

OPINION

TELEGRAPH JOURNAL

New Brunswick's Newspaper, Founded in 1862

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ACCOUNTABILITY KEY TO SUCCESS

Literacy scores among Grade 2 students in New Brunswick's English schools continue to fall. Results published this week show just 77.5 per cent of seven-year-olds met or exceeded standards on the most recent literacy tests, down from 79.5 per cent a year ago.

Whenever standard provincial test results are announced, stakeholders in the education system trot out the usual explanations and excuses – there aren't enough resources, teachers are doing too much non-teaching duty, the system is saddled with too much social service work. We find it odd that in the long chain that constitutes our education system, only one component is regularly measured for success – the children. The government that allocates funding, school district administrators, principals and teachers all have opinions on what's wrong but are not held accountable.

A case can be made to better allocate existing resources. That means rather than dividing the \$1 billion in education spending on a per capita basis, the province should focus its efforts in neighbourhoods and schools struggling the most to hit literacy and numeracy targets. But to make a step change in our education results, we need more than a shift in resources, we need a clear and co-ordinated strategy.

The new Liberal government has promised a 10-year education plan to achieve results. Here is what it should contain: an understanding of the reasons our children can't read, a strategy that aligns the work of all stakeholders in the system, a standard curriculum that gives all students the decoding and language skills to succeed, and perhaps most importantly, standard measurements of the province, school districts, principals and teachers. Those measurements will give the system the accountability it now lacks. Add in some regular reporting and it also gives taxpayers the transparency they need for their \$1 billion annual investment.

It is time to wipe the chalkboard – or perhaps these days the smartboard – clean on education. The province should do an audit on the system as it now exists and use the results to develop the accountability, measurement and transparency mechanisms we need to give our children a real chance to achieve.



Manage within your budget

The governance manual of the Saint John Board of Police Commissioners is quite clear on its role: to "demonstrate accountability to the public, the province and other stakeholders ... by operating in a transparent manner." Its key governing principles include this: "a governing body exists not to help the business, but to own the business on behalf of the community." We suggest a refresher course on its role is in order after the commission's meeting this week.

Saint John Mayor Mel Norton tried to get further detail on a \$1.26 million overtime bill for the police force in 2013. The force has reported a full cost overrun of \$500,000 so far this year. At the same time, Chief Bill Reid has warned of shoddy investigations and comprised public safety if the force doesn't receive a further \$1.5 million from the city in 2015.

At this week's commission meeting, Chairman Jonathan Franklin accused this newspaper of adopting "odd positions" in its editorials on the force. We wonder if the chairman finds it odd the mayor of the municipality funding the force failed this week to get the commission to provide an action plan on how it intends to cut the massive overtime cost? Mr. Franklin further suggested we have shown no willingness to do "equal coverage" of the force.

It seems he thinks we have an agenda when it comes to the work of the commission and police. Guilty as charged, Mr. Chairman. We do have an agenda and this is it: consistently and persistently look for the best value for the taxpayer in all public services. We see that as core to our mandate, just as being accountable and transparent should be core to yours. Allowing the police force to spend \$1.26 million extra on overtime is simply a sign of bad management. Saint John already pays the highest municipal taxes in the province. Agreeing to a further \$1.5 million in police funding would add three cents to the tax rate, and less money for other municipal needs.

We acknowledge the commission members act for a small honorarium and a board that now includes so many new members may need time to get up to speed on its role and jurisdiction. However, here's an idea the commission should immediately consider: direct Chief Reid to eliminate or drastically reduce overtime, just as the Saint John Fire Department has demonstrated. The extra \$1.26 million spent on overtime last year – including \$46,000 to one officer and more than \$15,000 each to 18 others – almost equals the extra amount the chief says he needs. In short, manage within the budget you are given. We all do it; why can't our police force?

Gilbert Reid
TELEGRAPH JOURNAL



YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN IMPOVERISHED.



Wildlife is part of living in rural areas

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I was happy to read G.A. Gilmore's letter in Saturday's Telegraph-Journal. I do not feel safe out walking now with my dog! I worry all the time about my other animals in my own backyard. Now I see I need to worry. If I ever walked out in my yard and saw someone killing something I would go crazy. Now I'm not even safe in my own yard. They can continue to hunt if they thought they hit a poor deer. Of course they are going to say that even if it isn't true.

I know of people that hunt and break any rule that they want. It's not fair that I can't feel safe for a few weeks now. I'm so grateful that my family are grown and my lovely granddaughters don't live here. They wouldn't be allowed to walk anywhere as far as I'm concerned.

A lot of people do not agree with this and that survey that they did isn't one bit fair. There are a lot of people that don't have computers and (sadly) don't read.

We built here because we didn't want to bring up our children in the city. We wanted them to see the wildlife here. I don't understand why some people live here. They want a beautiful garden, white picket fence and no wildlife. I know of people that are upset when people put out birdseed because of their pool! They don't even want cats loose because of their beautiful gardens.

It's just an excuse to say that the deer are loaded with ticks. So are a lot of raccoons. Perhaps they want to get rid of all the other creatures!

Gail Carter
Hampton

Invest in skills that create jobs

Hurrah for Donald Savoie! Someone has to say it – we do not need more roads, in fact we cannot maintain the roads we have now. Road building provides jobs during the construction phase, but once built, these jobs disappear.

It is not investment in concrete and asphalt, nor bricks and mortar that we need but investment in our people. Investment in education and training

creates the skills to create and fill jobs.

Our universities have been nicked and dimed for the past few decades. Increased fees and faculty unrest are symptoms of a general lack of funding, which has led to increased workloads, program reductions and reduced opportunities to fund research.

These conditions inhibit the universities' ability to educate our students and leave students with a crippling debt. For long term economic prosperity let us invest in our people, not in concrete, asphalt, bricks and mortar!

M. Sally McGrath
Tymouth

We have time to improve technology

As much as I care about the environment, I also care about my province and my country getting value added jobs.

According to a recent UN study, we have 80-plus years to wean ourselves off of fossil fuels.

I don't want to sound like a Harper Conservative, as I'm sure I'll be accused of being, but just think of all the advancements in science and green technologies in the next 80-plus years! We have 80-plus years and here we are all running around like the sky is falling. Yes, we need to be vigilant but after hearing this latest report I'm seriously starting to think we are being much more alarmist than vigilant.

Ronald Melsaac
Saint John

Association backs proposed pipeline

The Association of Consulting Engineering Companies – New Brunswick (ACEC-NB) supports the Energy East Pipeline. Our members have extensive experience in pipeline planning, development and construction. Following strict engineering codes and principles, engineers hold paramount the safety, health and welfare of the public and the protection of the environment.

The pipeline will also create many jobs benefiting New Brunswick as a whole. Pipelines are highly regulated by the National Energy Board. Engineers working on these projects

analyze all aspects of design and take into consideration environmental, safety and technical constraints.

Engineers attempt to minimize the amount of topographic elevation change and pipeline length, while choosing paths that are accessible for construction and maintenance. Design engineers ensure safety and minimize routes that could impact municipal water systems, densely populated areas, and/or environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands or rivers.

Pipelines have an excellent record for safety and protection of the environment in Canada, due to the systems in place that monitor pipeline activity on a continual basis. These systems include operators who regularly perform physical inspections, fly the pipeline corridors, monitor conditions at pumping stations to respond quickly to unexpected changes in transporting the resource; and the use of intelligent pigs, which assess the for corrosion and geometrical deformations, leading to preventive maintenance being performed.

Nadine Boudreau
Executive Director ACEC-NB

ISIS madness must be stopped

I read of late calls for balanced reporting of the crises in Iraq and Syria. As long as individuals mixed up circumstances to meet their scenario, Neville Chamberlain's spirit will be alive and well. Why anyone would respond to these letters of late, I could only justify it to myself recognizing these individuals are clouding the issues and the true record needs to be conveyed.

Primarily they insinuate that the current crises in Iraq and Syria are somehow related to the Gulf Wars and nothing could be further from the truth. The Gulf War was about overthrowing a dictator, I did not agree with this but because I supported Saddam but because I did not believe the people of Iraq were ready for democracy unlike their northern neighbours the Kurds.

The slaughter we are witnessing now is perpetrated by radical Muslims against their fellow Muslim brothers, Christians and the Kurdish people. This is not directly against the West but this group known as

ISIS has a believe in an idea of a greater Muslim state not dissimilar to the madness of the Nazis.

If you think otherwise of this group, ask yourself where were they when young Canadian soldier ran in to the streets of Sarajevo under sniper fire to save the lives of countless Muslim men and women. Where were they when the Taliban were killing innocent men, women and children in Afghanistan? Preventing females the right to an education

Friends this is not about the west versus the Muslims, but about freedom to live in safety regardless of ones sex, religion, race or colour.

This is about the fundamentals of humanity whether these horrendous acts are carried out by Christians, Muslims, fascist or communist it must be confronted and destroyed there is no chance of reform they are serial killers to put it politely as I can.

John Campbell
Saint John

Weather confounded Saint John Airport

I was a passenger on AC 8972 on Nov. 2 flying from Toronto to Saint John. After an aborted attempt to land the plane, the pilot was forced to go to Moncton whereupon he described the diverted flight to inadequate snow removal from the runway.

After remaining in the plane on the tarmac for 90 minutes, the passengers were informed by the pilot that he had been assured the runway in Saint John was now clear. The plane then left Moncton and arrived in Saint John some hours later than expected.

It would be shameful and embarrassing should YSJ lose sight of fundamental airport priorities such as clearing snow in time for scheduled arrivals in favour of aesthetic terminal rebranding. Or perhaps the airport management is simply in line with the maddening crowds at area auto garages in these days following a first snowfall: caught unaware of reality.

I hope that this lapse in professionalism is an exception and not a reflection of our Saint John Airport's quality service standards.

Stephen Mott
Saint John

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