

## **We Inspire: Starting Point 2019**

### **Notes for Chair Stan Cameron**

Good morning—and welcome to Starting Point 2019! I'm Stan Cameron, chair of the board, and it is my pleasure to be with you this morning. I would ask everyone to please stand as you are able and join in the singing of *O Canada*.

Thank you all for being here this morning. I hope you enjoyed the debut screening of the board's newest *O Canada* video, which was beautifully sung by students at Mayfield Secondary School. Did you know the school is in Caledon? Thanks to the amazing students and the staff who inspire them every day! I would also like to thank our media support services team for producing a video that truly showcases the diversity we celebrate in Peel.

I'm excited to be with you today at my first Starting Point as Chair of the Board. Joining me today are many of my trustee colleagues, here to begin the new school year with you. I would ask them to stand as I introduce them.

So welcome. While we enjoyed holding Starting Point at the Pearson Convention Centre, we made the decision to move the event to a new venue this year because of austerity and because it gives us the opportunity to showcase an amazing Peel secondary school. We hope you are enjoying the change of venue and the amazing Chinguacousy Secondary School! Thank you to Principal SK Mork-Gerra and all the staff for your hospitality.

The venue is not the only change, we've also changed the event format. While you will still hear from Director of Education Peter Joshua, he will deliver a briefer speech, which will be followed by a student performance and a keynote address from Diana Patton, speaker, social justice and integrative health advocacy coach, author and attorney. Of course, all of this will take place just after my extended two-hour presentation. Well, I need time for all of my magic tricks!

On a serious note, we hope you were able to take some time to visit our Wellness Tradeshow this morning, another new Starting Point feature. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the Peel students, staff and external vendors who hosted stations. Thank you for inspiring us to support our own self-care and the wellness of others as we launch a new school year. Personally, this summer I spent time

volunteering at Bethel Hospice in Inglewood. Debbie and I soaked up some sunshine—provided by our first grandchild Avery’s smile. We also spent some time preparing for our eldest daughter’s first child. Two boys. Cousins. Seven months apart. I so look forward to buying two sets of skates, two sets of art easels, two sets of children’s books and two sets of RESPs. Stay tuned for photos of these two!

I want to also acknowledge the many staff who worked during the summer – those at our summer and balanced calendar schools, and those catching up from a very busy spring and preparing our schools for an exciting fall. Thank you to all of our custodians for the remarkable care you take of our school sites and all that you do to prepare spaces for staff, students and the community.

You may know that the start of my role as Chair of the Board coincided with the end of another chapter in my life. I recently retired from teaching psychology at Centennial College after more than 37 years. While I miss working directly with so many students in that capacity, I feel truly honoured to have been elected to serve as Chair so that I can continue to have the opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of students.

I'm so proud to work with a board—trustees and staff—who are as committed to helping all students achieve personal excellence through access to rich programming, as I am. We will do this by representing the our communities, respecting each other, helping others, listening, and continuing to build positive working relationships, especially important during trying political times.

In June, despite challenges in provincial funding, trustees approved a \$1.91 billion balanced operating budget for the 2019-20 school year that was developed through an extensive consultation process. Thank you to those who shared their input with us, including employee group leaders, principals and vice-principals, the senior leadership team, trustees, staff, families, School Council members, students and community members. As a board, we dutifully considered all of the input throughout the budget process as it is our responsibility to ensure the voices of our communities are represented.

Throughout the budget process, difficult decisions were made as we looked for administrative efficiencies while exploring ways to optimize funding to best support student success and well-being. We focused on the projects in the *Plan for Student Success*, while representing our communities and sharing their voices. And I'm proud to say that, as a

board, we have remained steadfast in our student-focus and commitment to equity and inclusion, in setting budget priorities that put students first.

During these challenging times in public education, we must continue to pursue excellence and inspire success, confidence and hope in each student. I know that we can count on each and every one of you to continue to provide high-quality, educational opportunities for all students. And, more importantly, we know that you will do that with hearts wide open because the Peel District School Board is home to the most caring educators and support staff in the province. Your heart work is valued.

And you have the board's assurance that trustees will do everything we can to support the system through changing times. We will actively stand against any attempt by any lobby group, government or individual to attack public education in Ontario.

To quote the late and unparalleled Toni Morrison, if we “wanna fly, we have to give up the things that weigh us down.” But we won't sit in silence. Through her writing, grace and advocacy, Morrison demonstrated the importance of raising our voices and challenging

power structures that harm vulnerable communities. Her legacy reminds us there is a lot at stake for those who are oppressed and marginalized, and that our silence in the face of all this injustice is not acceptable. As always, we will continue to advocate for fair funding that supports the needs of staff and students—from kindergarten to adult learners. This includes those from marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+ students, students who live in poverty and those with special education needs.

As I reflect upon my first experiences as Chair, several highlights come to mind. Dolson, Tony Pontes and Whaley's Corners public schools all officially opened in their new school buildings. In March, the board announced the naming of two new Brampton elementary schools for Sikh-Canadian soldier Private Buckam Singh, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai, exemplary role models who will inspire a new generation of future leaders. We also approved Indigenous History Month, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Sikh heritage months, and a new Anti-Racism Policy, which is in development. We also started a garden at CBO, maintained by staff. Veggies are grown and donated to local food banks. There is so much to be proud of in The Peel District School Board!

On behalf of all of my colleagues on the board of trustees, thank you for all that you do to inspire success, confidence and hope in each student. We wish you all the very best for the new school year. It's now my pleasure to introduce our Director of Education Peter Joshua.