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**Director's Blog: Perspectives Along the Path of Learning**  
*~ By Kathi Wallace, Director of Education, SCDSB*



I am honoured to serve Simcoe County's public education system as Director of Education. Our dynamic learning and teaching community has been an integral part of my life journey, both as a student and as an educator. Thank you for letting me share my thoughts and ideas with you. Feedback is welcome through the email address: [webadmin@scdsb.on.ca](mailto:webadmin@scdsb.on.ca) (While I won't be able to respond to all comments, I will read every one of them.)

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### **Our students have the answers**

At the end of every summer, our superintendents, principals, vice-principals and managers come together to review priorities for the upcoming school year. Continuing a well-received initiative I launched last year, I invited a panel of students to join us for our August 2010 meeting to speak about their education needs, insights and vision for the future. The impact of these types of dialogues has been immense.

The focus of this most recent session was to gain a better understanding about gender differences in literacy achievement. Across Ontario, school systems are working to address the province-wide literacy achievement gap observed between boys and girls.

Here are some highlights of what our panel of SCDSB boys and young men told us during the meeting:

- They deeply appreciate, want and value their teachers' interest and support – through good times and bad times.
- They all have different learning styles. They want instruction that best serves their best way of learning.
- They value 'hands-on' activities, variety and interactive learning.
- Extracurricular activities such as clubs, athletics, peer programs, drama, music and leadership initiatives help them feel better connected to school.
- They want more opportunities to prepare for tests to reduce the element of 'surprise' as much as possible.
- Individual teachers' inspiration and motivation have made huge differences in their lives.

At the end of the mesmerizing discussion I thanked our young visitors for taking the time to teach all of us some very important lessons that morning. I told them that all voices count and I urged them to continue to voice their educational needs and insights.

What our students told us that August morning supports the recent findings of the Education, Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) research project *Towards an Understanding of Gender Differences in Literacy Achievement*. That report states:

...it is noteworthy that a school culture that focuses on learning for *all* students was repeatedly described as an important factor in enabling each student to experience some measure of success. Such a climate is obtained by holding and sustaining high academic, social and behavioural expectations; using a variety of teaching methods to meet, in real ways, the needs of different students; creating a consistently positive and caring school community; encouraging positive role models to whom students can relate; ensuring strong and effective educational leadership from the principal and maintaining ongoing active engagement of parents in the school.

You may download the full report at:  
[http://www.eqao.com/Research/pdf/E/Crb5\\_ne\\_1109\\_web.pdf](http://www.eqao.com/Research/pdf/E/Crb5_ne_1109_web.pdf)

Our recent [EQAO results](#) indicate we are heading along the right path for increasing student achievement. Gains by SCDSB schools were outstanding. We are achieving this excellent progress through many strategies, including:

- Using data to inform instruction and select resources
- Building administrator and teacher capacity in assessment and instruction
- Establishing professional learning communities

Our young panel also emphasized to me how important it is for all of us in education to be inspirational role models and guides – both to our students and to each other. It is a great responsibility that our SCDSB team embraces with dedication, skill and enthusiasm, day in and day out.

Guided by our multi-year plan - [The Simcoe Path](#) – with its goals, directions and action plans, we are supporting high achievement, well-being and learning for life. Through our professional learning communities in all SCDSB schools we are making great strides in increasing our collective capacity in the areas of assessment and instruction. I, too, have launched a professional learning community with our senior administrative team. In this way, we are all collaborating and working together to share and model successful strategies for teaching, leading and delivering services.

As we listen to our students, review the data, learn and plan together, and implement our action plans for improvement, Simcoe County's public education system is achieving new heights.

Thank you for a wonderful launch of a brand new year in education.