

Ashlee Schmaltz

Clarence Fulton Secondary School, Vernon

A Diverse Community: Awareness Equals Success

Everyone has a different idea in their mind of what the perfect school would be. To me, the most important component is diversity. We should acknowledge differences, we should greet differences, until difference makes no difference. Every student should be given the opportunity to embrace diversity and discover new paths that connect an understanding to caring, listening and sharing with others who are different than themselves.

The walls would be painted with colourful murals showing a diverse and multicultural community. Anyone who walks into the school would be able to feel a sense of welcoming and belonging. The walls covered in paintings, instead of white cement, would yell out in many different languages the multiculturalism we have within our school. Six main values would be promoted to the students: freedom, responsibility, compassion, equality, honesty and respect.

Every student learns differently. For students to succeed they need to be able to venture outside of their textbooks and learn more about themselves and the things happening in the present-day world around them. They need to be able to experience every technique of learning, including hands-on learning. Teachers would give every student freedom for their minds to explore. There are different teaching techniques that can be used so every student wants to learn and has an understanding of what they are doing. I believe anyone can think deeply and knowledgeably if they are given the freedom to think about what they want. When a teacher forces students to think about a specific topic, then write about that same topic, not all students will succeed. Students need to be able to find something they are passionate about and care about so much that they could write an "A" essay about it, even if they are only a "C+" student.

I would try to have as much student-to-student interaction as possible in the classes because the best way to learn is by doing. In classes such as math, where interaction is not as easy to do, a bit of time would be taken each week to make sure that *all* of the students feel welcome in the class and understand what they are doing. Teachers would become part of the class rather than being in charge of it. They would come down

to the level of the students. Desks in the classrooms would be arranged in a circle so that everyone could see each other and no one would be talking to the back of someone else's head. I would want teachers to feel that they could be part of a discussion rather than only being able to lead the discussion. Teachers' opinions count, too, and would help students to question their own ways of thinking.

Clarence Fulton Secondary School has an astounding program called Global Education that allows students to explore outside the classroom and have *real* experiences. The course is the perfect school, in my mind. It is all of the things I imagine are needed to make a school a place where students want to be and where they succeed in every area, not just academics but understanding themselves, having awareness about their fellow classmates and school, local and global community, and finding their passions. We may not have followed the curriculum by the books during Global Education, but we learned so much about ourselves. We were able to regenerate our passions from the past that we were not given the opportunity to express throughout school. There should always be opportunity for students to work in a way that shows their creativity. Everyone is creative in some way and would express themselves through music, art, sports, writing, or even volunteering, if they were given a chance to be creative in their own way, as I was during Global Education.

Global Education allowed us to go out into the community and experience things first hand. This is a big part of what the perfect school would be. We saw the diversity within our class first, then within our school, our local community, and even our global community. I may not remember what our first Civics Studies 11 test was about, but I do remember walking around our community campaigning awareness for the homeless people. I may not remember the definition of onomatopoeia, but I do remember the feeling of strength when we broke down the diversity barrier between ourselves and the children at an orphanage in Nicaragua. I do not remember the names of the Famous Five, but I do remember the names of the people I sat next to each day and the people I met on the streets. Students need to realize that while good grades are important, it is

just as important to take the time to find out who you are. Students should not leave grade 12 wondering if they are making the right decisions. High school should be the place to help you learn about yourself and become certain of who you are.

To have a successful school, the students need to be a big part of what shapes their school culture. They need to be allowed to express an opinion for the decisions that are made within the school because they are a part of the school community. The opinion that is not spoken aloud may be the one that would help to make a difference. The only barrier to students' achievement is not letting them think with an open mind. ❖