

The Lead Bullet Club

By Nancy Wagner

I am the proud parent of three children now in their twenties. All three of my kids attended publicly-funded schools. My older two kids sailed through school but, for my youngest child, school was a disaster – still a non-reader in grade 3, despite my strenuous advocacy activities with his teachers.

Fortunately for my son, we were able to afford the outside tutoring that fixed him up in short order. Once he could read, my son's problems were over. If, however, he had not received that tutoring, my son would very probably still be illiterate today at the age of 22. In the base cast scenario, he would be employed as a ditch digger. Worst case, he would be in jail. The way I see it, there are three categories of educational experience for those who go the public school route.

- The Gold Bullet Club These families are lucky enough to have children who breeze through their public schools, receiving an education that is the equal of or better than that in the best private schools.
- The Silver Bullet Club These families have at least one child who encounters major difficulties in his public schools, but they can manage tutoring or private or home schooling to bail their kids out. There are a lot of these families, as the booming market in educational supplementation attests.
- The Lead Bullet Club These families have at least one child who encounters major difficulties in his public schools, but the families can't afford outside help. There are a lot of these students too, as provincial tests tell us every year.

Unfortunately for the families in the lead bullet club, virtually every politician has the resources to salvage his children's schooling. One way or another, almost all politicians' children end up with a decent education. As a result, the people who make our education laws have no idea of the bomb that goes off in a family when one of their children gets into worse and worse trouble at school and there is no way to stop the downward spiral.

I can relate to the politicians in the Gold Bullet Club who tend to be oblivious to the problems in public education – just as I was until my third child experienced them up close and personal. But the attitude of the politicians who belong to the Silver Bullet Club is not as understandable. Politicians like Stephen Lewis and Michèle Landsberg and Bob Rae chose to send their kids to independent schools while preventing lower-income families from doing the same

thing. Many politicians have had the benefit of independent schooling themselves – for example, Dalton McGuinty and Gerard Kennedy. Yet they continue to block less-privileged families from giving their children the same advantages.

These are the same politicians who position themselves as the defenders of the oppressed!