

Budget Meeting June 22, 2010

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.

This fall, our major effectiveness review from the ministry highlighted the Report Card for Student Success, our strategic plan, as a powerful process. We should be proud of the fact ... that as a board we continue to align our budget with our goals and projects. And, in fact, thanks to Tony's and our senior team's leadership, I truly believe that the filter for what will and will not get funded ... is our board goals and projects—and that these projects and goals are focused on the learning needs of our students.

But, all that said, there remains one key problem—there is not enough budget *to* balance. Of course, our budget is balanced, as required. But what I mean is our Peel students continue to be shortchanged by a funding formula that rewards boards with declining enrolment and punishes growth boards like Peel.

In 2002-03, that gap was about \$459 per pupil. And from that point on we've been clear that the amount of the gap was unacceptable. But it has grown—dramatically. That \$459 per pupil under-funding has almost doubled to **\$838** per pupil. An erosion in funding of \$379 per student. To put this in blunt terms, the value of **change in the gap** is a whopping \$52 million. That's just the value of the **change** in the gap! The value of the gap itself? Well, that's an astonishing \$117 million. Peel students deserve better.

As a board, we have tried over and over again to make that message known. In fact, our first letter to then Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy regarding the funding gap was in January 2005 as a follow up to our meeting with him in November of the previous year. We also wrote of our concern regarding the per pupil funding gap to the next Minister, Sandra Pupatello, in April 2006, and to the next Minister Kathleen Wynne four times beginning in September 2006. We have copied our Peel MPPs on six of those letters and met with them personally.

Locally, we have organized multiple face-to-face meetings with our MPPS to specifically address the funding shortfall and to ask for assistance in closing the gap. In fact, for the last several years, we've had a simple and fair request—**stop the erosion**. Do what is needed to make sure that our per pupil funding position does not get worse. But it

has gotten worse and we have lost ground—and our students have lost opportunities because of the funding reductions.

To be honest, we have made our point about being the fourth lowest funded board in Ontario over and over again. We have asked for help, for consideration of the fact that the data used for funding purposes was out-of-date, for consideration of the unique needs of our diverse board. And the problem got worse.

Last year, we said “enough” and we went out to our partners in school councils, our staff and municipal politicians and asked for help—and they have. Since October, I know hundreds, maybe thousands, of contacts have been made with local MPPS to ask for fairer funding. My trustee colleagues and I have been at countless school council meetings to answer questions. I have spoken to Regional Council and worked with our faith leaders on the topic. Just last night, Trustee White and I were with Dolph Sr and Hazel McCallion to talk with their MPP and ministry staff about the gap. Despite the defensive charts and confusing figures, our parents still insisted we deserve our fair share compared to other neighbouring boards. Our message is clear and Jeff and I were encouraged to press it next year.

Admittedly, we have seen some results. A key point of the Peel board—that funding should be based on 2006 data to calculate the Learning Opportunities Grant and not on the previously used 1991 and 1996

data—has been acknowledged. That means that this year Peel students will benefit from an additional \$3 million. Unfortunately, the province has decided to phase in the use of the new data over four years, and so our students will not experience the \$12 million a year they deserve until 2014.

So, instead of the \$12 million for each of four years that the province acknowledges Peel students are owed, after four years the board will receive only \$30 million in additional funding instead of \$48 million—a funding shortfall of \$18 million. **And at no point do we catch up**—after four years, we remain behind. This is not acceptable. It is not good enough.

Now, based on the response we've received, the Ministry and some of our local MPPS are a bit annoyed by our campaign. They would like us to back off, to be less “out there” with the messages. After all, Peel has always been a “nice” board, a “polite” board. So willing to be low-key and not go public.

But that time has passed. We tried that approach six years ago and every year since—and now we find ourselves with a further erosion—and it must stop. We are unwilling to make our under-funding situation worse, even for a positive program like full-day kindergarten. We need fairer funding for all Peel students—including those in full-day kindergarten.

So let me be clear with the province—We need fairer funding for Peel students. **Now**. We need the erosion to stop. **Now**. We need you to work with us on finding funding solutions. **Now**.

And until that happens, we will continue to raise this issue. **Now** and in the school year to come. We will raise this issue through the next provincial election. In fact, we will continue our efforts—until we get fairer funding. We will increase our work with our diverse communities, continue to reach out to school councils and meet face-to-face with our MPPs.

We would certainly hope our MPP colleagues will champion the cause of Peel students. We've heard the rationale and the excuses but we've yet to hear - we agree and we'll work together to help. We will continue to reach out for their support, ideas and input on how we can receive the fairer funding they deserve. With our school councils', parents and community leaders' help, I believe we can make a difference. **Now**.