

April 3, 2019

## A Letter to the DPCDSB Community Regarding the **Impact of Recent Ministry of Education Announcements**

On March 15, the Minister of Education made announcements affecting changes as part of the provincial government's plan to "modernize learning in Ontario's publicly funded education system." The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB) and its Board of Trustees are deeply concerned about the potential impact these changes may have on student achievement and well-being and the effect that government-directed funding reductions may have on our ability to provide the level of quality programming that students and parents expect.

DPCDSB and the Board of Trustees were engaged by the province in its consultation process on multiple occasions, including through our provincial representatives, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA), the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) and through the government's Virtual Town Hall consultations. We also encouraged our communities to participate in the Town Hall discussions. On March 5, trustees met with local MPPs during which time, we had the opportunity to share many of the DPCDSB's exceptional accomplishments and engage in discussion on a variety of issues.

DPCDSB has been fiscally responsible with the resources provided as evidenced by year-over-year consecutive compliant budgets. We have experienced high levels of parent and student satisfaction with our school system and the Catholic education we have been able to provide. DPCDSB students have one of the highest graduation rates in the province.

DPCDSB is a Catholic school board that reflects a distinctive vision; one that is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Catholic education sets out to educate the whole person – body, mind and soul. We prepare our students for life beyond school, and for everlasting life. The teachings of Jesus permeate all that we do. As Jesus says in the Gospel of St. John, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). We pride ourselves on having staff that responds to this call, and we value the incredible expertise, faith and compassion that our staff bring to their position as Catholic educators, professionals and support staff throughout all sectors of the organization.

Recently announced funding reductions by the Ministry of Education have necessitated some very difficult decisions, and ones that have an impact on our staff throughout the organization. It is very difficult to have to make these changes, knowing the impact that it will have on our Catholic system, particularly as they relate to the services and programs we offer our students, families and community. We want to share with you some of our concerns in relation to the announced changes.

### **Class Size and Attrition Protection**

Proposed class size changes for 2019-2020 include maintaining a board-wide average of 24.5 in Grades 4 to 8 and increasing from 22:1 to 28:1 in secondary Grades 9 to 12. Kindergarten and primary Grades 1 to 3 would not be changed. DPCDSB has always maintained a board-wide average class size of 24.5 in Grades 4 to 8, so there will be minimal impact on class organization in this area.

The change in secondary (Grade 9-12) class size from 22:1 to 28:1 is significant. The larger class sizes may limit our teachers' ability to provide enhanced personalized instruction and support to students.

Additionally, understanding that class size is based on an average across the entire board, please be aware that DPCDSB has always had instances where some secondary classes have exceeded the board average in order to provide smaller class sizes to support specialized, applied, or locally developed programs. While we will endeavour to ensure that these programs continue, we are concerned that existing levels of support and programming may be compromised.

It is the expectation of the Ministry that the 28:1 class size in Grades 9-12 will be achieved over four years. Attrition protection funding will be provided during this time where the change in funded teachers exceeds actual retirements and resignations.

### **E-learning**

Starting in 2020-2021, the government will centralize the delivery of all e-learning courses provided to students throughout the province. The government has identified that secondary students will take a minimum of four e-learning credits out of the 30 credits needed to fulfill the requirements for achieving an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), equivalent to one credit per year, with exemptions for some students on an individualized basis.

DPCDSB and its Board of Trustees has raised concerns related to preserving and protecting the Catholic nature and quality of our program content and delivery model. Specifically, we know that there are some students, including those with diverse learning needs, for whom a virtual learning environment may present a challenge for them to achieve success.

The delivery of Religious Education courses includes the opportunity for students to participate in retreats, characterized by a day of reflection, whereby students engage in face-to-face interaction with each other as a faith community of learners. Furthermore, teacher-facilitated discourse in a face-to-face setting is also a key component of the delivery of all courses and this would be absent or severely minimized in an online platform.

The Board of Trustees is writing to the Premier and Minister of Education outlining its full concerns with the government's announced e-learning strategy. Among a number of these concerns, we will be representing to the Ministry that student access to technology to obtain the e-learning credit (i.e., at school during the school day, or away from school outside of school hours), will need to be clearly communicated and understood by school boards in order to ensure efficacy of implementation, integrity of programming, and opportunity for all students to achieve success.

We will be posting this letter on the DPCDSB website on April 24 for your further reference.

### **Grants for Student Needs Funding (GSN)**

The GSN announcement for 2019-2020 and the accompanying technical paper are expected to be released by the end of April 2019, however immediate financial impacts amount to a \$7 million reduction in expenditures.

The Local Priorities Fund (LPF), established during 2017-2018 collective bargaining, expires on August 31, 2019. LPF funding for DPCDSB is approximately \$9.5 million, and resulted in enhanced staffing across several employee groups (secretarial, custodial, support services staff, educational resource workers and teachers). Without assurance that this funding will continue, these enhanced positions that were established as a result of the LPF have been removed from the system.

### **Cellphones**

As of September 2019, the use of personal mobile devices (e.g., cell phones) during instructional time will be permitted under the following circumstances:

- for educational purposes, as directed by the educator;
- for health and medical purposes; and
- to support special education needs.

The DPCDSB currently enacts policies and procedures with regard to cellphone use by teachers, classroom support staff and students while on school property. DPCDSB Policy 25:00 states: "It is the policy of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board that students are permitted to use personal electronic devices (PEDs) on Board premises and/or at Board-sanctioned events for educational purposes in order to support learning, under the direction of staff and only with parent/guardian permission by the use of the personal electronic device used with WiFi Network Student Agreement."

### **Modernizing Learning**

#### **Health and Physical Education (HPE)**

Much of the government's public consultation in the fall of 2018 revolved around proposed changes to the Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum. Feedback from the consultation recommended the need for an HPE curriculum that is age-appropriate and relevant. The revised elementary HPE curriculum will be released in late May for implementation in September 2019. In this period of transition from now until June 2019, the government expects that educators will continue using the 2018 curriculum, professional judgement, and age-appropriate resources to teach the students in their classroom.

We anticipate that the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) and the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO) will also provide some direction with respect to the implementation of the new curriculum.

#### **Math**

The strategy will feature an updated math curriculum for all students in all grades phased in over four years, emphasizing basic concepts and skills and contribute to students' future success. The first elements of the new curriculum will be available in September 2019 and will be accompanied by parent and teacher print and online resources.

The government has also introduced legislation requiring teachers to pass a math content knowledge test in order to be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). Furthermore, for teachers already employed, the government will provide funding to support additional qualification courses in math.

### **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)**

The government is preparing Ontario students for success by equipping them with the skills they need in STEM. There is an intention to partner with educators, students, parents, post-secondary institutions as well as industry leaders, and to revise the mandatory Career Studies Grade 10 course to be released in late May for implementation September 2019. There are also plans to revise the Business Studies and Computer Studies curricula focusing on developing job skills such as entrepreneurial skills, computational thinking and coding.

### **Skilled Trades**

The memo recognizes the success experienced by students through the Specialist High Skills Majors and Dual Credit programs. There are plans to work closely with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to increase student and parent exposure to skilled trades, technology and apprenticeship training, and focus on promoting this high-demand career pathway.

### **Financial Literacy**

Financial Literacy can be found in various areas of current Ontario Curriculum; however, the memo makes reference to uplifting this area of focus by making it a major component of the mandatory learning in the revised Grade 10 Career Studies course which will be released in late May for implementation in September 2019.

### **Indigenous Education**

The government is committed to work with Indigenous partners to strengthen Indigenous content and learning by revising the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Studies curriculum for Grades 9 – 12 which will be released in late May for implementation in September 2019.

### **Digital Curriculum**

As part of its strategy to modernize the curriculum, the government has expressed a commitment to also modernize access to the curriculum by phasing in a digital platform to help educators, parents and students access curriculum and learning resources in a user – and mobile-friendly manner that will become increasingly interactive over time. The first phase of the resource will be launched in September 2019.

### **Conclusion**

DPCDSB and its Board of Trustees will endeavour to support our students, staff, families and school communities, during this time of transition, by working collaboratively with all stakeholders. Please be assured that we will continue to focus on student achievement and well-being, while maintaining safe, healthy, inclusive and faith-filled places to learn and work. We remain steadfast in this regard.

Parent/guardian and student voice will be important moving forward during this transition period and beyond and it is our commitment to keep our DPCDSB stakeholders informed through sharing information as well as providing venues to bring your concerns to the attention of the Ministry. In this regard, we have

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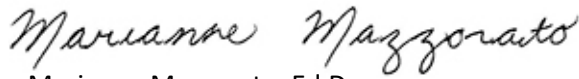
established a page on our DPCDSB website ([www.dpcdsb.org](http://www.dpcdsb.org)) where we have posted, and will continue to post, materials relevant to the Ministry's "Modernizing Learning" strategy. This page is accessible via a quick link button from the main DPCDSB webpage, as well as every DPCDSB school's main webpage.

Please know that you can share your concerns through your local DPCDSB trustee or your Catholic School Council. Additionally, you may wish to consider contacting your local MPP directly. A list of DPCDSB trustees and their contact information is noted below for your reference.

As always, we want to thank you for commitment to, and support of Catholic education. We value the strong commitment of all our stakeholders in support of the faith formation, well-being, and achievement of our students.



Sharon M. Hobin,  
Chair of the Board of Trustees



Marianne Mazzorato, Ed.D.  
Director of Education

**DPCDSB Board of Trustees**

**Sharon Hobin (Chair)**, Mississauga Wards 2 & 8  
905-301-1210  
sharon.hobin@dpcdsb.org

**Thomas Thomas (Vice Chair)**, Mississauga Ward 5  
416-845-8225  
thomas.thomas@dpcdsb.org

**Brea Corbet**, Mississauga Wards 9 & 10  
905-301-9373  
brea.corbet@dpcdsb.org

**Mario Pascucci**, Mississauga Wards 1 & 3  
905-305-3096  
mario.pascucci@dpcdsb.org

**Anna da Silva**, Brampton Wards 1,3 & 4  
416-706-5679  
anna.dasilva@dpcdsb.org

**Stefano Pascucci**, Mississauga Ward 4  
416-508-5543  
stefano.pascucci@dpcdsb.org

**Luz del Rosario**, Mississauga Wards 6 & 11  
416-528-6447  
luz.delrosario@dpcdsb.org

**Shawn Xaviour**, Brampton Wards 7-10  
416-528-9622  
shawn.xaviour@dpcdsb.org

**Frank Di Cosola**, Caledon/Dufferin  
905-951-8898  
frank.dicosola@dpcdsb.org

**Rynel Pinto**  
Student Trustee  
rynel.pinto@dpcdsb.org

**Darryl D'Souza**, Brampton Wards 2,5 & 6  
416-528-8515  
darryl.dsouza@dpcdsb.org

**Faye Rosario**  
Student Trustee  
faye.rosario@dpcdsb.org

**Bruno Iannicca**, Mississauga Ward 7  
905-270-0536  
bruno.iannicca@dpcdsb.org