

April 14, 2010

Dear Paul,

We want to thank you and the Ontario Science Centre teachers and staff for giving our son, Zachary, an amazing experience at the Ontario Science Centre Science School. There isn't a day that goes by that Zachary doesn't recall a fond memory, funny story, or some fascinating scientific tidbit which relates to the every day world. He truly misses the school, his teachers, and classmates, which is clearly evidenced by the fact that he continues to visit the OSC regularly- to see his teachers, visit with hosts, educators and other staff, or just to see an exhibit. He is in frequent contact with many of the friends he met at the school and has even become friendly with the new crop of students who are now attending the school's second semester. He constantly wears his OSC Science School student-designed hoodie, which serves as a fond memento of his experience. There are not enough glowing adjectives in the English language to properly describe Zachary's phenomenal social and learning experience.

While it may be difficult for many students to imagine leaving their familiar and comfortable high school for a semester of grade 12 to attend the Science School, it is an incredibly worthwhile venture. Zachary embarked on this journey with some trepidation, not knowing any of his new peers, nor any students who had attended the school in previous years. He came home the first day with a huge smile on his face, lots of stories about his day, and a new friend who came for his first of many dinners at our house. The school did an amazing job of integrating the students from the start. The two day trip, where the students and staff quickly became comfortable with each other and made friends, set the basis for a successful and intimate working group. Zachary particularly enjoyed meeting and bonding with many different people, whom he would otherwise not have met. The multi-cultural atmosphere included students from the public and Catholic school systems throughout Toronto, as well as many students from smaller cities or rural communities in Ontario, who had very different backgrounds than our son. Zachary enjoyed meeting such a diverse group of people and commented that the intimate school size of 28 students was perfect- just enough to meet lots of interesting people, but small enough that everyone was an integral part of the group, which would not lend itself to the development of cliques.

Some might expect that the OSC Science School might only attract the stereotypical "science geek", but the student body was anything but. The group consisted of diversely talented students including a competitive cheerleader, a football player, an actor/director, and Zachary, a competitive skier and ski coach. The students brought out each other's special talents. The unique graduation ceremony, scripted and self directed by the students, amazed all of the parents, relatives and friends present. These kids are not only smart, but they can sing, dance, play musical instruments, write humorous scripts, act, direct, and execute elaborate lighting and special effects. Most importantly though, they worked harmoniously together and it was obvious to us all that they truly enjoyed every minute of their unique experience at the OSC.

Zachary appreciated and was stimulated by the unique, higher level, and enriched learning environment with like minded, academically inclined, and motivated students. The students were able to catch onto concepts quickly, which sparked thought provoking questions, exciting class discussions, and enriched learning beyond the curriculum. Zachary's teachers were enthusiastic and imaginative and promoted a hands-on learning experience, taking advantage of the unique resources in the Science Centre including exhibits and access to scientists and engineers. In particular, Zachary enjoyed participating in the motion sensor lab in Physics and testing out Chemistry theories using the equilibrium machine. Most impressive was the semester long cross-curricular group innovation project- to design a prototype exhibit for the Science Centre on environment and sustainability. Not only was the topic current and relevant, but it incorporated science into a real world experience. Moreover, the project encouraged creative and innovative thinking, which our Universities are promoting as the key to future success. The hands-on educational approach and the access to scientists and engineers throughout the Science Centre were also invaluable in assisting Zachary and his peers in determining their university education plans.

Beyond the classroom curriculum, Zachary thrived on earning his red lab coat, which provided the opportunity to work as a host and assistant educator in the school programs. Enthusiastically being able to communicate scientific principles in a manner which is exciting and relevant to students and visitors is a fabulous skill which will serve him well in his future studies and employment. The field trips, consisting of visits to Universities (University of Toronto, York University, and Ryerson) and museums (The Redpath Sugar Museum, Art Gallery of Ontario, and Ontario Science Centre Planetarium), as well as special events including guest lecturers, valley walk, DNA lab, Fractal Extravaganza, Challenger mission, and Halloween makeup demonstration, were unique and educational. Frequent fun social events planned either by the school or by the students included group dinners, parties, skating, and attending various tourist sites in Toronto. While it is difficult to choose a favourite memory, Zachary's highlight experience consisted of the rare and extraordinary experience of riding on a Segway in the Science Centre!

Zachary has made life long friends at the OSC Science School and enjoyed an experience which will impact him forever. His thinking, inquiry, and analytical skills, as well as his love of learning, were greatly enhanced, an effect that will extend far beyond his one semester experience. We cannot thank you enough for providing this wonderful experience. We hope our younger son will also enjoy this fantastic opportunity when he reaches grade 12.

Sincerely,



Sari and Howard

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