

May 18, 2017 - Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance of Ontario presentation for the St. Margaret Catholic School Delegation at the TCDSB public board meeting

To the Toronto Catholic School Board:

My name is Mohana Sarmiento and I am a member of the Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance of Ontario. We are here today to support the students and parents of St. Margaret Catholic School. We are also here looking to you, the board members, to take an active role in meeting the demands of St. Margaret and addressing the resource and space issues they've been facing for 15 years. As a Filipino Canadian youth organization researching the situation of our youth, we know that this is not just one school's issue. We know in the community that St. Paschal Baylon, St. Antoine Daniel, and Our Lady of Assumption, all along Bathurst street--the area that has been dubbed as Little Manila--are all overcrowded, and lacking resources. This is unacceptable treatment of the community and our children.

St. Margaret's has a capacity of 300 students but over 600 are currently attending. 90% are Filipino children. And we have seen in our own trips to the main school building and the rented one, that facilities are not up to the basic standards of a learning environment. We have been to and held workshops and presented across the Toronto Catholic and Public district school boards and St. Margaret is the most unfortunate.

We continuously hear criticism of parents coming from school officials for their lack of participation and engagement in addressing these circumstances. Our community, the parents, are not only newcomers, but hard workers contributing to Canadian economy, many times juggling 2 to 3 jobs--these are absolutely barriers to their participation in this process. This attitude of school officials, and the substandard environment of the school only exemplifies that there has been no priority to address the current situation of the Filipino Canadian community or of the racialized and working families of the Bathurst area. This is what we know as systemic racism. Where in all this do we see the needs of the students being put first? We have only seen delay after delay and blame placed on working parents for not moving the issue along--even though this issue has been successfully pushed to public media since 2003, and the PEACE committee was formed precisely to get informed and address this issue, and countless delegations like these were attended to by parents, PEACE committee, and the community at large.

The St. Margaret School students, parents, and community are calling an end to the delay of building a new school and the upgrading of resources and facilities of the Carmichael site. For 15 years they have been looking for solutions to the lack of space, lack of resources, crumbling facilities and no clear answer has been given. For the Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance, we continue our advocacy to make the youth count in Canada's future knowing very well that our community is a growing one, and so is our next generation. Our community and children will not be going away anytime soon--more spaces, and resources will be needed. To make the youth count, genuine solutions to barriers within education must be addressed and St. Margaret's demands are at the core, basic requirements to a healthy educational experience that are long overdue.