

Changing our ideas about teaching and learning

By Sarah Sobanski

The province recently announced that it will be consulting with students, parents, teachers and other partners to manage a "comprehensive overhaul of school curriculum and student assessment tools." I'm really curious to see where the initiative leads. Rhetoric condemning the standard school system as we know it today has become more and more frequent over the last decade. Expecting students to fit into boxes and labelling their skills as better or worse than others seems to be combative. In a perfect world everyone would be appreciated for their individual areas of expertise and work towards bettering society as a puzzle instead of a ladder.

The ideology of the past is that the harder you work within the system the higher you'll climb. But an artist who works 10 times as hard as a plumber is never going to have as sustainable a career. Chances are the artist couldn't renovate a washroom or do quick [Lynchburg drain cleaning](#) and the plumber couldn't create a masterpiece or sculpture, but we don't value strengths equally so one is more likely to starve.

This same system makes it hard for a language arts student - who loves science but can't memorize in a classroom setting - to become a doctor. It takes a math genius with an affinity for photography down the path of teaching instead of encouraging him to capture architecture in a way only he can see.

Some would say that's life and they wouldn't be wrong. That doesn't mean that we should ever be opposed to trying something new. Some of the top scoring school systems in the world don't have homework. Complaints that young adults lack financial literacy is being met with money skills lessons in Ontario in 2018. Also, there are medical programs in the province at top universities that don't have science prerequisites.

According to the release, Ontario's updated school curriculum sets its sights on improving student achievement in core skills such as math, increasing emphasis on transferable life skills, communications, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity and global citizenship skills. It aims to "help students take full advantage of their education experience with a new curriculum that better engages every aspect of a young person's interests and potential." It hopes to "place an increased emphasis on equity and well-being, including the effects that physical activity, bullying and mental health can have on student success in and out of the classroom." It will "update provincial assessment and reporting practices, including EQAO, to make sure they are culturally relevant, measure a wider range of learning, and better reflect student well-being and equity." And last but certainly not least, keep parents better informed.

What I'd like to see is more programs such as North Hastings High School's Northern Environmental Research and Development Studies and Northern Outdoor Studies. Kids want to learn, but some can't do it at a desk. They want to excel in a tangible way. Programs such as NERDS and NOS are for students looking to pursue further education in natural resources, natural sciences, wanting to work in environmental sciences or looking at environmental management, natural resource and wildlife management, ecotourism or commercial logging for their futures. These are tangible goals. These kinds of programs say, "OK. This is what you want to do. This is what it's going to be like. This is how you get there." Getting kids out doors, engaging them in more ways than with a pen and paper, is a great way to keep them thirsting for knowledge and create a generation that will do better than those who came before them. Keep kids dreaming by making school more than an "A" on a report card.