

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? St. Benedict Girls? Government visits Queen's Park

Girls' Government is an interactive non-partisan program initiated by Equal Voice Toronto, a multi-partisan organization dedicated to electing more women, which I offer to schools in Dufferin-Caledon.

Last year I had an enthusiastic group of participants from Island Lake Elementary School and Princess Margaret Public School who chose two issues as their focus, participated in debates, prepared petitions and learned how to write letters to the editor and politicians. This year, I had the opportunity to work with a group of female students from St. Benedict School in Orangeville. Over the course of four sessions with me in the classroom, the students learned about Ontario's legislative process and how to advocate for their chosen issue. After debating a number of issues, including having advertising be more representative of society sizes, fighting obesity and offering more independent living programs in high school for individuals with special needs, the girls voted to advocate for including sugar tablets in first-aid kits to prevent diabetic episodes.

After selecting their issue, the students did further research to prepare a short verbal presentation for MPPs during their trip to Queen's Park June 8. The students' first presentation was to Elizabeth Witmer, the current Chair of the Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB), and former minister of Environment, Health and Education. The girls also presented to numerous MPPs, including the Liberal Parliamentary Assistant to the Ministry of Labour, as well as Progressive Conservative and New Democrat critics for Health and Labour. During the meetings, each student had the opportunity to present their idea and answer questions from the MPPs. While the girls were giving their presentations to the MPPs, the boys from St. Benedict's took part in a tour and scavenger hunt on the grounds surrounding Queen's Park.

Visiting Queen's Park is a great free activity to consider as part of your summer plans. If you are planning a trip to Toronto, consider including a tour of the Ontario Legislature where you can join one of the public tours that occur regularly throughout the day.

St. Benedict's teacher Julie wrote "our St. Benedict experience with the Girls' Government program was eye-opening and fascinating. The Grade 8 girls learned how to develop an issue and then research and advocate for that issue, presenting to many of our MPPs down at Queen's Park. Thank you so much to Sylvia Jones MPP and her team for their dedication to this program, as well as their hospitality at Queen's Park. We had a wonderful time and learned so much!?"

I truly enjoy working with and learning from students as they suggest ideas that they believe will make our community stronger. I look forward to running Girls' Government again.

If you are interested in learning more about the Equal Voice Girls' Government program, please contact my office at sylvia.jonesco@pc.ola.org or 1-800-265-1603.

