

News Release

March 8, 2006

For Immediate Release

Trustees won't dismantle programs & services that meet student needs ***"If the Ministry wants to ignore the real issue of underfunding, let them make the cuts."***

At a special board meeting held on March 6, Dufferin-Peel trustees received an update on the status of the Ministry of Education-ordered investigation into the board's \$15.1 million budget deficit.

"We have a list of suspected areas that the Ministry investigators may target for cuts," said Peter Ferreira, board chair. "Obviously, we have not seen their report and these items are based on discussions with the investigators and through recent comments made by the lead investigator in the media."

"If the report does not address chronic, historic underfunding, with a recommendation that the province move to close the funding gaps that have hamstrung this board, then this entire investigation has been a sham," added Ferreira.

Dufferin-Peel is one of the largest school boards in the province, has a total 2005-06 budget of \$738 million. The board has balanced its budget over the past two years only with the use of reserve funds. These reserve funds were depleted last year. Other boards across the province are also in deficit positions this year. More have indicated that they will be able to balance their budgets using reserves this year, but will be in Dufferin-Peel's position next year.

"If the Ministry wants to ignore the real issue of underfunding, then they will have to deal with the consequences," said Peter Ferreira. "Dufferin-Peel trustees will not swing the Ministry's axe. We will not hurt our community."

"The '*my way or the highway*' approach the Ministry has applied in their dealing with us is precisely the approach that the current Minister fought against when he was in Opposition, just a few short years ago," said Ferreira.

In the following excerpt taken from Ontario Hansard on June 26, 2002, then-Education Critic Kennedy questioned the Premier:

Premier, they [parents and students] want to know what kind of government you really lead. Are you a government that is prepared to listen to parents and students like this? Are you prepared to tell them today that there's some possibility you don't know more than them and their boards, and that in fact you might make changes possible that would allow the cuts not to happen or these boards not to have to defy you by passing deficits?

-more-

Are you prepared to make changes in your funding of the school boards that find themselves in difficulty, unable to provide the services needed for their students?"

While the current government has introduced many new initiatives and programs, they come with a price tag. For boards like Dufferin-Peel and others, financially burdened by the legacy of longtime underfunding in specific areas, it is not good enough for the Ministry to say that they have increased funding by percentages. The fact remains that cumulative debt significantly and negatively impacts Dufferin-Peel. The underfunding issue needs to be addressed. Dufferin-Peel is the tip of the iceberg, regardless of how the Ministry would frame the issue.

“School boards across Ontario are still waiting for the full implementation of the Rozanski recommendations,” added Peter Ferreira. “Our community has been patient, but that patience is wearing thin. We await the Ministry’s report on the investigation into Dufferin-Peel,” added Ferreira, “along with our parent community and staff.”

The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is one of the largest school boards in Ontario with approximately 88,000 students in 139 schools located throughout Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon and Orangeville. With more than 8,000 faculty and staff, the board is also one of the largest employers in the region.

- 30 -

For information contact: Bruce Campbell, Manager, Community Relations
(905) 890-0708, ext. 24466, or (905) 609-1480