This page was exported from - Caledon Citizen
Export date: Thu Mar 28 23:45:35 2024 / +0000 GMT

An epidemic of audacity in education

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Strictly speaking, the dictionary definition of audacity can mean both ?a willingness to take bold risks? and ?rude or disrespectful behaviour.? Frankly, with what is happening at several school boards around the province, including our own Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board, I think both definitions are equally applicable. Factor in the recent questionable move by the Ford government to potentially allow a ?Christian? college degree granting privileges and the Toronto District School Board spending millions NOT in the classroom but on pandemic related pay raises and I think we are experiencing an epidemic of audacity in education.

Uncertain times do sometimes call for ?bold risks.? They require us to think outside of the box, in this case, how best to provide an education for our children during unpredictable pandemic surges. School Boards and the government had an entire summer to come up with a plan and when they did, parents were asked to support it by choosing online learning or in school attendance. Families made tough choices based on a set of clearly defined parameters and schools were expected to plan and budget accordingly. Now, the playing field has changed significantly and NOT as a result of the pandemic but due to the second definition of audacity, the ?rude and disrespectful? expectation that teachers are somehow miracle workers. Teachers are apparently able to morph between being an in-person and online educator on command; providing quality education to both cohorts with the equal expectation of dealing with each of their unique learning challenges, answering their questions whether their hand is raised in the class or typed in a chat box, simultaneously managing all the technology required to actually make this work and oh yeah ? all while tap dancing balancing a jug full of water on their heads! Yes, that was a run on sentence. You know why? Because teachers will be running on and on and on ? as they attempt to manage the unmanageable.

Parents have united together in an effort to curb this madness. They've delegated to the Board pointing out the obvious and the Board, rather than addressing those concerns, seemed far more interested in establishing the provenance of mailing addresses on petitions and in reviewing the membership of the several social media groups that have emerged to fight this issue.

The move to hybrid learning was never actually a ?choice? despite a survey sent to parents because the default ?option? was hybrid learning, like it or not. Several other school boards, including York Region, are gaining more media traction with their fight making it into papers like the Globe and Mail this past weekend. The headline: ?Students miss out and teachers feel overwhelmed?.? Ya think? Locally, despite several Trustees at least appearing to take the issue seriously, DPCDSB sent an email to parents advising that on Nov. 13 teachers would be available online until 10:30am to provide student support. After that time and ?for the remainder of the day, educators will be engaged with preparing?including curriculum and lesson planning?? for a hybrid learning start on the Nov. 16. Certainly, as any teacher worth his or her salt knows, a half day of lesson planning is about all that's needed to adequately prepare for a year of teaching, especially in a hybrid situation and in a year as easily managed as this one. Our teachers are amazing. They take struggling readers and turn them into voracious ones. They help students grasp math using helpful hands-on strategies in the classroom and expose learners to history and science and geography and so much more. In the DPCDSB they also expose children to the gospel values, but what teachers are not, is Jesus himself. They can't perform miracles. It's time we stopped asking them to.

In other news, this epidemic of audacity isn't only contained to the DPCDSB and YCDSB. As announced last week, the Toronto District School Board is giving their administrative staff a bonus. Spending $2.4 million, the Board is providing a ?pandemic pay raise to both principals and vice-principals. All while teachers IN CLASS are struggling to maintain some sense of normalcy for the children under their care. Fair? I've no doubt administrators work hard but this just smacks of yet more rude and disrespectful behaviour on the part of Boards who have lost touch with the reality of what teachers are facing in their classrooms every day.

Finally, because I just can't let it go unremarked, a piece of pandemic legislation was recently proposed in the Ontario legislature that contained, buried within it, the potential of allowing degree granting privileges to a college that calls itself ?Christian? but is both homophobic and anti-Islamic. The founder of the College is said to be a good friend of Doug Ford. Its educational credentials

for degree granting are questionable at best. It's a slippery slope we tread. I fear there is indeed an epidemic of audacity in our educational system in Ontario and I'm not sure which is worse ? the pandemic or the epidemic it's causing.