

## **Times of Change and Innovation**

### **Update by Toronto District School Board Trustee Chris Bolton**

Last week you may have seen in media the presentation of some new ideas for programming in Toronto District School Board. These programming directions included consideration of boys' schools, girls' schools, choir schools and sports schools. Not everyone agrees with these innovations but these ideas are worthy of discussion, as to whether this direction is reasonable. A report will come back in June of this year to the board of trustees on the ideas.

This announcement was made on the same day as the government announced the funding for schools for the next school year. Although the assessment is still not complete, it is obvious that there is no additional funding for existing programs and only selected programs such as all day kindergarten are to be allocated new monies. This starts the annual period of angst over what programs the communities and the board of trustees feel are worth the most money of the diminishing pot and what cuts will be in place for the next school year.

In this exact same week there were final meetings of 8 areas in the city to decide whether to close schools. This is a big consideration for communities as they risk not only losing their local institution that is a hub for the community activities, but also a potential of lessening of green space. It is feared that at least 5 schools may close out of this process.

All of these events make one pause to consider what the largest board of education in Canada sees as its direction in this time of change and innovation. Firstly, although we only have about 10% of the population who actively look outside the board for alternative education opportunities, it is becoming clear that more parents want something different to keep their attachment to the Toronto schools. But we need to consider whether we think we are dividing up school communities into little cliques and colonies, or do we want to expand to ensure we have been inclusive of community needs? We also do not want to deplete the existing community schools' populations by creating great number of small boutique schools and not having enough students to fill existing buildings. We want to attract others to the school board from far and wide because, as in the past, the board should have a reputation that makes it a destination for people because of its inclusiveness.

If the Toronto Board of Education builds something visionary people will come. But we need to remember that schools belong to the communities they serve and the programs need to reflect the needs of that community. And during the budgeting time communities need to have an active voice in what their communities need. So please join us at one of the following budget discussion sessions to voice your opinions on all of the above and anything else with programming implications:

Rosedale Heights (Castlefrank Subway)	April 19 (all meetings listed start at 7:00pm)
140 Borough Drive (Scarborough Town Centre)	April 26
5050 Yonge Street ( Main Board Office)	May 3
Islington School (just north of the Islington Subway)	May 4