

## From Queen's park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Island Lake and Princess Margaret Girl's Government visit Queen's Park

For the last few months, I have been working with a group of female students from Island Lake Public School and Princess Margaret Public School as part of the Girl's Government program.

Girl's Government is a non-partisan program, initiated by Equal Voice Toronto. The Girl's Government program is designed to help get students interested in and learn more about politics and advocacy. The program helps promote getting young women involved in politics through a range of activities and initiatives while working directly with the Member of Provincial Parliament.

Over the course of four months, the students held monthly meetings with me after school, as well as additional planning meetings to discuss politics and issues they care about and learned how to advocate for issues they believe in. I also arranged a special presentation by my niece, two-time Olympic athlete Perianne Jones, to speak to the students about the importance of goal setting. As part of the program, the students were asked to choose an issue they care about and learn to raise awareness and advocate for it through various methods. Princess Margaret Public School Girl's Government chose to advocate for making the Healthy and Active Living course offered to students in high school a compulsory course for all four years. The students from Island Lake Public School chose to advocate for more funding for community hospitals across Ontario.

To learn how to advocate for their issues, the students participated in debates, learned how to write letters to the editor as well as politicians, and prepared a petition for the Provincial government, which I tabled in the legislature the same day they visited Queen's Park.

The culmination of this program was a trip to Queen's Park, where the students attended and watched Question Period and took a private tour. During their trip, I arranged meetings between the students and politicians, including Education Minister Liz Sandals, three Progressive Conservative MPPs, two New Democratic Party MPPs and a second Liberal MPP. This allowed the students to present their ideas a number of times to seven different MPPs from all three political parties and answer questions and defend their ideas. They did a great job.

I hope the students will be able to take this experience and the skills they learned and use them when they feel strongly about issues they care about. I would like to thank the teachers from Island Lake Public School and Princess Margaret Public School for encouraging students to try this new extra-curricular program, and assisting me by offering something new to the students. I really enjoyed working with the students, teaching how to advocate for issues and how to raise awareness for issues they care about. I hope to have an opportunity to run the program again

