

**Nobert Hartmann, Chair of Co-Management Team
Remarks to the February 5, 2007 Meeting of the
Administration & Finance Committee
Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board**

Madame Chair:

On January 30th 2007, this Board unanimously rejected my invitation to assume its decision-making role for the 2007-08 budget development process. Your decision was made:

- without any questions on the contents of the report,
- without any discussion of the merits of the proposal, and
- without debating the proposal's implications.

I am extremely disappointed that the trustees chose to reject an offer to restore financial decision-making power to the Board.

This rejection comes after many attempts by the Government to assist the Board in establishing the conditions for a stable financial future. These included:

- holding several meetings that included the Minister of Education, the Chair, the trustees and Board and Ministry staff to examine the claim that the Board had a \$15 million deficit;
- appointing investigators to identify areas where efficiencies and economies could be achieved;
- assigning a Special Advisor to assist the Board in the development of a deficit management strategy;
- putting a co-management structure in place to ensure that trustees continued to be involved in setting future direction for the Board despite its refusal to balance the budget;

- approving increased honoraria to reflect the important role trustees were expected to play in moving toward a more stable future;
- consulting broadly with those who might be most affected by savings measures;
- tabling of a deficit management strategy that balanced the interests of the parties and mitigated the most serious concerns of those affected;
- offering the Board increased flexibility, additional grants, and more time to achieve a balanced budget; and
- inviting the Board to assume a financial decision-making role for the 2007-08 budget development process.

With its motion to reject participation in the 2007-08 budget-setting process, the Board has again rejected the politics of faith, hope, and respect.

The Board will cloak its actions in the mantle of protection of students and programs. Trustees will talk of chronic underfunding compared to other boards, even though, under this Government, per-pupil funding for Catholic boards now exceeds the funding levels for public boards. Trustees will reject the remedies to the financial difficulties experienced by the Board, even though these are the very same remedies that the Board has often adopted in the past when it had taxing power. Constraints on discretionary budgets, altering of staffing ratios, deferral of planned projects and the like, were repeatedly employed by this Board to avoid unsustainable tax increases prior to the introduction of the current funding approach.

This is a power struggle, pure and simple. With its motion of January 30th, 2007, the Board has taken this power struggle to a new level. Not only has it chosen to ignore its statutory requirements under the *Education Act* and to defy a formal order of the Minister of Education; it has now set itself above the duly

elected law-makers of Ontario. The Board has, in fact, said that it will be the one to define the essential nature of trusteeship. You have made it clear that statutory obligations will only be carried out if and when the Province accedes to the local definition of what is acceptable. The right to determine the role, function and powers of trustees resides with the duly elected representatives of all of the people of Ontario, not one set of trustees.

The decision to distance yourselves from the 2007-08 budget process disenfranchises the very people trustees are elected to serve. By absenting yourselves from the table, you are denying voice to your constituents.

I invited you on a common journey into the future. You declined. And there is no way to force you to participate. I have no choice but to accept the Board motion rejecting a decision-making role in the budget development process.

Consequently, reports affecting the financial affairs of the Board and the development of the 2007-08 operating and capital budgets will no longer be presented to Committee or Board for consideration or advice.

The 2007-08 budget will be determined through a process developed and managed by staff, and enshrined in Board by-laws. This process will begin in February and conclude with a balanced budget in June of this year.

Community involvement will be critical to success. Therefore, staff has been instructed to ensure that the process provides the opportunity for their voices to be heard. The staff and I will explore several options for ensuring that the opinions of the community are heard in setting the future direction of the board, including having two community members on the co-management team. Their advice and suggestions would replace the voices lost

through the trustee refusal to exercise their statutory obligation to their electorate, or to participate in the co-management process.

To ensure that staff efforts are dedicated to establishing a solid financial base for this Board, the Director of Education will report to the Chairperson of the Co-management Team. The by-laws necessary to effect this change, along with those outlined in the January 30, 2007 report, are deemed to be in effect as of February 5, 2007.

This is not a future that I ever imagined when I accepted this assignment. It is certainly one that I have worked diligently to avoid. Yet, almost all proposals to move forward together have been rejected. The sole exception was my acceptance of the recommendation to increase your honoraria on faith that you would perform your statutory duties to decide and to represent.

As a result of your decision of January 30, 2007, there will be little other than denominational issues for the Board to debate and decide.

Whenever I offered an opportunity to move towards a new future together, you chose to focus on the failures of the past. It is important to move forward. The health of our Board, as well as that of Catholic education in the province, depends on it.