

News Release

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For Immediate Release

Board accepts terms of reference for Ministry's Special Advisor *Trustees will have final say on system cuts necessary to balance budget*

At a special meeting of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board held on Wednesday, July 12, trustees agreed to accept the terms of reference for a special advisor to be appointed by the Minister of Education to help the board to achieve a balanced budget position within two years. **Note: Terms of Reference are posted online at www.dpcdsb.org**

At the meeting, Peter Lauwers, speaking on behalf of the Minister, advised trustees that they had two options. The first option was to accept the terms of reference as outlined, and maintain control over system cuts to achieve a balanced budget. The second option was to not accept the terms of reference, at which point, noted Lauwers, the Minister would issue a directive to the board to submit a balanced budget for 2006-07 by August 31, 2006. Lauwers further explained that failure to comply with this directive would set the legal stage for Cabinet to appoint a supervisor to take over the function of the board. Lauwers was clear in his presentation that the Minister would not hesitate to ask Cabinet to appoint a supervisor and that Cabinet would not hesitate to appoint one.

Trustees had reviewed the same terms of reference at a meeting held on June 29, at which time, they voted to accept the terms with amendments. Through Lauwers, the Minister's response was that no amendments would be accepted and the board was in a "take it or leave it" position. Trustees made their decision faced with the prospect of an outside agent making cuts that would affect Dufferin-Peel children.

"Frankly, trustees were astounded that the Minister would threaten the board with a supervisor, given the McGuinty government's strong position against that very notion when the Harris government was in power," said chairman Peter Ferreira. "We are also very disappointed that the Minister refused to extend our deadline so that we could hold meaningful consultation with parents on any proposed cuts," Ferreira added.

The board has long maintained that its deficit was the result of chronic, historic underfunding, and that many other boards would soon be in similar situations. In September 2005, Dufferin-Peel had estimated its 2005-06 budget deficit to be \$17.1 million. In December 2005, the board filed a revised estimate of \$15.1 million. The board, through a series of cost-saving measures including strategic redeployment of staff, a hiring freeze, a freeze on various expenditures and the application of some funds received from the provincial government, has reduced its 2005-06 deficit to approximately \$7.4 million. The board estimates its 2006-07 cumulative deficit will be approximately \$21.1 million.

"The Ministry has acknowledged that underfunding is a problem for school boards, and now we must wait for them to fix that problem," said Ferreira. "In the meantime, we will work co-operatively with the advisor."

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For information contact: Bruce Campbell, Manager, Community Relations
(905) 890-0708, (905) 609-1480