

**Moving Forward Together:  
Remarks to the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board  
at its January 30, 2007 Meeting**

Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased this evening to formally present my report “Moving Forward Together: Restoring Financial Stability to Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board”.

As promised at the January 8, 2006 meeting of the Administration and Finance Committee, this report was publicly released last Friday. The early tabling of the report was intended to give all parties -- students, parents, staff and trustees -- time to study the recommendations and to reflect on their impact prior to this evening’s discussion. I have listened with interest to the ensuing observations, commentary and debate. I believe that all the discussions that I have heard have been informed, healthy and fair.

I have recently renewed an interest of mine in the world of biblical scholarship, specifically understanding the Old Testament from the perspective of the people whose sacred text it originally represented. What the study of Torah interpretation has taught me is that writings, whether sacred or secular, can be analyzed from at least four perspectives. One can look at the text’s plain meaning or content; one can search for the hidden meaning by looking at what is said and not said; one can study the historical accuracy of what is written; and finally, one can focus on the essential theme and its implications. All four approaches are equally valid and equally informative.

When one applies that framework to this report, it becomes clear that most of the focus to date has been on content – such as, the recommendations to alter the literacy support model, to affect

transportation efficiencies and to modify staffing provisions. This is both understandable and normal, for these are the actions that will most affect the everyday lives of our community members.

There has also been some speculation about the hidden meaning of the report by looking at what has been said and particularly what has not been said. The initiation of an administrative review, the mix of items “on and off the table”, and the failure to deal with the background of the current state of affairs have all been of concern.

There has certainly been comment on the accuracy of some of the analysis and observations. Like any text, there are places where editing could have improved the final product, where quotation marks inadvertently replaced a nugget and even an instance -- and here I refer to my comments on continuing education -- where more recent data would have been useful.

However, there has been much less said about the essential theme of this report. This is where I want to focus my remarks this evening.

The key message of my report is that setting the conditions for a stable future is more than simply a financial matter. It is also a matter of rebuilding relationships. All of the partners engaged in educating our students -- trustees, staff, Ministry and community -- must:

- work together in professional relationships based on trust;
- exhibit fairness in dealings with one another;
- respect the contributions each partner makes to the achievement of common goals; and
- create a sense of belonging to an entity that has shared purpose and commitment.

It is a message of faith and hope of building a better future together.

Such environments are, of course, always a challenge to build, but especially so when there is a “history” to the relationship. But by taking the steps outlined in the latter part of the report (pp. 14-18), I believe that we can get there.

While all of the elements are important, several of the building blocks are, in my view, crucial to the rebuilding process.

First, we must take a moment to catch our breath; to pause and reflect. The system is weary and there is, understandably, a great deal of concern stemming from an uncertain future. Therefore, my first recommendation is that for this budget year, there will be no further budget reductions, beyond those already implemented and outlined in the section entitled **Phase Two**.

Second, we must normalize the priority-setting and decision-making process. The focus must be on developing a balanced budget in the context of all activities that must be undertaken by the Board. Therefore, I am also recommending that implementation plans for the proposals developed in this report be dealt with through the Board’s budget process and that this process:

- start in February of each school year,
- involve all partners, and
- conclude by June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Third, a balanced budget must be doable. Much of the report is devoted to assessing this possibility. After consulting widely, and reviewing the merits and impediments to implementation of the plan, I have concluded that the final phase may need two stages.

The plan provides for this. If all components are implemented, it will result in a surplus position by 2008-2009.

Fourth, we must work together to achieve the goal and there must be benefits to working together. That is why the report indicates that I am prepared to share the decision-making powers that I have been delegated by the Minister. Under this arrangement, the Board would decide the details of the 2007-08 budget, provided that the process respects the provisions of the proposed by-laws. The benefits of such participation are, at least, three-fold:

- first, the budget-setting process is about far more than trade-offs that need to be made to achieve balance. It is about setting priorities and assigning the resources necessary to achieve them. Accepting the current power-sharing proposal gives trustees the opportunity to decide these matters;
- second, the current fiscal position of the Board may evolve over the course of the budget process. For example:
  - the deficit may come in lower than I have projected;
  - there may, as in past years, be in-year or end-of-year grants to Boards from the Ministry of Education;
  - the 2007-2008 Grant for Student Needs may improve our financial position; and
  - new opportunities for raising additional revenue may arise.

By participating in the process, trustees would have an opportunity to decide how changed circumstances, if they occur, will be incorporated into the 2007-2008 budget.

- third, should all the components of the deficit reduction strategy need to be implemented as currently proposed,

trustees would have the opportunity to influence how implementation takes place.

Drawing on the work of trustees, staff, Ministry investigators and the community, I have attempted to develop a plan that balances the interest of parties and address their major concerns. The Board, for example, is provided with additional time, more flexibility, increased transportation funding and the opportunity to be involved in setting future directions. The Ministry of Education is assured that a balanced budget is achieved in a responsible fashion. Mitigation strategies are proposed to assist communities with altered transportation services. Employees are assured that any staffing changes will occur through attrition, and program supports for students are needs-based and outcomes focused.

I recognize that there will be those who believe they have been asked to carry an unfair share of the burden of establishing the conditions for a successful future. These concerns must be acknowledged and addressed with understanding and compassion as we move through the implementation phase. Having trustees engaged in the budget process will enhance the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Chair, we are about to engage on a journey that will set the future direction of this Board. Like all journeys, it is one best taken in the company of others. When we travel together we see the landscape from the vantage point of many eyes and each person's unique experiences. It is my fervent hope that trustees will choose to move forward with the politics of hope, faith, and respect. The entire community will be well served if these basic tenants of our Catholic faith guide this journey.

Thank you Mr.Chairman.