

Not ?small potatoes? anymore

by BROCK WEIR

When you have a chance to look back, sometimes the issues that mattered to you in your youth might seem like relatively small potatoes.

Math and numbers were never my strongest suit in my youth ? and not much has changed on that front, I have to admit ? and when my seemingly stellar Grade 4 record of A-s and B+s was tarnished by a C- in some generic math, at the time I felt it was the beginning of the end and all my hopes and dreams at the time of being an archeologist were being metaphorically buried in sand blowing in from parts unknown.

Yet, at the end of the day, somehow this blight on my Provincial report card didn't haunt me for the rest of my days as I envisioned at the time. It was a bit of a quick-healing bruise ? no more, no less ? but go tell that to an academically-minded kid in Grade 4!

A few years later, in Grade 8, ahead of Nelson Mandela's visit to Toronto, the most important issue in my mind was securing one of the few tickets allocated to our school for a youth rally he and his wife, Graca Machel, were holding at the SkyDome.

In order to score a place at my particular elementary school in Newmarket, our South Africa-born teacher prescribed a number of tasks and objectives, and as soon as the makeshift syllabus was available, that was the only thing that mattered to me.

Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with having drive and ambition, but if I had a time machine I might zip back to that surprisingly competitive time just to tell my young self to ?slow my roll? and calm down.

Not much changed in high school; as we worked our way up the grades, our student council decided to hold some sort of music event at school featuring a Toronto artist who was duly booked for the date ? only for the principal to decide their ?image? was less than appropriate for the school and the date duly cancelled.

For a couple of weeks, it was a top cause celebre, but something more important came along in which we could direct our respective energies and we moved on accordingly.

In retrospect, some of these vignettes from my own educational journey will undoubtedly spark an eyeroll or two. Energy may have been misdirected in some instances, but one thing I would never apologize for ? nor, I suspect, would any of my peers ? is the passion that we brought to the table.

But, as stated above, these instances were little more than small potatoes.

Much has changed since then.

Students today are more connected than ever before ? to each other and the world around them. The same can be said for the teachers that are now guiding them through the heady journey that is youth.

Those embarking on or currently on that journey have a lot more to consider these days and, in turn, they are being encouraged to use their voices to advocate for the issues that matter to them. And rather than an elementary school math grade, a nosebleed section ticket for the SkyDome, or who may or may not perform in the high school ?cafetorium? they are consequential indeed and should matter to all of us.

By the time you're most likely to read this on Thursday, June 8, students within the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) are planning a walk-out in protest of the YCDSB's decision last week to reject calls from students, along with calls from many

teachers and parents, to raise the Progress Pride flag at their Catholic Education Centre (CEC), the Board's headquarters on Bloomington Road in Aurora.

Through social media organized by students themselves, the objective, they say, is to 'show the YCDSB that we need change NOW!' (Emphasis theirs)

Students prepared to walk out are encouraged to get up and out of the classroom at 1.15 p.m. and 'wear rainbow colours instead of your uniform.'

'Our trustees and administration have failed us. Now we must act,' say organizers. 'When we reference 'administration,' we specifically mean the Board's senior administration, because principals, vice-principals, and staff have been extremely supportive. On June 8, walk out of your schools and classes in support of 2SLGBTQ+ respect, dignity, and visibility.

'The YCDSB has shown us that they do not value their students, staff, and community members. We must act now! There is no time to wait for next year or the year after, when 2SLGBTQ+ students are suffering. We need to show [the YCDSB] that we care, and we will not be set aside.'

To those of you who did not attend or view the May 29 meeting at the CEC, the students' position might seem hyperbolic, but, in my opinion, it is not.

Trustees who voted against flying the Progress Pride flag did not discount that more needs to be done to make students who identify as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community feel safer and more welcome in the school environment but argued that flying the flag wouldn't make much of a difference? despite students who walk the halls of their respective schools insisting that it would, indeed, be a good first step in the right direction.

Heck, even Student Trustees who shared their experiences and those of their peers at the Board table, as is the job assigned to them by the Board, were shut down after stating that Board members who framed those supporting the flag as viewing the pennant as a 'panacea' that will solve all issues identified to the Board as 'useless and a bit ignorant.'

'There is a massive campaign of hate around the western world against the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and it hurts knowing our Board is making national headlines for being a place where this hate is demonstrated,' said Student Trustee Jonah James before he was cut off.

'Students have chosen to come to this Board meeting whether in person or online to stand together and make their voices heard,' he continued. 'Students, particularly those of the 2SLGBTQ+, are risking their right to a safe, equitable, fruitful and quality education just to see a little shine of light at this Board that serves them. To say no today is honestly just a slap in the face to every student here at the YCDSB.'

I look forward to seeing what comes out of the walkout this week, if it indeed, transpires? and what the Board's response might be.

After all, a response might be only a few hundred metres west of the CEC on Bloomington Road where, as of Tuesday, ESC Renaissance, a French-language Catholic school under the jurisdiction of Conseil Scolaire Catholique MonAvenir doesn't seem to have any problem flying an iteration of the Pride flag.