



DECEMBER 17, 2019

Student Trustee Bi-Annual Report

Prepared for the Ottawa-Carleton District
School Board by:

Ganaaboute Gagne & Prasith Wijeweera

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Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

The Office of Student Trustee

A Student Trustee serves a one year term in which they shoulder the responsibility of bringing student voice to the Board of Trustees and senior staff, in accordance with Policy P.017.GOV. Currently, the students presiding over this role are Ganaaboute Gagne from Glebe Collegiate Institute and Prasith Wijeweera from Bell High School, who are both in grade twelve. As per the responsibilities of the office of Student Trustee, Prasith and Ganaaboute are required to present two bi-annual reports during the term of office. This package serves as the first report.

A Foreword

Ganaaboute Gagne and Prasith Wijeweera, student trustees for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board are pleased to present this report to update the Board of Trustees and senior staff on the essential work being carried out by both the student trustees, as well as Presidents Council, and the Student Senate. This report also serves to provide an update on the vital work done within the Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA-AECO) and current issues that are resoundingly and consistently impacting students at a board-wide level.

Engaging Students

A priority identified early on in the term of the student trustees was to both remain connected with as many students as possible, as well as to elevate the voices which traditionally have not been heard. With student voice being of the utmost priority to the office of student trustee, and a priority of the OCDSB, the question arose as to how to give voice to students who are not part of Student Councils, Club Heads, or are otherwise actively engaged. To circumvent this, the student trustees have undertaken the ambitious task of sitting down and moderating a discussion with students who are not necessarily active within their respective school, at every secondary school within the OCDSB's jurisdiction, and as many elementary and feeder schools as possible.

Why have the Student Trustees engage directly?

The purpose of having the two student trustees attend these "round table" discussions was twofold: first, to ensure direct engagement with students in schools throughout the board; secondly, it allows youth, and specifically marginalized youth, access to students elected to represent their peers in positions of power. This parallel project of exposing students to new opportunities and encouraging student excellence is at the core of the direct student trustee engagement sessions.

How Is It Done?

**METHODOLOGY IS IMPORTANT
TO ENSURE THE ENGAGEMENT IS
ETHICAL**

This strategy of consultation is the result of trial and error, but it does appear to be effective at yielding insightful results.

While this initiative is separate from the student senate's proceedings, assisting student senators to orchestrate a round-table by connecting with the local administration, and inviting students who do not have a voice to participate, is central to the spirit and aims of the student trustee position. During the round-tables, the student trustees encourage a free-flowing conversation with students about every aspect of their experience within the education system. Capturing the experiences from students who face distinctly different challenges and privileges, continues to influence the workings of the Student Senate. Thanks goes to Earl of March student senator, Amina Elsharif, for initiating and developing the current roundtable pilot project model.



Recycling and Beyond

The Student Perspective

Secondary students are increasingly cognizant of the importance of sustainable stewardship. Students at all of the consultation groups unanimously agreed that the OCDSB's environmental policies can be more fully developed and that a considerable cultural shift is required to reduce the Board's environmental impact. The Board should especially focus on retrofitting older schools in the OCDSB, with eco-friendly infrastructure, whenever possible. Student senators also raised concerns with Superintendent Carson regarding the OCDSB's environmental policy framework. It is evident that students across the city are motivated to enact local initiatives.

Therefore, it is recommended that the OCDSB continue to encourage local efforts and to implement cost-effective environmental strategies.

Student Recommendations

1. Board policies and custodial contracts should be updated to facilitate a board-wide green bin program;
2. When renegotiating the next cafeteria contract, the Board should include wording to reduce single-use plastics and reduce the overall environmental impact of school cafeterias; and,
3. Student run environmental groups across schools in the OCDSB should continue to work together on letter writing and ecological awareness campaigns and joint charitable initiatives.



Transportation Troubles: Addressing Inequities in Student Transportation

Resources

Financial considerations

Providing high school students with access to fully subsidized transit passes costs approximately \$250,000 per year. The costs are offset in part by a combined contribution of \$60,000 from the two school boards (LDSB and ALCDsb) and an additional \$100,000–125,000 from the Ontario Gas Tax Fund for each year of the program. The City of Kingston receives provincial gas tax funding based on population and transit ridership. As population and ridership grow relative to other Ontario municipalities, gas tax funding also increases.¹⁷ Ongoing funding from other sources is required to fill the funding gap, which ranges between \$65,000 and \$90,000 annually, currently paid by Kingston Transit.

(Above: Overview of the Kingston Transit High School Bus Pass Program's financial considerations.

Source: (Federation of Canadian Municipalities). The cost of the program was shared between the coterminous English and Catholic school board in Kingston, the provincial gas tax program and Kingston Transit.

The OCDSB's program to offer Presto Cards to eligible students has been a positive step towards increasing student independence and increasing extracurricular opportunities for students without access to a car. Students brought up concerns about whether the Board could review Presto Card eligibility policies to allow a greater scope of students such as cross-boundary and those with particular circumstances to be eligible. While the student trustees understand the considerable financial commitments needed, the Limestone District School Board (LDSB) & Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board (ALCDsb) concluded that the socio-economic and environmental benefits of their universal bus pass program outweighed the financial commitments. The program was found to increase equity by supporting disadvantaged students and reduced congestion at peak hours. (Above: Overview of the Kingston Transit High School Bus Pass Program's financial considerations. Source: (Federation of Canadian Municipalities). The cost of the program was shared between the coterminous English and Catholic school board in Kingston, the provincial gas tax program and Kingston Transit.



Transport Continued

While students greatly appreciate Presto Cards over the alternative yellow school buses, students in suburban regions felt that the bus service was lacking. In other words, students felt that there was a lack of infrastructure to accommodate demand. Student Senators from Barrhaven high schools brought up concerns that the service capacity and reliability were no longer adequate. When the catchment boundary changed, redirecting Chapman Mills students from Longfields Davidson Secondary School to John McCrae Secondary School, and Barrhaven students attending the gifted program from Merivale High School to Bell High School, student commute times did increase significantly for students. While these changes were necessary to address enrolment pressures within the OCDSB, affected students have had to cope with increased travel times. While students did receive Presto cards, students highlighted a lack of quality transit routes, which often leads to increased student stress and decreased student well-being. The student trustees are concerned that these issues are representative of a larger city-wide issue: lack of transit planning in suburban regions. In the urban context, there continues to be a lack of capacity on transit routes, which has been felt city-wide, especially after the transition to the light rail Confederation Line — noting that bus routes fall under the purview of O.C. Transpo & OSTA, the OCDSB, should continue to be a strong advocate for high-quality student transportation.

Students were also gravely concerned about safety on public transit and yellow buses. Many students felt that bus operators were not adequately trained to handle behavioural incidents. Students that did report violence, harassment and theft on buses to their school's administration felt that there was limited support available to them. Student trustees are also concerned that vaping on buses remains widespread and that this issue should be tackled in any action plans that board staff creates to curb the vaping crisis.

Student Recommendations

1. The OCDSB should consider the costs and benefits of a universal Presto Card program for secondary students.
2. The OCDSB continues to cooperate with OSTA and O.C. Transpo to enhance service, especially when attendance boundary changes are enacted.
3. The OCDSB should work with O.C. Transpo and OSTA to increase safety on buses and reduce the use of e-cigarettes or vaporizers on buses.

Annex #1: Federation of Canadian Municipalities Report on Kingston's Universal Bus Pass Program

Overview of Kingston Transit High School Bus Pass Program		
Program elements	Objectives	Program benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Partnership between City of Kingston and local school boards ▶ Fully subsidized transit passes at no cost for all high school students (21 years and under) ▶ On-site distribution and renewal of transit passes using a mobile printer at high school locations ▶ On-bus transit orientation to teach students how to ride the bus and the many benefits of choosing public transit ▶ Smart card technology gathers quality ridership data 	<p>For the city:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Educate the next generation of commuters to make more efficient and sustainable choices in transportation ▶ Encourage long-term public transit ridership ▶ Anticipate and envision the emerging future city <p>For the school boards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Increase affordability of field trips and cooperative education ▶ Encourage community integration and experiential learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Promotes social equity by providing all high school students with free access to public transit ▶ Improves quality of life for students through increased access, opportunity, choice and freedom ▶ Increases affordable access to cooperative education and experiential learning ▶ Generates cost savings and more efficient delivery of co-op, field trips and community education programs ▶ Reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, improves air quality and reduces congestion

Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Above: Overview of the Kingston Transit High School Bus Pass Program. Source: (Federation of Canadian Municipalities) The cost of the program was shared between the coterminous English and Catholic school board in Kingston; the provincial gas tax program and Kingston Transit. Students are resoundingly in favour of such a program and the implementation of such a program would cogently create a more equitable school system.

For more information about Kingston's Universal Bus Pass Program, please visit this link:
<https://fcm.ca/sites/default/files/documents/resources/case-studies/2018scawards-transportation-city-kingston-high-school-transit-pass-program-gmf.pdf>

The Lack of Apparent Mental Health Resources in Schools

While many mental health resources may be available for students in schools, extensive barriers continue to prevent students from accessing the resources they need. There continues to be misinformation surrounding the role of a guidance counsellor and the services they are qualified to offer to students. Students participating in roundtables were not aware that a “student-staff” confidentiality policy does not bind counsellors; students should be made aware that seeking support from a guidance counsellor is not confidential. While the OCDSB offers a diversity of mental health resources to students, students remain in the dark about which services are available to them and how to access these services. This leads students to turn to private mental health resources and ultimately leaves disadvantaged students at risk. Students felt that teachers continue to learn about the causes of mental health issues and that teachers continue to develop a sensitivity around the issue. Noting that mental health is a significant issue in modern society, the Board must continue to focus on improving student well-being. It is important to note that the Student Senate has voted to effectuate an initiative on mental health this year.

Student Recommendations

1. That the role and qualifications of guidance counsellors are clearly defined at the start of each year at school assemblies;
2. That the board make a concerted effort to advertise mental health resources and explore what initiatives other jurisdictions have undertaken to improve student mental health resources; and,
3. That teachers continue to receive professional development on student mental health and student well-being.



Expanding the Scope of Engagement

SENIOR STUDENTS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WORTH LISTENING TO

Students in 7/8 have different concerns, and different priorities - a set of concerns that need to be listened to

The student trustee's led two activities with two groups of 20 grade seven and eight students. Grade seven and eight students shared concerns about the eLearning mandate by the provincial government, labour relations, and the transition between middle school and high school. The OCDSB should continue to seek out ways to engage grade seven and eight students and to share information with those students in an age-appropriate manner. Board-wide leadership opportunities for grade seven and eight students should also be considered as a manner of building leadership capacity and preparing students for secondary opportunities. Assistance provided by Allison Fuisz, a teacher at Bell High School, and Josee Desjardins, a teacher at Broadview Avenue Public School, was much appreciated in organizing the roundtable discussions with students.



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

15th Annual Rainbow Youth Forum

November 14, 2019

Follow Up to the Fifteenth Annual Rainbow Youth Forum

While this report has focused on areas of improvement for the Board, there are also Board initiatives which are much appreciated by students. Following the OCDSB Rainbow Youth Forum, students at a roundtable discussion who attended the forum praised it for being welcoming, well organized and engaging. When asked for anonymous feedback to be sent to the event's organizers, the student trustees were surprised to hear that students had no negative feedback. Staff involved in this event should be proud of this work and continue their positive commitment to student well-being. This forum was also instrumental in starting a discussion about bullying, access to gender-neutral bathrooms, and the overarching discussion of equity in education. Staff and trustees should remain aware that although sexual and gender equity has increased over the years, bullying and negative staff interactions continue to persist to a lesser extent. Assistance provided by Shannon Mills, teacher and Rainbow Alliance staff lead at Bell High School, was greatly appreciated in organizing a roundtable discussion with students.



Follow up on the Fourth Annual Indigenous Youth Symposium

Another area of excellence appreciated by students was the Indigenous Youth Symposium event, which was centred around multiple workshop blocks and a lunch catered by local Kitiganzibi catering company. The event was MC'd by grade 12 student, Jai Metatwabin, from Glebe Collegiate Institute, and Ganaabouté Gagne, student trustee. A theme of community permeated the day, allowing for new friendships to be started, and old friendships to be rekindled. Events such as the Indigenous Youth Symposium, and the annual Indigenous Youth Leadership Camp - organized by Kris Meawasige, Jody Alexander, Kareena Butler, Josh Lewis, and Chantel Verner - serve as essential opportunities for Indigenous students to feel connected to their culture and to friends who have become family, all in spite of the complex realities Indigenous students face in OCDSB schools. While this one-day event may be an outstanding success, it is essential for senior staff and the board of trustees to understand that events like this are one day, and that the OCDSB should strive to ensure that safe spaces such as the IYS exist for Indigenous students every day.

Student Senate Priorities



THE SENATORIAL INITIATIVE

Mental Health Concerns

The 2019-2020 Student Senate is comprised of 23 student leaders from secondary schools in the OCDSB. In October, student senators attended a retreat at the Bill Mason Outdoor Education Centre. At the retreat, senators participated in team building activities and brainstormed initiatives that they could undertake in the 2019/2020 school year. At the senate meeting following the retreat, student senators voted on shortlisted projects and elected to focus on a mental health initiative this year. In January, senators will engage in discussion with Dr. Petra Duschner, Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services, to further explore mental health issues.

Student trustees are also actively working with the vice-principal of South Carleton Secondary School, Matthew Gagnier, to increase student senator representation on the Board's advisory committees as it is an essential step towards increasing student voice in the OCDSB.

WHAT IS THE SENATE?

Election Process, and Purpose

The Student Senate is a collection of full-time students from the majority of the OCDSB's secondary schools. Each secondary school elects one senator to sit on the Senate, which is chaired by the two student trustees. This body is intended to serve as a consulting body for various departments of the OCDSB. This group also fulfills the purpose of funneling student voice, and school concerns to the board of trustees via the student trustees. Lastly, the Senate has traditionally identified an area of focus and pursued an initiative.



Student Senate

A LIST OF SENATORS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE SCHOOLS

Bruno Vidal

Glebe Collegiate Institute

Kate Rodriguez

Woodroffe High School

Amina Elsharif

Earl of March Secondary School

Daniel Bersyniow

Sir Robert Borden High School

Annie Markarian

Lisgar Collegiate Institute

Hailey O'Donnell

Merivale High School

Chanel Paris

Cantebury High School

Yasmin Mouaki Benani

John McCrae Secondary School

Eric Currie

Osgoode Township High School

Miruna Chandrabose

Brookfield High School

Wajid Zaman

Longfields Davidson Heights Secondary School

Samiha Ali

Gloucester High School

Joe Fast

Ridgemont High School

Caelum Widecki

A.Y. Jackson Secondary School

Ross Cleary

Nepean High School

Joy Liu

Colonel By Secondary School

Ahmed Yasin

Hillcrest High School

Billy Mott

South Carleton High School

Jeffrey You

Bell High School

Gaby Grigorescu

Sir Wilfred Laurier Secondary School

Laura Davies

Cairine Wilson Secondary School

Prasith Wijeweera

Student Trustee & Co Chair

Devinder Sarai

West Carleton Secondary School

Ganaaboute Gagne

Student Trustee & Co Chair



100%

Ontario Student Trustee Association / l'Association des Elevs Conseillers et Conseilleres de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO) Updates

PRASITH WIJEWEERA:
REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE, CO- CHAIR OF FRENCH RELATIONS
WORKING GROUP

GANAABOUTE GAGNE:
MEMBER OF INDIGENOUS RELATIONS WORKING GROUP

FGM Recap

In October 2019, student trustees Prasith Wijeweera and Ganaaboute Gagne attended The Ontario Student Trustees Association Fall General Meeting in Toronto. This proved to be an engaging event in which the OCDSB student trustees were able to network with other student trustees across Ontario. The student trustees participated in activities to review board room procedures and attended seminars about student trustee policy. The Public Board Council of OSTA-AECO has elected to focus on peer support between student trustees this year. student trustees had the opportunity to hear from Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister of Education, surrounding the eLearning mandate and other proposed changes by the provincial government to the education system. Norah Marsh, former EQAO Chief Executive Officer, also presented to the OSTA-AECO general assembly about data management in education and the future vision for EQAO.



OSTA-AECO E-Learning

Student trustees had the opportunity to see OSTA-AECO's eLearning report and ask questions about the report's findings. It is important to note that 94.8% of students surveyed indicated that they were opposed to the province's e-Learning mandate.



Student trustees also had the opportunity to join working groups within OSTA-AECO. Student trustee Wijeweera is the co-chair of the French Relations Working Group and is working with the OSTA-AECO Executive Council to organize a conference on French Second Language Education in April 2020 in Ottawa. Student Trustee Gagne joined the Indigenous Relations Working Group and is working with the team to increase awareness of the issues that Indigenous Students face across Ontario. Both student trustees are incredibly grateful for the opportunities available to them through OSTA-AECO and look forward to the OSTA-AECO Board Council Conference in February 2020, in Ottawa.

A significant publication by OSTA-AECO within the last year has been the Report on eLearning, which, based on thousands of student survey responses, inspired discussion at all levels of education. While the Ministry of Education has recently reduced the mandatory "E-Credits" a student must have to graduate from four to two, OSTA-AECO continues to oppose any move to mandate eLearning for all students. This echoes student voice from across the province. For a brief overview of said report, please see the attached "fast facts" page.

Fast Facts

The fast facts listed below are the key findings from the eLearning survey released to students in grades 8-12 by the Ontario Student Trustees Association / l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO). The survey was conducted from May 2019 to June 2019, and garnered 6087 responses.

1 in 4 respondents said they had a hard time contacting their eLearning teachers.



35.2%

of respondents who have taken eLearning reported experiencing moderate to severe challenges with utilizing the eLearning software.

Approximately

60%

of all survey respondents who took eLearning feel that their learning styles were not adequately accommodated.

Out of the 6087 survey respondents used in this sample, 5772 respondents -- or

94.8%

of all respondents -- disapprove of the new eLearning mandate.

An estimated ceiling of

90,000

of Ontario's 2 million currently-enrolled students would not be able to obtain their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), if eLearning is mandated for all students.



3 in 10 respondents had difficulty understanding their eLearning course lessons.

Non OSTA-AIECO Conferences Attended by Student Trustees

National Child Day at the National Arts Centre, in Ottawa

Student Trustee Wijeweera had the opportunity to attend the November 2019 Children First, Canada National Child Day Conference at the Canadian National Arts Centre. Student Trustee Wijeweera had the opportunity to listen to students and discuss pertinent social issues with students. This professional development opportunity was an eye-opening experience for Student Trustee Wijeweera because of the wide diversity of voices that had a chance to present at the forum. It is important to note that two topics that were the focus of student concerns were mental health support, and more significantly, environmental issues. During a luncheon with other OCDSB students attending the event, Student Trustee Wijeweera was also able to explain the role of a student trustee and clarified the election process to interested student leaders.

People for Education Annual Conference at York University, in Toronto

Student Trustee Gagne enjoyed the privilege of being able to attend PFE's Annual conference and engage in discussions surrounding eLearning, combating micro-aggression in the school environment, and hearing from Stephen Lewis on the role that public education plays. A dominant topic throughout the day was the consequences of private money in a public system. This pertinent discussions has given a new perspective to Student Trustee Gagne that has strengthened his understanding of equity in education. This conference ultimately proved its value in much more of a qualitative aspect as its impacts cannot be measured, merely observed in discussion and actions.



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Closing Remarks

Student Trustee Prasith Wijeweera

Every day during our terms as a student trustee, we continue to learn something new about the dynamic nature of the OCDSB. I am grateful for the meaningful support that Myra Wells, Superintendent Hardie, Trustee Lyra, Vice-Principal Gagnier and Nicole Guthrie have provided to us during our time as student trustees to date. In the upcoming months, we look forward to connecting with underrepresented student groups and supporting tangible student initiatives at the grass roots level.

Sincerely,

Prasith Wijeweera

Prasith Wijeweera
Student Trustee

Student Trustee Ganaaboute Gagne

Perhaps the most challenging part of this position that I have discovered so far has not been the time commitment, nor the desire to remain involved, but instead it has been figuring out how to balance life. Between school, my employment, my community involvement, and this role - managing my time and prioritizing my health has been a challenge. I would like to specifically extend my thanks to Superintendent Baker, Superintendent Hardie, Board Services team members, Myra Wells and Nicole Guthrie, for entertaining any questions I have had and supporting me in this role. I look to the future eagerly awaiting what it has to bring.

Sincerely,

Ganaaboute Gagne

Ganaaboute Gagne
Student Trustee