

Incumbent Adams-Luchowski aims to focus on the students that fall in between



By Brock Weir

When Peter Adams-Luchowski was appointed by the York Region District School Board over two years ago to be trustee for Aurora and King, he initially planned to retire after his term came to an end.

Changing family circumstances, and changes at the board, however, caused him to re-evaluate and he is now looking for your support to continue on in the role.

Mr. Adams-Luchowski assumed the role following the resignation of Gord Kerr. Having already served as a trustee for Richmond Hill, he hit the ground running.

‘We hired a new director in this past year, and he was one of my superintendents, so we have a very good working relationship and great communication,’ says Mr. Adams-Luchowski, on the hiring of J. Philip Parappally as the new Director of Education. ‘I think he will be very good for the kids in the Region. He is a young guy himself, he has kids in school, he is very different from our previous template of a director, which was a retired superintendent. He is younger than I am, has got a more hands-on view, we share a lot, and I believe we can work well together.’

Mr. Adams-Luchowski first became involved in the education in the 1990s, volunteering on his kids' school council. He eventually became a supply teacher with the Board of Education for seven years and served his first term as trustee beginning in 2006.

In the meantime, he coached football at King City Secondary School – a role he enjoys today – but quickly came to realise the importance people place in the local support networks for these students.

‘Education is very emotional,’ he says. ‘I am for the average, everyday kid that sometimes gets overlooked, and that is really what keeps me interested. I bring the view to the Board of a majority of kids who never get in trouble, will never get an award, but need to succeed, and I think we're doing pretty good with it.’

‘I always stick with opportunities for kids that are stuck in the mushy middle, the average student that isn't getting a graduation scholarship, but isn't at risk.’

Students aside, one thing Aurora doesn't have to worry about is a ‘mushy middle’ – but that is a problem in itself. Schools on the east side of Aurora are flourishing as far as student enrolment is concerned, but the same cannot be said for schools in the Town's west side. This, he says, is going to be a particular problem in the next four years and one the Board needs to continue addressing.

“It is a challenge that has existed for a while,” he says. “[One solution] is offering opportunities for students to choose programs. That helps schools that are losing enrolment. We rolled out French immersion between the two schools that were suffering from declining enrolment and that has increased their primary enrolment which will carry through. It is really driven a lot by the experts on the board, the planners who are looking 10 years down the road, that have information the average people don't have.”

Student demand is likely to continue as Aurora's 2C neighbourhood develops, and Mr. Adams-Luchowski says construction of new facilities requires a formula that will guarantee seats before they can get funding out of the Province.

“Provincial funding is something we have to deal with, so we have to have balanced budgets and maintain balance to areas that we have,” he adds. “Every department could make a case for increasing their money, but we need to spread it out to stay in the classroom as much as possible. Busing is another area. People will argue for more buses not knowing these dollars come straight out of classrooms.”

Next year, there will be more classrooms the Board will know what to do with as George Street Public School closes to students, who will then merge into a renovated and expanded Aurora Senior Public School. Although he says it is premature to speculate on preferred options for this school land, a full evaluation of the needs of the school board has to take place before they can move forward with a decision.

“We may need a meeting room, we may need special education facilities, we may need expanding offices for the education centre in Aurora,” he says. “That is something staff decides, but we don't preclude anything.”

Moving forward, in addition to addressing the enrolment gaps, Mr. Adams-Luchowski says he would like to focus on one bit of silver lining that came out of the clouds of labour disruptions over the last four years. When extracurriculars ground to a halt, parents came forward to volunteer their times to keep them going. Since that time, however, that enthusiasm has dissipated.

“I have been working with people to find the mechanisms to train persons who wish to volunteer could be accepted and then have a standardized method of having parents get involved,” he says. “I care about things and I work with everyone. I can't always say yes, sometimes the answer is no, but I always return calls and do what I can to help people. I am not a politician, I am not a very good campaigner, but I do what I think is right.”