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## Board includes voice of students

By Michael Kelley  
Staff Writer

For the past six years, the Scarborough Board of Education has received an inside look at what's happening in the district's six schools thanks to student representatives.

Jackie Perry, who has been serving on the Board of Education off and on since the 1970s, said the student representatives have been a welcomed addition to the board.

This school year, Katie Elliott is the senior class representative on the board and Sadie Tirrell, the seventh student to hold the title, is the junior class representative.

A plaque honoring the student representatives permanently hangs in the high school. It is named after Jeffrey Poulin, one of the first student representatives, who came up with the idea in 2007.

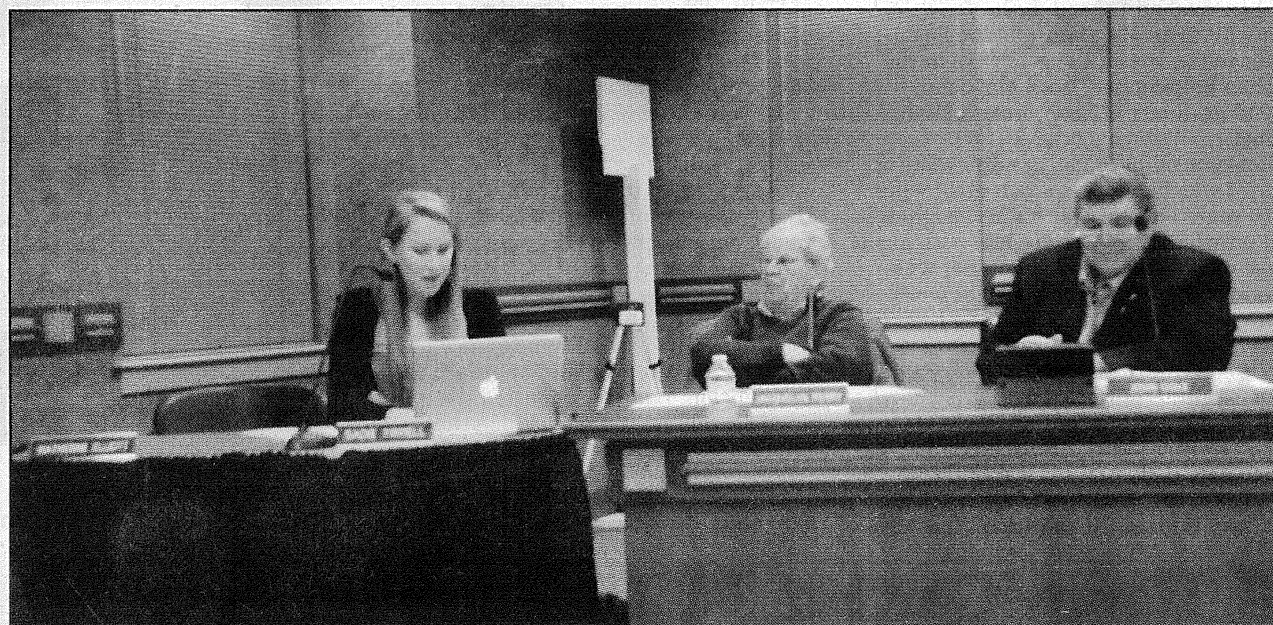
"I am very much in favor of what these youngsters bring to the school board," said Perry, who, last week, was re-elected to another three-year term on the board.

"Having their voice is huge for us," said school board member John Cole. "If we didn't have them on the board, we would be running blind about what is actually happening in the schools."

**Tirrell said having students** represented helps to keep the student body informed about what decisions are being made and how those decisions will affect Scarborough students.

"We always here about the decisions being made, but students don't really have a say in it. Being on the board lets me behind the scenes and see how decisions are made," said Tirrell, who joined the board in October after winning a 10-way election for the position.

Elliott, who has been serving on the board since 2011, said going so allows her to see democracy in action.



**Junior Sadie Tirrell, left, shares a report about what is happening in Scarborough schools with Jackie Perry and John Cole at a Board of Education meeting Thursday, Nov. 1. Since 2007, Scarborough High School students have had two seats on the board.** (Michael Kelley photo)

"I plan on majoring in political science and local politics and government is something that is attractive to me," Elliott said. "Adam Cohen (a former student representative who graduated last June) told me that it would be a good opportunity for me and that I would enjoy the experience. I went to my first board meeting and loved it. It is important for the students to have a voice on the school board."

While student representatives are elected by their high school peers, Perry said they are advocates for all

Scarborough students.

"It is not just the high school. They keep in touch with the younger kids as well. I think it is something that every school board member appreciates because we don't get into the schools," Perry said.

Perry said Superintendent George Entwistle, Assistant Superintendent JoAnne Sizemore and building principals regularly get into the classrooms, but student

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# Student reps

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representatives have a different relationship with the students they visit and thus get different information from them.

"When our student reps go into the classrooms, they are a peer of the student, even though they are older. Sometimes they are revered because they are older," Perry said.

Elliott said there isn't a set time or way that she and Tirrell report back to the students about what happens at school board meetings. That's not to say, however, that they don't keep the student body informed. Tirrell said they informally pass on information about decisions from the school board or upcoming action items to students who are interested in such news.

Bringing in the youth voice to the Board of Education deliberations has worked well for the town, Perry said.

"I am so happy with the way this has turned out for Scarborough," Perry said. "I encourage every school board to try this because it is invaluable the information we get for these students."

The approach is relatively rare in this area. None of the communities surrounding Scarborough have student representatives on their school boards. The nearby communities of Portland and Biddeford, however, do.

Both Cole and Perry said student representatives have helped them to be better informed while making educational decisions.

Cole said a few years ago, when the school board was discussing a round of teacher layoffs across the district, the student representatives on the board at the time—junior Adam Cohen and senior Abby Van Note, were instrumental in convincing the board not to approve the layoffs.

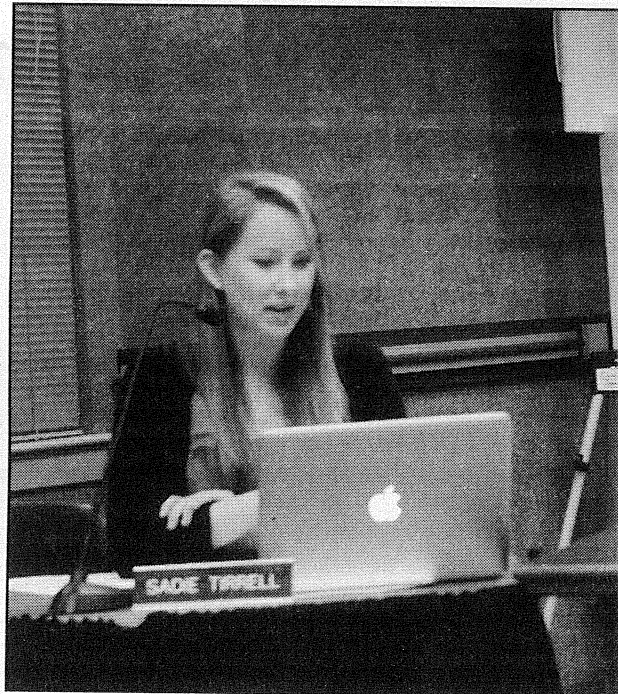
"Once they find their voice, they are not afraid to speak their minds," Perry said. "They are very thoughtful about what they say."

Elliott said being on the board has offered her a glimpse into how work goes into being a school board member.

"It was a great learning opportunity," she said. "You don't see how much effort gets put into the decisions they make and how much work they do to make those decisions."

Cole said while the student representatives do a good job while on the board, he would like to see if there was a way for them to take a more active role in the meetings. He suggested the student representatives could possibly come up with agenda items they would like see addressed or take a more active role in agenda topics, or even lead part of a public meeting.

"They are the leaders of tomorrow. Let's start mentoring



**Sadie Tirrell is the seventh Scarborough High School student to sit on the Scarborough Board of Education. Tirrell, a junior, said the experience has helped her understand how educational decisions are made in town.** (Michael Kelley photo)

them now and give them the opportunity to lead" Cole said. "I like (having student representatives on the board), but I think it needs to be managed."

Tirrell said the experience has helped her to build a relationship with education leaders throughout the district.

"It exposes us to people we wouldn't talk to otherwise. It gives us a chance to have a conversation with a lot of different people," Tirrell said.

Elliott said she has enjoyed her time on the board so far and looks forward to working with Donna Beeley and Christopher Caiazza, who replaced Jane Wiseman and Bob Mitchell at the Nov. 6 elections.

"I am sad to see the current board members leaving, but I am excited to meet the new ones and see a better future for the students of Scarborough," Elliott said.

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