

Speaking notes for Chair Stan Cameron Budget Meeting – June 19, 2019

Good evening. As we sit, as a board, this evening to deliberate on the 2019-20 budget, I can't help but liken this year's budget process to performing magic—something I know a little bit about.

When I started performing magic tricks at the age of 12, my goal was to distract and trick, but not in a mean-spirited way—always with the intention of inspiring a “wow” moment and a smile. I'd snap my fingers and coins would vanish right before the audience's eyes. I was adept at making money seemingly disappear and reappear. In many ways, we have been hoping for the same to happen over the past few months—for school board funding that disappeared to reappear.

Over the past few months, Ontarians have been told that the province has increased funding to public education. However, when you look into the details and look at the numbers from year to year, we're getting less funding overall. Although funding has increased in some areas, like transportation, overall, the Peel District School Board, who will experience a 0.2% enrolment increase next year, will receive \$27.9 million less in grant funding than it did in 2018-19, outside of the monies received to honour the completion of centrally negotiated labour commitments.

As trustees, we've publicly questioned the government's claim that, next year, education funding will increase by hundreds of millions of dollars. And we've, now twice, formally requested a meeting with the Minister of Education to share our concerns about the ministry's new vision for public education. We remain hopeful this meeting will take place because we intend to work collaboratively to support the students and communities we serve.

For months, staff and trustees have been carefully working towards tonight's budget meeting, starting with our community budget consultation process, which began in March, and generated input that we have dutifully considered throughout this process. As elected officials, it is our responsibility to ensure the voices of our communities are represented. Thank you to those who shared their input with us.

The budget we have before us tonight—the first budget we will approve this term as trustees—was prepared by staff, under the leadership of Director Peter Joshua, Associate Directors Jaspal Gill, Wendy Dowling and Poleen Grewal, Controller of Finance Tania Alatishe and the senior finance team. I want to thank them for their diligence, thoughtful guidance and partnership.

What I love about magic is that it allows us to experience the impossible—to wonder and ponder and consider all of the options. Throughout this 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.

After considering all of the possibilities, my trustee colleagues and I will approve a balanced budget tonight. We focused on the projects in the Peel District School Board's *Plan for Student Success*, while representing our communities and sharing their voices. Throughout the years, this board has remained unwavering in its student-focus and commitment to equity and inclusion, in setting budget priorities that put students first. Providing high-quality, educational opportunities for all students continues to be a goal of this board.

During these challenging times in public education, we must continue to pursue excellence and inspire success, confidence and hope in each student. We will not achieve this by waving a magic wand over this or any future budget. Instead, we must tap into the good will and expertise of our staff, families, volunteers and

community members to continue to provide high-quality learning opportunities for all.

As we head into the summer and then a new school year, we are mindful of the impact shifts in practice, including increases to class sizes, will have on students and staff. And we want to be transparent with our communities—increased class sizes mean fewer teachers, which leads to fewer courses and less student choice.

You have my assurance that the Board of Trustees will do everything it can to support the system throughout these changing times. Our focus will always be on students and how we can continue to do our best to provide programs that help support students' success and well-being.

As always, we will continue to advocate for fair funding that supports the needs of all our learners—from kindergarten students to adult learners. Before I conclude, I would like to leave you with a quote from author Laini Taylor, "Hope can be a powerful force. Maybe there's no actual magic in it, but when you know what you hope for most and hold it like a light within you, you can make things happen, almost like magic." It is this transformational magic that you inspire every day.

Thank you for your hopeful spirits, for being champions of public education, and for your time this evening.