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Changing Education: My Senior Project

Originally I planned on doing my externship at a Rescue Farm in Washington. I knew that I wanted to travel during externship and I thought that hanging out with animals would be a cool way to travel, help the community, and have fun during externship. My plans changed, however, when I first checked in with Will. He said he didn't think that working on a farm would be a good use of my time since I don't want to pursue a career that has to do with working with animals. I want to be a teacher. He said I should join his externship group which focused on education and spreading the word about High Tech High. So here I am!

My passion for education started when I was a little girl. I've always loved school and known that I wanted to be a teacher. Last year, I interned in a first grade classroom and my desire to be a teacher was solidified. My externship is focused more on the philosophy of education and how we can take small steps towards making schools more effective. Back in January, a group of administrators from the Ontario Christian Schools came to High Tech High and were impressed by the work we did. They were so impressed that they invited Will Haase along with six other students to fly up to Ontario and spread our knowledge and experiences of Project-based learning with six different schools in the area.

Nobody thought that we would actually get to Canada. It wasn't until we were landed in Toronto that it finally felt real. Our experience with Canadian hospitality started right when we landed. William Groot, principal at TDCHS, was there at baggage claim waiting for us to make sure we got there safely and were on the right track to our first destination. That brings me to a very big part of my trip: Canadian hospitality. Throughout the eighteen days of the trip, many families opened their homes to host our group. Aside from the school aspect,

homestays were a whole experience on their own. I am so amazed and thankful that so many families were willing to take me, a total stranger, into their home and treat me like part of the family.

One of the best experiences with a host family happened in Chatham when I stayed with the Brouwer family. They lived in the middle of nowhere. You couldn't see any neighbors from their property; it was just open space everywhere. The night we arrived, Michael (12th grade) and Sarah (10th grade) showed us what life in the country was like. It was such an epic night that included petting llamas, taking an adventure through the forest, visiting a pig farm, riding a tractor, and climbing to the top of tall buildings. The next night was rainy and we spent the night in their cozy house, playing apples to apples. They welcomed us into their home with open arms and I really felt like part of the Brouwer family for my entire stay there.

When I wasn't hanging out with a host family, I was at school speaking with students and teachers about education. Our days were usually structured like this:

- *1st&2nd period- tour around classes. sit in and observe what "normal" class is like.*
- *3rd period- speak with a panel of students, usually looks like a Q&A session*
- *LUNCH- hang out with students while eating lunch that the school provided for us :)*
- *4th&5th period- speak with staff about how to structure their classes for a better learning environment.*

Before this trip, I never really thought about how High Tech High was different from traditional schools. I've been in the High Tech system since the sixth grade and have never really known differently. My knowledge of High Tech High's philosophy was limited--I knew that we used projects as a way to learn, but never really thought about why. Spending a lot of time with Will Haase has opened my eyes and really got me thinking about my time at High

Tech High and education. We've talked a lot about education-- what it looks like vs. what it should look like. The current education system calls for a lot of memorization and test taking. But really, how much of that information does a student remember? The school system was designed in the industrial age for industrial workers. Since the United States has changed so much since the industrial age, why hasn't the education system changed? It is no longer valuable to know tons of information verbatim when we have the internet at our fingertips. What is more important: skills or content? What skills are important at school? What skills are important in the real world? Why are they different? Why do we even go to school? Why is there a general negative attitude towards high school? In elementary school, students love school. Ask a Kindergardener how they like school and they will respond with great enthusiasm. Ask a college student taking upper division classes how they like university and they will tell you all about their major and why it's so great. But if you ask a high schooler if they enjoy school, the chances are slim that they will respond with glee and start ranting about why they love high school so much. Somehow the love for education gets lost in high school.

My love for education drove my senior project. I hope that by visiting these Ontario Christian Schools, our group inspired some people and got them excited about learning again. I can't wait to attend university to explore my passion for education even more.