

April 10, 2006

An important message to students, parents/guardians, staff  
and members of our Catholic faith community

## Investigators' Report Confirms Board Claims of Underfunding

On behalf of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board and all trustees, I want to again express my gratitude to you, the parents/guardians, students, staff, clergy and others in our faith community for your tremendous support of our efforts to stand up and fight for students and quality Catholic education in Dufferin-Peel. It is because of your support that we have raised the issue of underfunding and its impact on our ability to balance our budget to the highest levels of the government.

On Tuesday, April 4, the former Minister of Education released the report of the Ministry-appointed investigators. One of the first items in the 42-page report recognizes the board for "providing an excellent level of service to its community and doing many good things for its students."

The report states that the board's motivation for refusing to submit a balanced budget was that it is "loathe to reduce the level of programs and services it provides to students because it believes its students deserve, at least, the present level of service provided." This is absolutely correct, and we are committed to maintaining quality Catholic education programs and services for our students.

The report acknowledges underfunding in salaries and transportation, areas that Dufferin-Peel has repeatedly identified as being chronically underfunded. **This is the second major government-commissioned report within the past five years that speaks to underfunding in salaries and transportation. Underfunding is the real issue, as we have said all along.**

The report contains criticisms of board practices. When these criticisms were first made by the Minister, the board had a specified procedures review conducted by an external financial organization. The review confirmed that the board's practices were sound. The criticisms are, in fact, grossly unfounded and are a designed distraction from the real issue of underfunding.

The report recommends that the board use capital money dedicated for new school construction to cover operating shortfalls resulting from the Ministry's underfunding of transportation. This is an unsound management practice that we are being asked to consider.

The report recommends wide ranging service cuts and staff cuts, such as a reduction in administration costs that would jeopardize vital components of Catholic education, including school chaplains, Religious and Family Life and Adult Faith staff, elimination of transportation to magnet schools such as St. Sofia and Holy Name of Mary, and elimination of noon hour transportation for children in kindergarten. The report also calls for a reduction in the number of

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school secretaries, vice principals and custodial staff, all areas that will affect our ability to maintain clean and safe schools.

When you get past the smoke screens, two things really stand out in the report. The first is that the report is all about making cuts that would reduce the quality of education to Dufferin-Peel students and the second is that Dufferin-Peel, and indeed all school boards in the province, is not being given enough money to do the job it's supposed to do.

It is important to know that this was not an independent investigation. The investigators were hired by the Ministry and reported directly to the Ministry. The Ministry was in possession of the report for several days before releasing it on the former Minister's last day on the job.

A trustee's job is to represent and speak for students, parents/guardians and quality Catholic education. We have taken a stand. We have placed children first! It is not our job to make cuts that will result in an inferior, diminished system. By filing a deficit budget, we have said to the Ministry, in the strongest way we have at our disposal, that current funding levels are not good enough. The report confirms this, as did the Rozanski Report, and the board is calling on the Minister to provide adequate funding now, not later.

Dufferin-Peel is not the only school board in a deficit position. We are the tip of the iceberg. This is an emerging province-wide issue that will be revealed as more boards attempt to balance their budgets by depleting their reserve funds to compensate for underfunding.

We hope that the new Education Minister will look at our situation for what it really is – the consequences of underfunding.

The board will be reviewing and discussing the report, prior to responding directly to the Minister. Again, thank you for your support, and be assured that we will continue to communicate with you on this issue.

God bless.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Ferreira". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "F".

Peter Ferreira - Chair