organization with disciplinary panels that are not dominated by teachers. The *Star's* investigation found a similar issue in Ontario with discipline decisions often made by a majority of teachers and only a few appointed public members involved.

One thing the College and Minister in Ontario have not yet tackled is the issue of teachers ruled incompetent. Those hearings are behind closed doors and the public is not privy to the details.

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Education: When students face expulsion from school

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Nick Kozak/For the Toronto Star

Early last June, lawyer Renai Williams led 16-year-old Ian McGrath and his mother, Gillian, into a boardroom at the offices of blue-chip Bay Street law firm Affleck Greene McMurtry LLP. They looked nervous in what Williams realized were probably intimidating surroundings, so she began by telling them a bit about herself, to make them comfortable. Then she asked them to tell their story.

A couple of weeks earlier, Ian had been suspended from his Durham high school for swearing at, and allegedly making threats against, a special ed teacher, as well as assaulting a vice-principal (he vehemently denies the latter two charges). There were criminal charges involved, and the principal recommended that Ian be expelled from all schools in the district. Ian and his parents were awaiting an expulsion hearing before a panel of school board trustees.

It was already impossible for Ian, who as a child was diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and an anxiety disorder, to salvage the current academic year. But, more critically, he was so frustrated that he was talking about quitting school and getting a job.

Frantic about the future of her only child, Gillian, a 46-year-old real estate administrator, had searched online and stumbled upon a little-known resource: volunteer lawyers like Williams who help kids in situations such as Ian's (the names of the boy and his mother have been changed to protect the boy's anonymity).

Most of the time, Williams is a corporate litigator, advising CEOs, boards and executives at large corporations on issues of competition law, price-fixing, breach-of-contract and other matters. But as one of the nearly 130 volunteer lawyers with the Education Law Program, part of the Child Advocacy Project (CAP) run by Pro Bono Law Ontario (PBLO), she provides free services to students and their parents who feel legal rights and procedures haven't been observed.

These may include: unfair or illegal suspensions, expulsions, exclusions or transfers; an inability to access accommodation for disabilities; being denied the right to attend school and being subjected to bullying, harassment or other safety issues.

Mothers and fathers aren't always the best advocates for their children. The legalities around suspensions and expulsions can be labyrinthine, and parents can sometimes become so emotional at meetings that they're unable to deal with the issues. The involvement of a lawyer can help move things forward. It makes officials realize, says Sarah Armstrong, another CAP volunteer, "that somebody is there to make this file the squeaky wheel."

At their meeting, Williams made a point of respectfully addressing Ian as often as his mom, at one point saying to him, "I will do my best for you, but you also have the choice not to retain me if, for whatever reason, you're aren't comfortable with me representing you."

Because of his medical conditions, Ian can become agitated and sometimes antagonistic in situations he perceives as stressful. “He can be mouthy, even swear sometimes,” explains Gillian, who notes that he has the kind of Tourette’s associated with socially inappropriate or obscene outbursts.

For years, Ian has had an Individual Education Plan (IEP), a working document describing the needs of “exceptional” students and detailing a program of accommodations and special services to help them learn. He progressed well through elementary and middle school but problems emerged when he entered high school. Coping strategies that had worked in earlier grades were discarded because, Gillian said, she was told by a special resource teacher that he had to “grow up now.”

One of his coping mechanisms was to leave his classroom for the tranquility of a special resource room or even to come home. But now he was more frequently being suspended for one or more days, affecting his academic performance.

Then, the incident involving the special ed teacher and the vice-principal occurred. Ian was suspended and led off school property but he refused to go home, demanding to know why he had been suspended. The police were called, charges laid and a trial appearance is set for March.

Listening to the story in the boardroom, Williams observed that Gillian was more objective than many mothers. She didn’t minimize the challenges school officials would have dealing with Ian, but she also believed he had a right to an education.

To Williams, Ian seemed like a typical teenager. At five-foot-nine, he was slightly built, a skinny kid wearing skater shorts, a T-shirt and a black-and-white checked Hurley baseball cap. He seemed nervous, a bit defensive. When he spoke, his voice would rise with emotion and a slight stutter would worsen. At one point, when he began getting excited as he said, “Why are they doing this? I shouldn’t have to fight for my education. . .,” Williams said soothingly, “It’s okay, take a deep breath, Ian. I’m on your side.”

Williams could see him being verbally aggressive but it struck her as the overcompensation of a teenager who needed help. Besides, he wasn’t physically intimidating and even in the two hours she spent with him, he would settle down when she spoke calmly to him, adult-to-adult.

She was also impressed that Ian recognized he had a reputation as a difficult student, though he added he had been trying very hard to change in recent months. He had wanted to get as many credits as possible that year, enrol in summer school, and move on to Grades 11 and 12, but he felt he was being defined by the younger, less-motivated person he had been. When asked what he’d most like to see happen, he said, “I just want to go to school.”

At the end of the meeting, Williams told Ian and Gillian that she thought Ian had a winnable case.

Lynn Burns is a former special ed teacher who at one time created a pro bono program for the state of Ohio. In 2000, several legal organizations in Ontario decided to establish a province-wide system matching lawyers willing to take on pro bono cases with clients in need. Burns was hired to launch what became Pro Bono Law Ontario.

Addressing the needs of children was a high priority, so she created the Child Advocacy Project and, within it, the Education Law Program (in partnership with The Advocates' Society, a not-for-profit association for lawyers, and Justice for Youth and Children, a non-profit legal aid clinic.)

"It turns out that education is rich with legal issues," says Burns, "and our lawyers find this pro bono opportunity especially rewarding because they're helping children."

These services are especially important since education law is not a common specialty and the vast majority of those who practice it work for school boards. The Education Law Program's volunteer lawyers come from a variety of backgrounds and specializations, although most of them have one thing in common: they know little about education law. So CAP runs training sessions to provide its lawyers, like Renai Williams, with some background before assigning them to their first clients.

"At first, most parents don't think of problems at school as legal problems," says Wendy Miller, the longtime project director for the program who recently moved to a new job. "But schools operate in a legal framework governed by the Education Act and the Human Rights Code. And they can be very intimidating institutions where parents are discouraged from challenging the decisions of administrators."

Consider some examples from the roster of families who have recently been assisted by the program.

- A child is identified as having a disability in language and memory retention. Unsure how to address his special needs, for years his school did little to accommodate him. As the child's issues progressed, he wrote in his journal that he was thinking about suicide. After a CAP lawyer became involved, the child began receiving appropriate special ed services and has shown remarkable improvement, gaining more confidence. Teachers who were once very difficult to deal with have since agreed to work more closely with the family.
- A child in elementary school was disciplined following a number of minor infractions. When the school suspended the student for as long as possible under the Education Act, a CAP lawyer discovered the principal had misinterpreted the Act; given the facts of the case, the child's extended suspension was unlawful. Eager for their child to get a fresh start, the family wanted him to be bussed to a different school in the area and have the suspension expunged from his record. The lawyer negotiated with reluctant board of education officials who eventually agreed to provide bus service to a new school and expunge the suspension. The child has since enrolled in the new school and adjusted very well.
- A 17-year old girl with advanced muscular dystrophy has very limited mobility and a tracheotomy tube. She lives at a rehabilitation centre and goes to school with a nurse and a full-time educational assistant. The girl is a good student and has a very positive attitude. With the approval of her medical team, a friend enrolled in the same school was trained in feeding her, handling emergencies and taking her on outings. The girl wanted to be fed at lunch by her friend so she'd have some privacy and they could chat like teenagers. However, school officials, citing liability issues, insisted that while on school grounds she had to be fed by the nurse or the educational assistant and she wasn't allowed to leave the school grounds with her friend. As a result of a CAP lawyer's intervention, the girl is now able to enjoy the privacy she wanted with her friends at school.

Few cases are straightforward and the further they progress, the more complicated they become. Gillian McGrath certainly felt that way. Articulate and educated, she was a model advocate for Ian but she could feel the system grinding down on her. (Her husband, although supportive, works long hours at a job far from their home.)

Ian was facing a “full expulsion” — not just from his school but from all schools in the district — and Gillian was told his only opportunity was to attend one of the province’s expelled student programs, where young people can make up lost academic credits and receive help, such as counselling and anger-management workshops. But Ian was mortified at the idea of being further stigmatized as a “bad kid.”

There have always been families struggling to deal with the school system on behalf of their children, but conflicts began escalating in 2000 after the Mike Harris government introduced a Code of Conduct and the Safe Schools Act (known as “zero tolerance”), giving teachers and principals new powers to remove troublemakers. The net was cast so wide, however, and the ability to consider mitigating factors so narrow, that many students, including those with disabilities, were being routinely — and often unlawfully — suspended or expelled.

In 2008, Dalton McGuinty’s Liberal government revised the legislation. The final decision to expel students was returned to the quasi-judicial process of a school board hearing, and principals could no longer automatically suspend or expel students for bad behaviour. Schools were also required to provide educational programs and counselling to students who were expelled or on long-term suspensions. Still, many children and teenagers continue to fall through the cracks.

When Renai Williams decided she wanted to do some pro bono work earlier this year, she came across the website for the Child Advocacy Project and felt drawn to it. As a relatively new mom — with her first, a 2-year-old boy named Zackery — she thinks she probably had children and the importance of education on her mind.

Her first case was instructive. As sometimes happens when school officials hear a child is being represented by a lawyer, a seemingly intractable problem is suddenly and mysteriously resolved. Of course, when a lawyer comes on board it can also create friction, as Williams would learn when she took on her second client, Ian McGrath.

At their first meeting, he told her that he had been in the academic resource room discussing access to a laptop computer to which he was entitled under his IEP. He says he pushed the door nearly closed because he didn’t want other students to hear the conversation. A dispute arose and he swore at a female special ed teacher.

There was nothing new about this, especially for a teenager with Ian’s menu of disabilities. After lunch he went to his English class and his teacher called him over, showing him that the computer listed him as suspended. Agitated, Ian went to the principal’s office.

The principal was away that day but all three vice-principals were there. When he asked why he had been suspended they wouldn’t tell him. He was instructed to leave school property. All three escorted him outside and one walked him down the steps and out to the street. The VP had asked two students to accompany her, apparently for “protection.”

Ian repeatedly demanded to know why it was happening, even when he was off school property, but says he wasn't told. At one point, Ian says he tried to catch a walkie-talkie that slipped out of the VP's hand; she alleges he forcibly grabbed her. Soon both Ian and the VP were on their phones talking to Gillian, who was at work. By the time the police arrived, she could tell her son was becoming increasingly worked up, so she asked the VP to call an ambulance.

When Gillian and her husband arrived at the hospital, Ian was being evaluated by a psychiatric crisis team to see whether he should be temporarily held for further assessment (a provision under the Mental Health Act). By then Ian had calmed down and the hospital felt it unnecessary to keep him. At that point, the police arrested him and charged him with two counts of assault and one of uttering threats. McGrath had to hire a criminal lawyer.

Later, after a few conversations with school officials, McGrath became suspicious. She hadn't been told Ian had assaulted or threatened anyone when she was first contacted. Her son confirmed he had made some threats, but last year, not during this incident. Then she was told the principal, who hadn't been present but heard the story from his staff, had decided on a suspension pending full expulsion.

"They kept talking as though this was a done deal," she says today. "I was told that over and over. But I started thinking, does it have to happen this way?"

When Williams examined the file she thought there were a number of inconsistencies. Under the Education Act, the principal was required to conduct an objective investigation, getting all sides of the story. But he never contacted Gillian McGrath and the report read as though it had been transcribed from what his staff had told him.

The principal's letter to McGrath said Ian had been suspended for making threats, but his mother had been told it was for swearing at the teacher. Examining Ian's IEP, Williams saw that the school knew he suffered from the form of Tourette's associated with inappropriate outbursts and had problems dealing with authority and recognizing body language cues.

When he wasn't told why he had been suspended, he would understandably grow more exasperated, triggering his anxiety disorder. School officials knew all this, Williams thought, yet failed to defuse the situation early on by treating Ian with respect and calmly explaining why he had been suspended.

"My suspicion was that at some point they'd decided if there was another incident involving Ian, they wanted to remove the problem," says Williams.

A date for a hearing was set. When Williams contacted the lawyer representing the board's trustees, he was very cooperative. But her experience with the lawyer representing the school's administration was quite different.

"She was condescending, inflammatory, extremely adversarial," recalls Williams, adding that her efforts to reach out and discuss any common ground were rejected.

On the morning of June 29, Williams accompanied McGrath to the school board's offices. Tables were set up in a large circle in a conference room. The principal, VPs and special ed teacher, plus their lawyer, sat

on one side of the circle, the director of education and the school board's lawyer on the other side. Williams and McGrath faced the trustees.

Although Williams was prepared to argue many points supporting Ian's case, she first raised what she knew might be a pre-emptive strike. "While I do not want to introduce an adversarial tone so early in the hearing," she said, "...it is our position that this hearing has been convened out of time."

Williams was making the case that although the school claimed Ian's suspension began the day after the incident, Ian's teacher had shown him on a computer that he had been suspended the day the incident occurred. That would mean the hearing, which had to be held within 20 days of the suspension, was being held on the 21st day. After a one-hour recess, Williams and McGrath were told the trustees dismissed the case because Williams was right about the date.

"I've learned so much from this experience that I hope I'll never have to use again," says Gillian McGrath today. "Sure, the teachers are specialists, but that doesn't mean they're always right. They're human, they make mistakes. From a parent's perspective you have to go with your gut.

"I felt so lucky to have Renai on our side. She seemed to treat us no differently than she would her clients on multi-million-dollar cases she really does litigate. I hoped she could help us, but I knew there were no guarantees. Honestly, she saved me. If she hadn't been involved we would be in a completely different situation right now."

Ian went to summer school and made up a couple of credits. In September, he started in Grade 11 at a new school, doing some Grade 10 and some Grade 11 subjects. He's made some friends and so far is doing well.

"Ian will always struggle in school," says Gillian. "I won't even go so far as to say, 'Yeah, he'll get all his credits and graduate.' But he's going to school every day, which is a huge thing."

As for Williams, she thinks of her own toddler, Zackery, when she looks back on her first major pro bono case. "At 16 we all have 'stuff,'" she says. "I know I had my share. Then imagine not only dealing with the usual issues of being a kid but also having physical and learning challenges that make fitting in even harder. Pile onto that the sense that most of your teachers have written you off. I hope Zack never has to feel so unsupported by the school system as Ian did."

What Happens When Petulant Parents Won't Share? School Funding Inequities, That's What.

Slate.com

California's Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District set off a parent revolt this past month by taking steps to curtail parents from fundraising solely for their children's school. If proposed new rules are adopted, future donations for all instructional activities will go through a central education foundation. The motivation? Fairness.

Funding inequities have long marked the American education experience. Because educational monies come (mostly) from local taxes, spending can vary wildly between adjacent school districts. But as schools increasingly turn to parents to cover budget cuts in economic hard times, chasms have opened within the districts themselves.

You can see the results in Santa Monica-Malibu Unified. To the outside world, the two Southern California beach communities are fabulously wealthy, fully populated by show-business stars and others of significant means. Then there is reality. Santa Monica, especially, is quite diverse, with significant low-income and Latino populations.

That diversity is reflected in the individual schools. One elementary school is so adept at getting its wealthy parents to open their checkbooks that it is able to spend an additional \$2,000 per student on enrichment activities, which include employing multiple reading and instructional assistants, as well as classes in chorale music, marine science, and art. But at another Santa Monica-Malibu Unified school, located just a few miles away, a significant percentage of the kids come from economically disadvantaged homes and the local PTA can't even muster up an additional \$100 per child, leaving the students to make do with a truncated music program, a few art classes, and one measly instructional assistant.

Charity, however, begins at home if you are from affluent Malibu, where the anger over the proposed change is most intense. Many say that parents will simply stop donating their time and money if forced to share. One claimed parents were being "disenfranchised" to a local paper. Another told Malibu Patch, "Our families give to the schools and principals and teachers and programs they know and love and trust."

Please. This entire contretemps reads like yet one more chapter in the more-than-occasional solipsism of many contemporary parents, who seem all too sensitive to the problems facing their own progeny and nowhere near sensitive enough to the issues of others. They appear blissfully unaware that, along with additional arts instruction, they are imparting lessons to their children in everything from economic privilege to virtues of selfishness. To paraphrase George Orwell, all children are equal, but some children are more equal than others.

Santa Monica-Malibu is hardly the first district to look at these parent-generated funding inequities and declare them unacceptable. Portland, Ore., for example, has had a plan in place for more than a decade that requires school-based fundraising groups to donate one-third of the kitty to a separate fund dedicated to the needs of the city's less affluent schools. Others—including the California communities of Manhattan Beach, Palo Alto, and Albany—have moved in recent years to the fundraising model Santa Monica-Malibu is considering. Last month, the Albany superintendent gave an interview about the changeover to the Sacramento Bee. "All we are talking about is providing equity for our students within the confines of the school day," she explained.

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Marijuana Use Growing Among Teenagers

By ANAHAD O'CONNOR

One out of every 15 high school students smokes marijuana on a near daily basis, a figure that has reached a 30-year peak even as use of alcohol, cigarettes and cocaine among teenagers continues a slow decline, according to a new government report.

The popularity of marijuana, which is now more prevalent among 10th graders than cigarette smoking, reflects what researchers and drug officials say is a growing perception among teenagers that habitual marijuana use carries little risk of harm. That perception, experts say, is fueled in part by wider familiarity with medicinal marijuana and greater ease in obtaining it.

Although it is difficult to track the numbers, “we’re clearly seeing an increase in teenage marijuana use that corresponds pretty clearly in time with the increase in medical marijuana use,” said Dr. Christian Thurstone, medical director of the adolescent substance abuse treatment program at Denver Health and Hospital Authority, who was not involved in the study. Medical marijuana is legal in 16 states, including Colorado, and the District of Columbia.

The long-running annual report, called the Monitoring the Future survey and financed by the National Institutes of Health, looked at more than 46,000 students nationwide. Over all, about 25 percent of 8th, 10th and 12th graders who took part in the study reported using marijuana in the past year, up from about 21 percent in 2007.

R. Gil Kerlikowske, the federal drug czar, said he believed the increasing prevalence of medicinal marijuana was a factor in the uptick. “These last couple years, the amount of attention that’s been given to medical marijuana has been huge,” he said. “And when I’ve done focus groups with high school students in states where medical marijuana is legal, they say, ‘Well, if its called medicine and it’s given to patients by caregivers, then that’s really the wrong message for us as high school students.’”

Mark Baumgartner, the director of inpatient treatment services at the Betty Ford Center, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center in Rancho Mirage, Calif., said it was “not uncommon” for young adult patients to show up with medical marijuana cards, which can be obtained to treat conditions like chronic pain or migraines.

The report also revealed that a mixture of herbs and chemicals known widely as “spice” or “K2” — or synthetic marijuana, since it mimics the intoxicating effects of herbal marijuana — has quickly gained popularity among teenagers. One in every nine high school seniors reported using it in the past year; most of them also regularly used marijuana. In another sign of the synthetic drug’s popularity, poison control centers received 5,741 calls about it through Oct. 31 of this year, almost double the number for all of last year. This was the first year the report asked students about their use of synthetic drugs.

Part of the reason synthetic marijuana had become so popular is that until recently, it was sold legally, often as “herbal incense,” in convenience stores and gas stations and on various Web sites. But in March, the Drug Enforcement Administration declared several

chemicals in synthetic marijuana Schedule I drugs, banning them for a year. Congress is now considering legislation that would ban the substance permanently.

“If you talk to school superintendents and principals, they’ll tell you about their concerns that this stuff was being sold a block away from their schools,” said Mr. Kerlikowske. “High school students probably think it’s not dangerous. But we know from the calls to hot lines, emergency departments and poison control centers that this stuff really is dangerous. It just really wasn’t on parents’ radar screens.”

While interest in marijuana and synthetic marijuana has climbed, the willingness to try most other drugs has waned. The report found declines in the use of crack, cocaine, over-the-counter cough and cold medicines, sedatives, tranquilizers and prescription drugs like Adderall and the narcotic painkiller Vicodin. Some 1.7 percent of 10th graders and 2.6 percent of 12th graders reported using cocaine in 2011, for example, far fewer than in the 1980s or ’90s. About 5 percent of 12th graders reported using ecstasy in 2011, an increase of about 1 percent from the previous year.

Heavy drinking among high school students has also fallen over the past 20 years, the report found. From 1991 to 2011, the proportion of eighth graders who reported drinking in the previous 30 days fell by about half, to 13 percent from 25 percent. Among 10th graders, it has fallen by more than a third, to 27 percent from 43 percent, and among 12th graders by about a fourth, to 40 percent from 54 percent. The percentage of students who reported binge drinking fell by a third, to 13.6 percent from 20 percent.

About a third of teenagers said they consume energy drinks like Red Bull, with use highest among younger students. Ten percent to 20 percent of high school students reported drinking one or more energy drinks daily, down slightly from 2010.