

**Janet McDougald, Chair, Peel District School Board**  
**Budget Meeting June 14, 2011**

Good evening. First, I would like to thank the team in Finance, especially Associate Director Carla Kisko and Controller Christine Beal for their hard work and leadership in preparing this budget. I would also like to thank Director Tony Pontes, Associate Director Pam Tomasevic and our senior team of superintendents and controllers who I know work for months—gathering input from the system to ensure our funding priorities are linked with our system goals.

And I mention the Report Card for Student Success for a reason—the goals and projects were a key starting point for trustees this year as we began to understand the budget and set priorities. We are proud that the clearly defined goals and priorities keep our focus on student success, and that as a board we continue to align our budget with our goals and projects.

And as we look at this budget—and I know this is what our director's office has said to trustees—we are in an enviable position. Here, now, in the middle of June we are looking at a balanced budget. That balanced budget provides increased support to schools and students. In fact, at this point many boards are going through the agonizing effort of looking at what to cut in terms of student supports in order to balance their budgets—a difficult and unrewarding process for sure.

So to be here, looking at increasing per pupil funding to schools by \$5 a student, or the addition of learning resources for schools, or the expansion of mental health supports—these are all things we appreciate. And to be sure, that is in part because we now begin to see the results of our work with our local MPPs and the province in creating fairer funding that represents the students we currently serve—not the population we served in 1988!

Next budget year we will receive another three million dollars in our Local Opportunities Grant—that's six million dollars more than two years ago. There is no doubt in my mind that the work of our school councils and community partners, our staff and our unions and federations all helped to make that happen. In the same way, I thank our local MPPs for raising the funding issues of Peel at the provincial level and for their willingness to meet with us and understand our

concerns. The same is true of the Minister of Education who took time recently to meet with Tony and me regarding our underfunding.

The greatest benefit of those meetings, I believe, is that we have been able to help our MPPs and the Minister understand that we are not in a fight or battle for funding—we are allies, representing together the students of Peel. Our agenda is the same. And that, by fulfilling our responsibility as elected representatives, Peel trustees will continue to express significant concern about our funding issues and advocate for fairness for our students.

We, trustees and administration, have ensured that Peel students have benefitted from all of the funding increases in the last eight years. However, and you knew there would be a however, that does not mean we are satisfied – the increase in the LOG portion of the foundation grant confirms our allegations and strengthens our resolve to continue to press for a funding formula review that better reflects our population and student needs.

So, where do we stand in terms of funding? Well, if this was EQAO, and I was grading the government, I might give them a two plus. In other words, approaching the standard. Because that is what is happening with our funding—it is approaching—*slowly*—the standard. Yes, for example, we have been able to *slightly* increase the per student funding, but schools need so much more.

Next year, the impact of the new food and beverage and fee requirements of the provinces will be a financial double-whammy for schools. If we want to implement our Equity and Inclusion policy in the spirit it is intended, we will need to provide some schools with more per pupil than five dollars—and that could happen if we had the funding we deserve.

We have also had to take some of our new funding and apply it to areas previously funded by the province—including the support of our technical infrastructure. While that work is important, we need to have more money for a very different technological purpose—student learning. We are looking ahead and as we develop a compelling vision for technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it cannot

be built with the funding of 1999. And yet we continue to see the loss of provincial funds for classroom computers.

Once again, it is not that we are *unappreciative*, but let's not confuse "thankful" with "satisfied". Take full day kindergarten for example. We are incredibly supportive of the program. We are staunch advocates for early learning in Peel. But there is no rational reason while the government does not plan to fully fund the students we are actually serving today in our schools! This is a provincially—mandated program—and yet when more students come than expected the local board has to: turn them away, or bear the cost, or delay other students the opportunity for full day learning. That is just not fair.

And that is not the only remaining areas of unfairness. We spent a lot of time this year looking at our Special Education shortfall. We learned that there are some things we can do to help—specifically around data collection. And we are taking those steps.

But as the recent People for Education study uncovered, we remain the lowest funded board in the province on Special Education. That cannot continue. Not when we have to serve some of our most vulnerable students.

SO, grateful for funding—yes. Envious position in terms of growth and a balanced budget? Absolutely. Able to meet the growing needs of the students of Peel with the funding provided by the province? Absolutely not!

So in terms of our funding, a level two. Or two plus at the most. In the new progress report card I might even go so far as a "progressing well" but with room for improvement.

And – we will continue to ask for help from the residents of Peel. Soon, there will be candidates at the door asking for the privilege of your vote. When they come, or when you attend an all candidates meeting, I ask you *to ask them* one simple question—what will you *personally and specifically* do to increase the education funding for the children of Peel.

If the answer is anything like ‘they have all the funding they need’, well, still a level two. But if there is openness, interest, and understanding, if they can talk about the ways our children can receive fairer funding—well then the candidate has a grasp for this important issue and should likely earn much more than a passing mark. They might actually deserve a vote.