

Got a plumbing problem? You'd better hope there's an App for that!

by Sheralyn Roman

Don't be fooled by the recent 'good' news, our education system is still in trouble. Alarmingly so. In recent conversations with staff working in the secondary school system it has become clear that the trades are in trouble. I've touched on this topic before because we own a Tool and Die shop and finding staff is already nigh on impossible, but these most recent talks truly have me worried about the future. Classes geared toward the trades are increasingly facing the chopping block as a result of new classroom cap sizes and no one seems to be sounding the alarm. One secondary school teacher who wished to remain anonymous shared that teachers have been asked, for the 2019/2020 school year, to have classes 'imagine' working with specific tools and 'imagine' what they could create ' if they had access to those tools. I'm sure you can IMAGINE my reaction to hearing this.

Still another teacher patiently took time to explain to me how capped class sizes can have an impact on trades programming. In classes that involve heavy machinery, or potentially dangerous tools, class sizes are capped at 21 students. This is for everyone's safety and that makes sense. However, because the government is mandating an increase in class size and because trades classes must be small, someone has to make up the shortfall. This means other classes (like English or Math) must often accommodate 30 and even 35+ students. Combined with a reduction in any kind of budget that might actually adequately equip trades related classes (and in general, an older teaching cohort approaching retirement) you have a recipe for disaster. Larger class sizes, a reduction in optional but enriched learning programs like visual arts, music and theatre and less time for concentrated focused learning per student, will all have further and far-reaching consequences. Students who learn differently or have any kind of exceptionality ' along with those who might have flourished in trades programming - will simply become lost in the system.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ford wants mandatory e-learning for all because ' computers! I mean, as long as we can all mindlessly click a button to download whatever Mr. Ford wants us to believe in this week we're good. I'm left sincerely hoping all that e-learning pays off with some student, somewhere, creating an app that'll take care of your plumbing problem. Why? Because when the only trades-related classes now available have students 'imagining' what it's like to work with actual tools ' when you've got a plumbing problem ' you'd better hope there's an app for that!