

June 14, 2011

**“Funding progressing well but with room for improvement,” says chair**  
***Board asks residents to ask MPP candidates what they will personally do to increase education funding for Peel students***

Trustees of the Peel District School Board approved a budget of \$1.56 billion for the 2011-12 school year. This balanced budget is a \$79.7 million increase in provincial operating grants from last year.

“As we look at this budget, we are in an enviable position—we’re looking at a balanced budget,” says Janet McDougald, chair of the board. “That balanced budget provides increased support to schools and students. So to be here, looking at increasing per pupil funding to schools by five dollars a student, or the addition of learning resources for schools, or the expansion of mental health supports—these are all things we appreciate.”

For many years, Peel trustees have asked and continue to ask for the funding formula to be reviewed, and for the gap between the provincial average per student amount and the amount given per Peel student to be closed. Some progress has been made with the phasing in of some additional funds.

“Next budget year, we will receive another \$3 million in our Local Opportunities Grant—that’s \$6 million more than two years ago,” notes McDougald. “There’s 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 Director of Education Tony Pontes and me regarding our underfunding.”

Although some progress has been made, there is more to be done. Explains McDougald, “The greatest benefit of those meetings 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.”

“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,” notes McDougald. “In the new progress report card I might even go so far as a ‘progressing well’ but with room for improvement.”

“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,” says McDougald.

As we head into a fall election, McDougald notes, “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,’ 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.”

For more information about the Peel board budget, go to [www.peelschools.org](http://www.peelschools.org). For a complete copy of the budget, call 905-890-1010 (or 1-800-668-1146) ext. 2012.

**Media contact:** Janet McDougald, Chair, Peel District School Board, 905-278-1402,  
janet.mcdougald@peelsb.com

**Reference:** Carla Pereira, Manager of Communications (Acting), 905-890-1010/1-800-668-1146 ext.  
2814, carla.pereira@peelsb.com

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