

the Reckoner

of Marc Garneau C.I.



NOVEMBER 2025

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28 NOVEMBER 2025

VOL 13 NO. 1

Cover Photo: Angela Xi

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NEWS BOARD

A board to keep the student body informed about their school and local community.

The Future of Basketball at Marc Garneau

by ALEXANDER GABRIEL TEVODROS

Marc Garneau's annual basketball tryouts were held from 3 to 4 November, allowing Marc Garneau's aspiring athletes to showcase their basketball skills. Junior tryouts were held on the 3rd, coached by Mr. Laughlin, giving students a chance to advance their athletic skills for the future. Senior tryouts occurred the following day at 7 am, coached by Mr. Hillman.

This opportunity gave students a chance to refine and exhibit their skills in many ways, such as practicing shooting, playing team games, and doing warmups. Team games like

basketball also help students build necessary future skills like teamwork and determination.

Grade 10 Student Abhijoy Ghosh said, "The tryouts were very competitive and fun, and the experience was unlike any other tryouts at Marc Garneau". He also said that the tryouts had a "simple but effective" method for selecting the "dream team". The method used a command drill, which tested essential basketball skills from which

coaches determined who was the best fit for the team.

Hopefully, these tryouts will help us assemble a team that

will help Marc Garneau become the winners this season—and encourage other students to pursue their goals, whether it be basketball, soccer, or crocheting. Sports like basketball are reminders that dedication and

courage can open doors, no matter what path a student chooses to follow. Hopefully, the team succeeds and conquers this year's basketball season. For additional information about the tryouts, please refer to the Marc Garneau Athletics Instagram account: @mgci_athletics. Go Cougars! ■



Photograph: Babar Waheed

Baseball World Series

by HANIAH SAEED

On 20 October, the Toronto Blue Jays beat the Seattle Mariners in a thrilling seven-game American League Championship Series (4-3), advancing to the World Series for the first time in almost 32 years (with their last appearance (and win!) dating back to 1993). Blue Jays fans everywhere were eager and excited, believing that this could finally be the year where Toronto reclaimed the title of baseball's World Champions.

All across Toronto, the energy was impossible to ignore. TTC buses and streetcars drove through the city with signs cheering "Go Jays!", while crowds were filled with blue jerseys and hats. Businesses joined in too—local restaurants hosted special promotions, pubs held watch parties, and even Tim Hortons had special-edition coffee cup designs.

Game 1 of the World Series was held at the Rogers Centre in downtown Toronto, and the Blue Jays did not disappoint. They won the game with a score of 11-4 against the defending champions, the Los Angeles Dodgers—a strong start to the series, making fans proud.

Unfortunately, it did not last long. Toronto lost the next two games, with a 5-1 loss in Game 2 and an upsetting 6-5 loss in an 18-inning Game 3. This gave the Dodgers a 2-1 lead in the series, much to the disappointment of Blue Jays fans.

However, the Blue Jays did not back down. They won with a solid 6-2 score in Game 4, and kept the momentum going with a 6-1 win in Game 5. Toronto was once again leading the series 3-2, only one win away from the World Series title.

Finally, the day of Game 6 arrived, and the halls of Marc Garneau were filled with blue clothing for Blue Jays Spirit

Day. Students and teachers alike buzzed with excitement, in the hopes that the Jays would secure the World Series title. All eyes were on the Blue Jays that night as they played against the Dodgers, hoping to end the series early with a win. Sadly, this was not the case. The Blue Jays lost this game 3-1, making the overall series even at three wins apiece. Everyone was tense—the winner of the next game would be the World Series champions.

The next day, the final game of the series took place. Over 51 million people watched the game across Canada, the United States and Japan. The Blue Jays started strong, leading the game 3-0. However, the Dodgers soon caught up. By the ninth inning, both teams were tied. The game went to extra innings, yet neither team managed to earn another run in the 10th inning. Finally, in the 11th inning, the Dodgers hit a home run, ultimately leading to a heartbreaking loss for Toronto (5-4).

Although the Blue Jays couldn't bring home the championship title, their journey to the very brink of the World Series was one that brought fans together, especially here at Marc Garneau.

"I think that's what was great about this run," said Grade 12 Student Swapnil Kabir. "How people like me who weren't watching the Jays or baseball at all beforehand were able to get involved. It was very much a uniting force for the city, country even. Past that, my hope as a sports fan is that our city's teams can stay successful, and that we can compete to win titles in all the big leagues."

Though the Jays didn't win this time, their determination and perseverance have given fans, including the ones at Marc Garneau, confidence in another strong season next year. ■

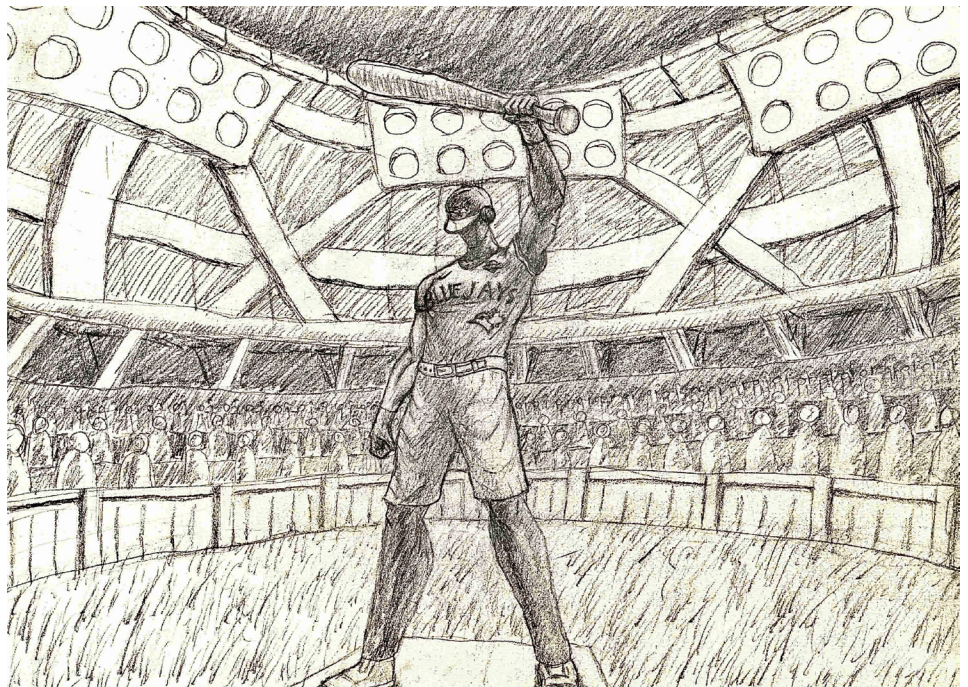


Illustration: Dawud Shaikh

Spirit Week at Marc Garneau CI

by MARYAM REHMAN

As October came to an end, Marc Garneau CI came alive with spirit, culture, and creativity with the onset of Halloween Spirit Week. Excitement grew with each passing day, culminating in a Halloween that reflected the school's unity and spirit.

Spirit Week began with students showing their competitive sides on Jersey Day, proudly representing their favourite sports teams. The energy carried through every class and conversation, as students compared scores, debated which teams were the best, and celebrated their favorite players. The next day, MGCI's diversity took centre stage for culture day. Bright fabrics, unique accessories, and traditional clothing filled the school, reflecting the rich mix of backgrounds that make up MGCI. The halls became a living exhibition of heritage, as students demonstrated pride and respect for one another's tradi-

tions. "Cultural Day was definitely my favorite part of Spirit Week. Everyone looked amazing in their traditional clothes, and it really highlighted how diverse MGCI's school community is," said Zahra, a grade 11 student.

By midweek, Frat Out Day brought a fun twist. Everyone showed up wearing ties, caps, and sweaters over their shoulders, embracing the theme. The coordinated ties and backward hats worn by many students gave Frat Out Day a distinctive visual identity. Then came Pajama day—a fan favourite. Students traded jeans for flannel pants and showed up to school wearing fuzzy slippers and cozy pajama sets. Classes tuned into comfort zones for a day, creating a relaxed atmosphere before the big finale.

Finally, Halloween arrived, and MGCI did not disappoint.

Costumes of all kinds filled the hallways, ranging from creepy clowns to creative group

costumes to an iconic pair of "6-7" enthusiasts. The biggest hit of the day was the haunted house. Students lined up during lunch to experience the real thrill of Halloween with their friends. "The haunted house was such a fun experience—the scarers were creative, and made the experience feel so real," said Shahd, a grade 10 student who attended the event. The haunted house quickly became the highlight of the week with its eerie atmosphere, dark lights, and jump scares around every corner, making it an unforgettable experience.

The week exemplified what makes MGCI exceptional: innovation, enthusiasm, and school spirit that brings everyone together. Each event created memorable memories throughout the school, making this year's Halloween spirit week one to remember. ■



Photograph: Aimal Rizvi



Illustration: Angela Xi

Schemes, Murders and Laughs: The Stratford Festival

by INAAYA AHAMED

On 9 October, four buses of students left Marc Garneau C.I. to go to the Stratford Festival. Attending the Stratford Festival is something of a tradition for MGCI students, and many see it as a place where friendships are forged and memories are made. This year there was a new option, allowing students to choose between a day trip and an overnight trip. Both students on the day trip and the overnight trip saw *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. Additionally, students who attended for two days also saw *Annie* and *Macbeth*. “Stratford was awesome, with all of the goofy shenanigans and lifetime experiences,” said Hashim Syed, a grade 10 student.

When the grade 9s and 10s arrived at Stratford, they were met by some of the cast of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, where they were taught some interesting choreography. The older students spent this time walking with friends, with the grade 9s and 10s joining after the workshop. Afterwards, all students made their way to the Avon Theatre to see the first play, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrel*.

“It was very enthusiastic,” commented Grade 9 Student Nazish Mohaimin when asked about her opinion on *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, the first play of the trip. “It never had a bland moment.”

After dinner, students watched *Annie*, a musical about a young girl trying to find her parents and realising what family truly is along the way. The fun didn’t end there, though. Once the play was over, students raced to the buses in the dark, desperate to

get out of the cold. Eventually, everyone got settled into their rooms and students spent the night playing games, talking and watching movies.

The next day, students had breakfast in the city and the grade 9s and 10s attended another workshop, getting fake fighting tips from some of the actors in *Macbeth*, leaving the older grades free to explore by themselves. In the workshop, students learned how to throw fake punches, before joining the grade 11s and 12s back in the city. Students then had a quick lunch, and made their way to the theater to watch *Macbeth*, a modern take on a classic.

From the plays themselves to the bus rides, there was never a dull moment at Stratford. But students aren’t the only ones

who love the festival. Ms. Roitman attended the Stratford Festival for the second time this year. She named *Annie* as her favourite part of the trip.

“It’s really important to see live theater,” said Ms. Roitman, who teaches English. “It’s such a powerful method of storytelling.” And she wasn’t wrong.

For Grade 9 Student Lina Lai, watching plays alongside peers felt “truly unreplaceable,” helping her connect to not only her friends, but the world. “Thank you for making it happen, it was a core high school moment that I’ll surely remember,” added Lina, expressing her gratitude towards Ms. Lajeunesse and the rest of the English department for a trip that would’ve been impossible without them. ■



Photograph: Bailey Min

LIFE BOARD

A board for imaginative self-expression through written and visual content.

Needles and Threads

by MARIAM KHAN

They always kept it warm here. The nurses say it helps with the nerves - that it keeps patients from shaking. I tell them I don't mind, because the poor ladies stuck here need it, and I'm a nice person, so I let it be. But the heat will always remind me of the memories - even though the night he died was a cold one, just like any other.

Sometimes at night, when the corridors go still and I can hear the soft whirring of the vending machine with the lazy breaths of my roommates., I try to remember the cold. I used to keep the house cold — he liked it that way. “Keeps the mind sharp,” he'd say, tapping his temple. I'd sit in my chair with a blanket over my knees and stitch by the fire, pretending not to see him watching over his books. Every time he'd anchor his gaze to my back with those foggy grey eyes, and I'd get a shiver that went down my spine as my hand twitched violently. I could never focus on my sewing.

The doctors ask me about that night often. The night they say I found him. They used gentle tones, as if soothing out their itchy, rasping voices...as if soothing their voices might help tranquilize the pain of the memories.

They told me that I ran out into the street, screaming for help, and that I'd fainted, and I'd nodded the whole time. I didn't remember the scream, but I suppose it must have sounded awful, echoing through the house like that. I do remember the smell, though - the thick iron in

the air.

The nurses here are kind, and they let me sew in the afternoons, even bring me thread from the store-room. They bring crimson, mostly, because it “cheers the eyes.” I liked it because it hides mistakes.

I've been working on a tablecloth for weeks now. The pattern came to me in a dream in long looping lines, like veins, running to the edge of the fabric. I lose track of time when I'm sewing. There's something soothing about the needle's bite, the way it slips in and out, leaving such neat, obedient patterns behind.

They've all been told I'm fragile. That whatever I saw must've been terrible. That I was so brave for bearing whatever had happened in that house. Sometimes they whisper about how much denial I was in because he was my husband. I let them believe it. It's easier that way. This afternoon, when the thread

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BREAKING NEWS

MGCI's Cougar Missing From Campus: Suspected Kidnapping.

Marc Garneau Collegiate's very own Cougar has suddenly vanished from the school building. Security cameras show four mysterious figures dragging a fainted cougar outside of school grounds. These four suspects have not been named, although MGCI has stated they are searching relentlessly for these masked culprits. Cougar's family has chosen to stay silent about their tragic loss.

Cougar was allegedly supposed to be at a library gala the week after his mysterious disappearance. The hosts of said gala and chairs of the Library Council Thea and Maxi have yet to speak out.



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caught on my finger, I noticed a small cut. I licked it clean, out of habit. The taste of copper and salt was comforting, and I missed the taste of comfort.

When the nurse came by to check my work, she smiled and said my stitches were perfect, and I had never felt so happy. I thanked her, but I didn't tell her the trick. It's all in the wrist. Gentle pressure. Precise aim.

And never, ever let your hand tremble. ■

Wake Up Call

by DEEBA ARIA

The war between me and my alarm starts at 7:00 a.m. and I always lose. I hit snooze at 7:05, and again at 7:10, pretending those five extra minutes will somehow change my life. Then comes Mom's dramatic entrance: "Wake up! Only ten minutes left for school!" My heart jumps, and I panic, only to realize there's still an hour left. Classic Mom. It's her favorite trick to give me a morning heart attack. Honestly, if I ever die young, it'll probably be because I overslept.

I drag myself out of bed, wash my face, and stare at my closet like it's a math test. What do I even wear? My sister's clothes always look better, so I "borrow" hers (without permission, obviously). Breakfast happens somewhere between yawns and regret. I already hate school, but I end up there anyway in first period, Equity and Justice. It's not a bad class though; we have a cute teacher, and her outfits are always on point.

Every morning feels the same... until one day, it didn't. During class, we watched a documentary about privilege. Michael Yates said something in his TED Talk that really stuck with me: "If you have access to education you have power." That line hit me harder than I expected. I always thought I wasn't privileged enough, but then I realized I actually am.

We discussed how some people have more opportunities than others, and it made me think of my country, Afghanistan, where many girls aren't allowed to go to school at all. Every morning and every night, they pray that one day the doors to education will open for them.

I believe when we have a privilege that doesn't give us power in the real world, we don't even consider it a privilege. For example, just be-

ing able to go to school might seem normal, but to others, it's a dream beyond reach. We must honour what we have by using it well and by living the opportunities others are still dreaming of.

Meanwhile, I wake up complaining about school, struggling to get out of bed, skipping breakfast, and being ungrateful for what I already have. I used to think my life was difficult because of homework or bad

grades, but really, I'm lucky. Going to school itself is a privilege; one that many girls dream about.

Now, every day I wake up and I fight for their dream to become someone. Their dreams are my dreams. I feel responsible for carrying them with me, for doing what they are not allowed to do yet.

To be grateful is to act, not just to feel. ■



Photograph: Babar Waheed

Under the Radio Tower

by ZAHRA ATAI

She was born in a church pew, where the air was thick with hymnals and heat. Her father was a preacher who believed suffering was the truest form of worship. Her mother played the organ softly, eyes shut tight, like she was trying not to exist. Their daughter sat between them every Sunday, quiet as a prayer, and learned early that love and fear were the same thing when spoken in the name of God.

Her name was Ethel. She grew up in a house where even the wallpaper looked tired of pretending to be holy. The walls knew everything — the shouting, the praying, the way her mother's perfume mixed with candle smoke and grief.

She met Willoughby one summer under the radio tower. He was kind, a little reckless, with hands that shook when he laughed. He said her name like a secret. They spent their days in fields gone to gold, their nights in the backseat of his car, dreaming about running away. He told her he'd never leave. And she believed him, because she had to.

That summer, she wrote letters to her best friend Janie — pages filled with promises and fear and love she couldn't name. Janie was the only one who ever really saw her. Holly Reddick lived down the road — beautiful, wild, everything Ethel wasn't allowed to be. Holly kissed her once behind the church after choir practice, tasting like cherry soda and sin. They never spoke about it again.

Then the storm came. Willoughby disappeared — no note, no goodbye. Just the hum of the tower and the sound of thunder swallowing the fields. People said he left town but she didn't believe them.

That's when she met Logan. He was older, sharper around the edges. He promised her escape — real es-

cape this time. They robbed a bank together, desperate and shaking, and when the sirens came, Logan didn't make it out. She did. She ran until her legs gave out. She later found out he had been shot by a police officer.

For a while, she lived in motels and bus stations, sleeping beside men who didn't ask her name. She told herself she was free, but she still felt the weight of the preacher's cross pressing into her skin.

Then she met Isaiah. He told her she didn't have to run anymore. She wanted to believe him — she always wanted to believe someone.

His house was quiet. The fridge hummed. The rooms were clean in a way that felt unnatural. He made her dinner, poured her wine, asked

her to sing. When she looked up, his eyes were full of something like love — or hunger.

After that, there was the needle. The sleep. The ache. She dreamed of home — of Janie and Holly laughing under the radio tower, of Willoughby's hand in hers, of Logan's voice saying, run.

Then came the dark. The freezer hums. The world goes still.

But death didn't keep her. She lingers — in the wires, the wind, the static between stations. The preacher's daughter, the runaway, the lover, the ghost.

And if you stand under the radio tower on a humid night, you can hear her voice behind the hum — soft, steady, still singing. ■



Illustration: Inaaya Ahmed

Mad Hatter & The Queen of Hearts

by FABEEHA FATIMA

Tick tock, tick tock.
 The rat climbed onto my spot.
 His hairy tail and dirty frills curled up in my teacup slot.
 He squeaked and choked and drank my cup with his dirty, ragged fleas.
 I watched in silence, restraining violence, as he smashed my lover's tea.
 My hat sat atop my head, tangled in its ragged nest.
 Grey hair and fungi small,
 Mushroom mould and grass grow tall.
 Corpse-like skin, flies kiss my chin,
 I hate to say that I have fallen,
 but Queen of Hearts, you saw the calling.
 I wait and wait like widowed grace,
 standing amidst your bitter taste.
 You drive me mad and make me sad
 Now I sit with rats and an old, torn-up hat,
 I wait and wait, persistence proceeds,
 while your chair remained vacant, ignoring my pleas.
 Oh, you monster, what have you done to me?
 Cold buzzing tea and rain-stained forgotten trees
 May you be witness to my final decree
 I sit in silence and drink my tea.
 "My first and final, forgotten love—
 May I drive you mad like you have driven me."
 For I am the Mad Hatter, and unfortunately
 That's all I'll ever be.
 Drained by you, and chained to you
 Queen of my Heart. ■

Anonymous Illustration





Winds of Freedom

Fariha Mridha



Colours of Santorini

Hania Ahmed

EDITORIAL BOARD

A board that amplifies student voices through supported opinions.

From Belém to Schools: Building Environmental Literacy in 2025

by HIBA ABBASI

Students are often overlooked in their role as stakeholders in environmental advocacy. Similarly, thorough environmental education is discernibly overlooked in many school systems. Despite both remaining unrecognized, youth have taken the responsibility to influence climate change movements globally. Demonstrably, as young people have proved themselves capable of taking charge in such powerful activism, the possibilities of what they could achieve with structured environmental literacy are endless.

Out of 193 member states mandated by the United Nations [6] to submit their pledges to cut carbon emissions, only 64 have honoured this guarantee [4]. The 30th session of the annual Conference of the Parties (COP 30) will occur during November in Belém, Brazil, concentrating on tackling climate change, primarily by limiting the global temperature to 1.5°C and adjusting food systems to adapt to a higher threshold of temperature [3].

The significance of this summit in 2025, at least within the context of climate justice, cannot be overstated. As the President-designate explained, it is “urgent we address, in a comprehensive and synergetic manner, the interlinked global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss in the broader context of achieving the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals).” [3] This “urgency” falls flat when over 100 000 mature rainforest trees have been chopped down to make traveling

easier for the 70 000 political activists set to attend COP 30 [5]. Such dangerous contradictions never go unnoticed by youth activists, a glaring microcosm of why attempting to deliver global solutions without them stagnates progress.

It is a common pattern that high-level conferences such as COP 30 tend to create loopholes for the very climate negligence that they claim to prevent, while students are the first to stand on principles. Even without formal education, the response from youth when it comes to carbon-cutting and climate resilience has been staggering. On an institutional level, the most effective way to educate youth on the environment is through standard curriculums. On an individual level, the lack of this kind of education has not stopped them from impacting real climate change policies.

Youth-led movements often inaugurate climate change action. For instance, in allegiance with Fridays for Future (FFF), spearheaded by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg at age 15, students skip Friday classes to protest and demand action from political leaders on climate issues. The immense pressure FFF placed on governments to regard climate change not as a result of economic or foreign issues, but rather as being complicit in human rights violations, pushed 25 German cities to change their environmental policy-making processes [5]. Another of many examples, The Global Youth Biodiversity Network has been one

of the key leaders in pushing the Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted during COP 15 to promote healthy nature and human relationships by 2050 [1].

The simplest method to harbour earnest commitment to climate advocacy begins from environmental literacy; understanding the symbiotic association between humans and ecological systems through real data and verifiable sources. Perhaps as global warming, rising sea levels, and the fossil fuel industry are issues of priority—although teaching climate change should certainly be implemented within academia—it has, impressively, motivated a surge of personal learning for our future leaders. What they have achieved simply through self-education and conviction would only evolve if institutions recognized the potential in their passion.

To consolidate, while it may be true that students should be provided with substantive resources to understand the bitter realities of climate change to be equipped with creating meaningful reform, history suggests it is not mutually exclusive. Thunberg has played a defining role for youth in climate politics. She explains, “This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope.” during a speech at the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019 [7]. It is counterintuitive to expect students to create change without something

as fundamental as mainstream climate education.

Climate change is universal— it affects the poor, rich, young, and old. Climate education should consequently be universal, even if it exists without the grace of school curriculums. It is important to note that promoting implementation of environmental literacy within the curriculum is not to place responsibility on any demographic, especially not youth with limited resources in comparison to policy makers. Rather, it is to instill a climate-conscious mindset from an early age which requires both long-term and immediate action. As COP 30 comes to an end, it is urgent for more students to take it upon themselves to understand what these summits are working towards as relying on formal education is no longer feasible, and holds far too

many risks to wait for. Youth-led movements and policy changes did not transpire from complacency; their starting point was curiosity, which developed into reform.

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Anonymous Illustration



Behind The Curtain: How The TDSB's Admissions Theatre Keeps Failing Students

by SWAPNIL KABIR

May 25, 2022: The Toronto District School Board has gotten rid of merit-based admissions for its specialized programs across Toronto [2]. All of them. It's an enormous victory, trustees and other advocates argue, for equity in the city. Finally, students from communities marginalized over race and socioeconomic status would have fair access to coveted seats for arts, math, and science education that had long been dominated by wealthy, often white families.

This decision, sudden as it may have seemed, had been years in the making. A 2017 study from educational researchers at the University of Toronto found students in TDSB arts programs were 67% white compared to 29.3% across the board, and nearly twice as likely to come from high-income households [3]. Income inequality proved particularly troublesome, as the old merit-based system often demanded auditions, awards, and various extracurriculars. Margaret Greenberg, principal at John Polanyi Collegiate Institute, explained to The Globe and Mail that many students simply "did not apply in past years because they didn't feel as confident ... compared with someone who had built a portfolio" [1]. These were just some of the problems the lottery was expected to do away with.

But that didn't quite happen. Three years and three cohorts of lottery-admitted students later, the TDSB has reversed course, returning to merit-based admissions for the 2026-27 cohort [4]. Defenders of the lottery may say it didn't get a fair chance, that more time was needed. But truthfully, the

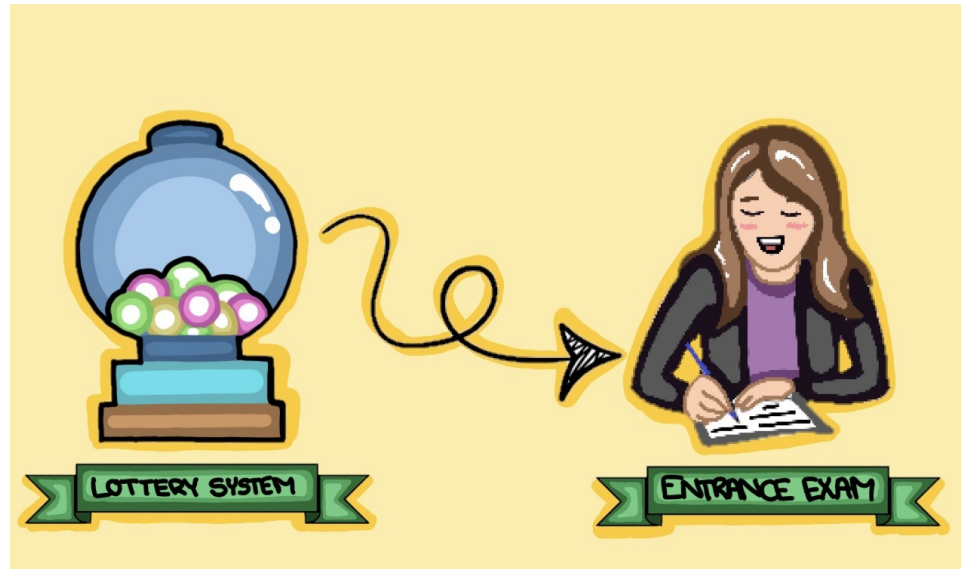


Illustration: Sahana Sakthivel

lottery failed to achieve its stated goal of increasing diversity. It was a policy failure on its own terms.

I was part of the last group admitted to TOPS through essays and exams. Though I somewhat envied the students who could get into these programs through lotteries rather than the days of work I'd put in, I was hopeful the new system would open them up to more people and change them for the better. Statistics and testimonials alike say otherwise.

For one example, look at the music-theatre program at Etobicoke School of the Arts (ESA). Its head, Patricia Warnock, told the Toronto Star she "hasn't seen much change" in diversity since the lottery was introduced. In fact, she witnessed what might be "the opposite," with more students from the surrounding middle-class neighbourhood choosing ESA over other local schools, taking the place of students traveling across the city as was common before [6]. Warnock was clear about her support for increased equity and diversity. She simply found

that the lottery didn't deliver it.

The situation wasn't much better for the TDSB's top STEM offerings. In its fight against the lottery, nonprofit Save Our Schools brought on University of Toronto economist Marcin Pęski to look at demographic data from three programs, including TOPS at Marc Garneau. Though the lottery aimed to transform demographics through admissions, Pęski found that underrepresented students faced barriers mainly in their application rates, not admissions [5]. Simply randomizing selection after applications couldn't address the deeper issues keeping these students from applying in the first place.

Applications to TDSB specialized programs did increase dramatically under the lottery, from about 1,400 to 2,300 for the arts, and from 3,000 to over 4,000 for math and science [1]. The board celebrated this "tremendous interest" as evidence of the lottery's success. But increased applications mean little if the demograph-

ic makeup remains unchanged. And as seen at schools like Marc Garneau and ESA, random admissions don't necessarily increase diversity in these programs or help underrepresented groups apply to get into them at higher rates.

My aim with this piece isn't to attack students who've entered special programs through the lottery. I know many TOPS students admitted after me, through the lottery, who are thriving in the program. But when admissions standards slip, the education follows suit. I spoke to Harithra, a Grade 10 TOPS student, who described what came with the lottery: "The math, science and English courses for Grade 9s were exactly the same as the regular streamed courses, just with a bit of untested enrichment. That didn't prepare us for Grade 10 at all." The lottery was steadily diluting the program. And TOPS not only saw watered-down curriculums, but reduced club involvement and overall program spirit, all for an increase in diversity that never really appeared.

Harithra also critiqued a key component of the TDSB's lottery: the expression of interest, explaining that: "If you said 'I love math, science, technology and English,' you were automatically qualified. Does that really tell you whether a student is interested in the program?" Of course not. The lottery had no good way to measure student interest. And that was its cruel irony. It not only hurt students that could have gotten into specialized programs on merit previously, but also students that did get in but wouldn't thrive there. When students are put in environments they're unprepared for, they're not being done any favours. They're simply being set up to struggle.

Yet even after all this, we can't simply revert to the old merit-based system as it was. That system, and the environment around it, still carry the same flaws that prompted

the lottery in the first place. I think Ray Fontaine, whose son was accepted to Rosedale Heights School of the Arts, best captured the contradiction with the old merit-based admissions: schools should be where "children are exposed to new passions and skills," but requiring portfolios creates a prerequisite. "It's almost like a chicken and egg situation" [4]. How can students demonstrate interest in something they've never had the chance to pursue?

Just implementing one system or the other doesn't address the barriers that have made specialized programs unequal in the first place. Transit costs remain a "major barrier" for many families [6]. Elementary schools in many areas lack the arts and STEM programming that would prepare students to apply confidently. The TDSB has even banned schools like ESA from running "road shows" to visit schools in disadvantaged areas like Rexdale, actively preventing outreach that might have informed and encouraged more students on the idea of enriched education.

We do not need a return to the status quo, nor do we need to put blind faith in experiments like the lottery. What we actually need is to invest in elementary and middle school arts and STEM facilities. We need to cover transportation for families that can't afford it. We need to help students develop their portfolios so that those who apply for specialized programs feel confident doing so. And, as the 2017 task force originally recommended, we need a more equitable distribution of resources across the TDSB, so that students and parents don't feel so pressured to apply in the first place [3].

As the curtain falls on the lottery system, and the TDSB returns to merit-based admissions, we should recognize this isn't an all-inclusive, all-happy ending. It's just an intermission. We can keep arguing over how to have these programs better

represent the student population. But until we address the deeper inequalities that decide who even dreams of applying to them, we won't find that equity we so desperately seek. We'll just be watching the same performance with a different cast, hoping for a better outcome we have no reason to expect.

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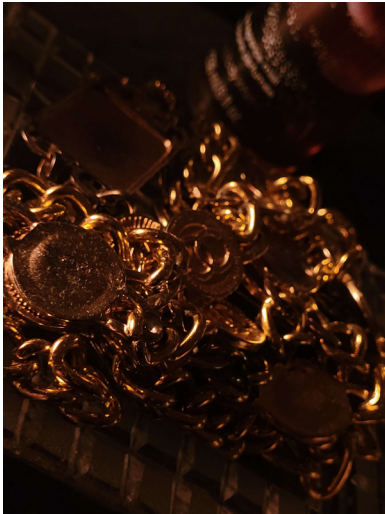
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