

# (councillor) Jan harder

E-News Blast for July 12th, 2019



## A Message from Jan

By now, you will have received two of my traffic updates in your inbox. I want to know if you find them informative and useful. What can we add that would help you? Folks, you are my eyes on the streets. I really need your feedback so I can best help you.

## School Scoop

Guest Columnist Charlie Senack

### John McCrae

#### **Inspiring Students Through Failure and Success**

It's 9:05 a.m., and as students at John McCrae High School are getting ready to start their day full of learning, students in Rebecca Chambers classes are beginning the "unlearning" process. You see Chambers uses a different approach in her classroom, one that can be seen as a bit strange to some, but the results have been nothing but positive. Failure is expected in her class - it's an opportunity for her students to encounter real world problems, and try to find ways to overcome them. She allows students to choose what they want to learn, and uses many modern day educational tools including social media and

podcasts. Almost all of her students have a Twitter account, and uses it to network with people in the community for their assignments.

Her lessons of course also include a bit of traditional teaching, but Rebecca is always trying to find new ways to inspire her students. She's worked countless nights, weekends and holidays, and has even dedicated a large portion of her summer to starting workshops with other like-minded educators. Over the past few months we have told you the stories of many of the students in Rebecca's classes, and have covered the countless events her students have organized which have included; a Do It For Daron hockey tournament, a 5k autism walk, science fairs, a movie premiere at VIVA retirement, body image workshops, stem cell drives, and abilities not disabilities campaigns - to name just a few. But we have not told you the story of the teacher who was behind it all, supporting and encouraging her students to be the game changers of tomorrow.

"I am not completely sure how to describe my classroom other than controlled chaos," Rebecca said on her blog, a personal initiative she started during the fall 2018 school year. "I am attempting to create a student centred, experiential, innovative and creative environment that values skills over content and reflecting on process over testing, doing things for a purpose, encouraging my students to help solve problems (Become Seekers and Peekers as Don Wettrick says) to become change-makers, to learn to embrace failure and learn from it, all while using social media."

Much of her passion came from her own school experiences. Rebecca admits she wasn't a fan of high school, and so that's why she wanted to become a teacher. She wanted to be the person she wishes she had growing up.

"My goal as a teacher was to make my classes a place where students could feel good about who they were, gain self-confidence and to know that I cared about them," she said. "I also wanted to make it a place where students were engaged and could get out of their seats to learn the material."

The first half of her career for the most part was traditional, but after being introduced to Sir Ken Robinson's Ted Talk in 2011, she was inspired to change her teaching methods.

"Since then I have continued to follow so many different progressive educators and have taken pieces from all of them to work on my ever-evolving classroom," Chambers said.

A quick look at her blog posts shows the magnitude of learning and creativity which takes place in her classroom each and every day. This year her students focused on passion based projects, which allow the students to choose a project they are passionate about, and incorporate it into something big. We shared some of their projects this year, which included a group of students creating an organization called AND (Abilities Not Disabilities), who worked with a group of students at Woodroffe High School who are disabled. They wanted to show members of society that despite not being like everyone else, they are still capable of having many amazing talents.

And then there was another group who spent their time at VIVA Retirement trying to help with senior loneliness. They started by finding ways to bring the residents together, and tried to find things they had in common with one another. That blossomed into a bigger project, where the students interviewed the residents for a documentary, which premiered early this summer, and can be found on YouTube at: [VIVA Movie](#)

Those are just two examples of some of the projects we profiled this year which took learning outside of the four walls of the portable classroom, and actually benefited society. Other students also raised money for many local charities and organizations through different projects, including; over \$1,200 for DIFD, \$18,85 for Children at Risk and \$570 for the Ottawa Hospital Foundation.

And then of course there was the social science fairs at the end of the semesters where the students spent five days working individually and with classmates to find ways to connect their projects, their classmates' projects course experiences and personal experiences to their respective curriculum. That's on top of other fairs that were held across the city, including one at Lansdowne where some of Rebecca's students sold fire started and compost bags, and donated the money to charity - and another at city hall where some of her students discussed a topic they were passionate about including; missing indigenous people and gender bias in sports. Speaking to many of Rebecca's students over the summer break, they all admitted they were already missing her classes, and thanked her for everything they learned over the past year.

"I really liked Mrs Chambers class because of how you can choose what you want to learn about," said Renée Rosteius, grade 11. "It's so much easier to go out and do something when you really care about it. I also love how we're valued on the difference we've made in the world instead of what we memorized from a textbook."

"Mrs Chambers has allowed me to connect and work with many different community organizations that I wouldn't have been able to do in a traditional learning environment," said Emily Deschenes, grade 11. "She constantly encouraged her students to work hard and to be passionate about their work."

"I loved being able to use my own creativity and thoughts to come up with my own ideas and follow what I liked rather than what my teachers like," said Anna Cole, grade 12. "It gave me the opportunity to see that failures aren't necessarily failures, they are just learning experiences."

They all admit that they walked out of her classes with a new meaning to life, and the willingness to learn something new. Rebecca pushed them out of their comfort zone, encouraged them to try new things, and always made them feel accepted and like they belonged. One student also credits Rebecca for allowing her to expand her career options, and feels the skills she learned in her classes will carry with her through life. Now as one school year comes to a close and another begins in less than two months, Rebecca Chambers is already working on creating new content for the 2019/2020 school year, trying to find new ways to keep the students engaged while giving back to society. And that's exactly what she's doing...

To read Rebecca Chambers blog and learn more about her "unlearning" teaching methods, visit: [Unlearn With Us](#)



Rebecca Chambers and students.



Smiles all around.