

## **Election of Chair Remarks, Dec. 2017**

Thank you Robert for your kind words. I appreciate your support and your continuous commitment to public education.

And thank you to my colleague trustees for your confidence. I'm as excited about the coming year as I have been for the last 29 years. This coming year is the last year of our 4-year term and my 20th as Chair of the Board. Many of you will be assessing your contributions to the successes of students. I hope you're honest about our challenges and proud about our accomplishments.

I also want to congratulate Suzanne on your re-election. I think of us as partners in this leadership role. I depend on your life experiences and candor that adds balance to mine.

As I was preparing these notes for tonight, I thought about all of the people who contribute to inspiring success, confidence and hope in every student. Together, as a community of families, educators and leaders, we share responsibility to inspire our modern learners to be active, critically engaged, global citizens. We will accomplish this through our commitment to *Empowering Modern Learners*; an initiative intended to support **all** learners.

What I know is that effective educators empower all learners to achieve personal excellence by being open, flexible and responsive to **students'** needs. When we focus on their needs, we create positive, innovative learning environments that empower.

Graca (pronounced Grassa) Machel, a politician and humanitarian, and the widow of former South African president Nelson Mandela has said that one word can summarize why education can make a difference, and that word is **empowerment**. Our work is not only to empower youth to dream big, but to dream **bigger**. It is to empower youth to believe in themselves. And to improve their life trajectories. This is **our work, every day**.

And when I say "our work," I don't mean only those of us in this Board Room tonight. Our influence doesn't begin and end in classrooms or in meeting rooms. It begins when families first meet office staff or settlement workers in our We Welcome the World Centres. It continues with the interactions our students and families have with administrators, teachers, occasional teachers, teaching assistants, early childhood educators, office assistants, custodians, lunchroom supervisors, bus drivers, social workers and speech-language pathologists. But our influence doesn't end there. It continues further in the support provided by our outstanding staff in our field offices, maintenance sites and right here at the HJA Brown Education Centre.

It is your work—our staff and volunteers' work—that we, as trustees, support every day.

As we head into an election year, we must continue to stand up for and protect public education. Public education empowers people, and supports democracy, equity and inclusion. It gives citizens the skills they need to become active members of our societies; citizens that make informed decisions that build and maintain strong communities where everyone feels they belong.

Last year, I mentioned that our most important work as an elected board in the next decade is to be caring, courageous leaders in equity and inclusion. OISE professor George Dei believes that, "Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone."

This is **our most important work**, and sometimes, it is our most challenging work because we are faced with opponents to what is right, just and good—opponents to a society—a school system—where every child, every adult, feels safe, respected, welcomed and included.

Good governance plays a critical role in overcoming inequalities in education. I am confident that together we can, through continuous progress on equity, achieve inclusion for all.

We have been courageous and transparent in our work on anti-Black racism and our *We Rise Together* work, and we will continue to do so. We also remain committed to achieving inclusion for **all** through the continued support of marginalized students, including our Black male, LGBTQ+, Indigenous students, students who live in poverty, and our students with special education needs.

I have the highest of expectations for all children, but closer to home, of my 4 grandchildren. Public schools have never disappointed. My grandchildren are happy and thriving, and their parents and grandparents are engaged and supportive of their learning. I am most optimistic about their future.

Helen Keller once said that, "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence." With the mutual respect and collaborative spirit that is the trademark of this board of trustees, I am hopeful and confident that we will continue to do what is right, just and good on behalf of Peel students and their families.

Thank you again. I look forward to working with all of you this year.