

**Peel District School Board  
2009-10 Grant Recommendations**

**SEEKING FAIRNESS IN RESOURCES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

The Peel District School Board is pleased to respond to the Minister's request for input regarding the development of the 2009-2010 Grants for Student Needs (GSN) and for measures that could improve student achievement and reduce gaps in outcomes among students. We would like to express our appreciation for the opportunity to provide our ideas, and for the spirit of partnership exemplified by this process.

Everything we do as a board is designed to help students learn and do well in school. If we want all students to achieve, we need to plan how to make it happen, focus our efforts where the impact is greatest and measure our progress. The Peel District School Board does this through our *Report Card for Student Success* – our strategic plan based on the balanced scorecard process.

With our *Report Card for Student Success*, each goal has data indicators to show our progress in reaching that goal, and key projects intended to have a direct impact on the indicators. Our bottom line – as is the Minister's – is improved student achievement, with our goals at the centre of the process.

One key aspect of the *Report Card for Student Success* is that it helps us to focus our attention on what will have the greatest impact on student achievement. It turns our goals into action and co-ordinates our time and energy.

If we want our students to achieve to the best of their ability, it is not enough to focus our attention – we must also align our resource allocation on what has the greatest impact on the goals and projects. In fact, we have a specific goal to use resources effectively. We understand and appreciate the importance of strategic resource allocation to support student success, and that belief guides our response to the request for feedback.

Though we recognize, as a board, the difficult economic climate in Ontario, and the funding pressures felt by the government, we still see a need for a redistribution of funding to allow us to adequately resource our schools to support student achievement.

Quite simply, the province must, as part of the development of the Grants for Student Needs this year, reallocate funding to the Peel District School Board to recognize and remedy the existing deficiencies. These areas of under funding are clear, and proven by demographic data. Our submission focusses, therefore, on three key areas of provincial funding that require attention:

- The Learning Opportunities Grants are based on demographic and student data that needs updating in order to provide for a fairer distribution of provincial revenues.
- The High Needs Amounts for special education remain based on student and demographic data that is not reflective of the actual data and require updating for accuracy.
- The Early Learning Grant does not adequately recognize the increase and size of Peel's preschool population in comparison to other boards.

From our perspective, the deficiencies of these three grants significantly contribute to the fact that Peel is the third lowest funded board in the Province, accessing \$964 less per pupil than the provincial average. These deficiencies need to be addressed or, as a board, we cannot help all students to learn to the best of their ability.

### **Demographic data demonstrates real and growing needs of students we serve**

The Region of Peel is the fastest growing region in Ontario and one of the fastest growing regions in North America. In addition, it has one of the highest proportions of households with children in the province – close to 70%.

By 2006, the number of new immigrants residing in Peel totalled 119,000 people, representing a 45% increase in new immigrants to the region and the number of visible minorities exceeded 52% of Peel's total population. <sup>1</sup>

The significant growth in Peel's population has been large in number and very rapid. The board has seen its enrolment grow from 107,000 to 140,000 students (30%) over the last 8 years, which has necessitated a capital build program unlike any other in Ontario in such a short period. In less than 8 years, Peel has more than doubled its student accommodation, building 60,000 new pupil places at a total cost of about \$1 billion. As the population explosion begins to level off, Peel's capital program continues to play catch up with approximately 3 to 4 new school or school expansion projects each year.

It is an honour and a privilege to be chosen by the world as the place where their children will learn. The every day diversity of the student population in our schools gives the students of Peel a unique and powerful insight into being part of a community that reflects where the rest of Canada will be in the coming decades. We would argue that it actually gives our students a competitive advantage in the workplace in the years ahead.

At the school level each day our staff do an amazing job dealing with multiple languages and cultural differences. They work each day to ensure all our schools are welcoming, respectful, inclusive, engaging, nurturing and safe places for learning and working.

It is undeniable, however, that along with this population explosion and school expansion comes new and increasing challenges. We see the sad evidence of child poverty and the absolute need for increased special education support services. More than 60,000 children in Peel live in lone-parent families and one in four kindergarten children are ESL. <sup>2</sup> Attached is a document produced by Peel's research unit titled **Social Risk Index** that illustrates the significant change in the Board's communities between 2001 and 2006. The SRI is produced by analyzing nine at-risk data indicators using Census data. It is exactly the kind of data we use in developing our Report Card for Student Success, and in strategically allocating our resources.

The data shows unequivocally, what our school staff see each day – the very real and increasing needs of the children we serve. The growth of and complexity of the population we serve put a significant pressure on the board to address social infrastructure gaps that appear on the doorsteps of Peel schools. These include the

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada: 2001 and 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Portraits of Peel – Facing the Facts, Fair Share Task Force

changes of children's mental health, lack of organized child care and preschool program opportunities, lack of recreational and social service supports for children, youth and their families.

### **It is time to base funding on the current student population**

Unfortunately for the children of Peel, the three significant grants focused on board differences rely on data that is significantly out of date. This creates serious and frankly unacceptable, funding disadvantages for us and for other for boards like Peel that have changing demographics. The bottom line is that it has resulted **Peel students being the third lowest funded in the Province, accessing \$964 less per pupil than the average across the province, and \$542 less than the average of GTA students** (see Appendix 1).

The board has repeatedly expressed its concerns with the per pupil funding differential over the last few years. The funding level is unfair, and without a rationale.

However, despite the clear expression of our concerns, the situation for Peel District School Board students is actually worsening. As our population grows in numbers and complexity, the funding gap actually continues to widen. Each year our per pupil funding level is eroded – and it is now an untenable situation. Simply put, for our board, our staff, our parents, our taxpayers and our students, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to rationalize what is clearly an unacceptable funding inequity.

Obviously, all boards want more funding, and that is difficult to do anytime, let alone a time of fiscal restraint. However, there can be no cutback on fairness and equity. The numbers in Peel are clear and powerful to support a reallocation of funds based on data.

Through a detailed analysis of the grants, our staff have identified that data deficiencies in the Learning Opportunities Grant, funding for Early Years and the High Needs Amount under Special Education are the main reasons for this vast difference in per pupil funding. We ask that these deficiencies be addressed in the GSN for 2009/2010.

The following section describes Peel's concerns with each of these grants.

### **Learning Opportunities Grant**

The Learning Opportunities Grant is made up of the following three components:

- Demographic Component totals \$334.5 million – Peel receives \$17.1M.
- Literacy and Math Outside the School Day Component totals \$15.3 million – Peel receives \$2.9M.
- Student Success, Grades 7 to 12 Component totals \$56.1 million – Peel receives \$2.6M.

The total Learning Opportunities Grant is \$405.9 million in 2008–09 (before PDT adjustments) --- Peel receives \$22.6M.

### *Demographic Component*

A total of \$334.5 million is flowed to school boards through the Demographic Component of LOG using social and economic indicators that have been associated with a higher risk of academic difficulties. These funds are intended to support boards in offering a wide range of programs to assist students from these communities with meeting their educational goals. Boards have considerable latitude in determining the kinds of programs and supports that they provide with this funding.

The base amount of the Demographic Component was established in 1998. It represents about \$160M of the total demographic amount, and uses statistics derived from **1991 Census** information provided by Statistics Canada.

In 2002-03, the Province increased the total funding of LOG by \$15 million and allocated this increased amount using socio-economic indicators from the **1996 Census**.

Two further increases to the Demographic Component of LOG were introduced; in December 2003 LOG was enhanced by \$95 million, and then in August 2004 by a further \$65 million. These new amounts are allocated using **1996 Census data**.

A board's total share of the Demographic Component is equal to:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Demographic} \\ \text{Component} \end{array} = \begin{array}{l} 1998 - 99 \\ \text{Model} \end{array} + \begin{array}{l} 2002 - 03 \\ \text{Model} \end{array} + \begin{array}{l} 2003 - 04 \text{ and} \\ 2004 - 05 \text{ Model} \end{array}$$

### *Student Success Funding*

In 2003 funding for Student Success was added to the LOG. Twenty percent (20%) of the Student success funding or \$11.1 million is also allocated using **1996 Census data**.

### *The Inequity:*

Peel's share of the Demographic component of LOG totaled \$17.1M of the \$334.5M, representing only 5% of the provincial total. This is 2.3% less than Peel's 7.3% proportional share based on enrolment. In addition, Peel receives only \$369,000 of the \$11.1M of student success funds which is only 3% of the provincial total.

These significant allocations are based on 1991 and 1996 census data that is **12 and 17 years out-of-date**. Since 2001, Peel has seen growth in enrolment of 33,000 students. The district is now characterized by more than 93 distinct ethnic groups, over 60 different languages with a newcomer population that represents over 45% of the region's total population. Along with the explosive growth in population, there is a significant increase in the number of children and families living in poverty.

**All of these statistics are completely excluded from the database used by the Ministry to allocate funds specifically intended for these students.**

This serious Provincial funding inequity has existed for far too long. It is particularly important to address during a period of fiscal restraint to ensure that students from socio-economically disadvantaged situations have access to programs that are proven to make a difference to their educational success. An example of such programming is Early

Years Hubs and Readiness Centres. A fairer allocation of LOG funding will help support the expansion of these important programs.

### **Special Education - High Needs Amount (HNA)**

The High Needs Amount (HNA) addresses the cost of providing the intensive staff support required by the small number of students with high needs. The province allocates almost \$1 billion to school boards under the HNA formula. In 2005-06, the province moved away from a claims audit process and fixed the per pupil value of the HNA by board. In 2007-08 and 2008-09, the province ensured that declining enrolment boards would not experience a loss in the total HNA they receive.

Two significant inequities result from the HNA funding policy. First, the HNA determined in 2005-06 was actually based on a board's 2003-04 ISA claims result. Any changes in the proportion of special education students to regular students or changes in the mix of exceptionality within a board are not recognized in annual funding.

With the growth in enrolment, the Peel Board has seen a 4,800 pupil increase in the number of special education students (excluding gifted) receiving support. Furthermore, there has been a considerable increase in students with autism (over 600), students with language impairment (over 1300), and non-identified students that require support. Special Education department staff identified **162** new students with a diagnosis of autism since the end of August 2008.

The second inequity relates to the fact that a board experiencing declining enrolment will actually receive a per pupil increase in the HNA, whereas the HNA per pupil for growing boards is held to a fixed level. While Peel has received an increase in HNA funding as a result of enrolment growth, on a per pupil basis, Peel receives the lowest per pupil high needs amount (\$339) in the province, almost \$300 less than the provincial average and \$135 less than the average for GTA boards (see Appendix 2).

For Peel, the gap between funding and board expenditures for special education continues to widen. In 2008-09, Peel's costs for special education is expected to exceed the Ministry's special education envelope by over \$10 million.

### **Early Years Program Funding**

The Peel District School Board has demonstrated significant leadership in creating direct connections between schools and early child development. In partnership with Dr. Fraser Mustard's Council for Early Child Development, we have presented the latest research on brain development to create new and vital programs to ensure that young children in Peel are better prepared for school and for life. Dr. Mustard's publication *The Early Years 2: The Science of ECD* clearly indicated that investments in the development of young children between 0 and 4 years old demonstrate a rate of return of \$17 for each \$1 invested. The Peel DSB has not only invested LOG grant funding to create 4 school Hubs and 10 Readiness Centres and recently opened 4 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres. As well, the Peel DSB was pivotal in the development of Success By 6 Peel, a community collaborative which has been highly successful in securing Region of Peel and CIC funding to purchase 3 mobile early learning vehicles (Learning in Our Neighbourhood –

LION) that deliver programs in 15 new school communities that have no available social service supports.

Similar to the 69 Parenting Literacy Centres in Toronto fully funded through the Early Years Grant, the Peel Readiness Centres and Hubs offer preschool children and their parents an opportunity to become familiar and build trust in the Canadian education system. Parents gain a better understanding of kindergarten expectations and their children have an opportunity to participate in a structured program with other children of similar age. These free, drop-in programs also offer families new to Canada an opportunity to socialize with other parents, and to practice their English language skills. For the students, the long-term benefits of these programs are well documented.

As shown in the following chart, the region of Peel, in comparison to GTA municipalities, has experienced one of the largest increases in the population of school age children, has the second greatest number of children between 0-6 years of age, representing over 9% of the region's total population.

### Population Growth for School Age Children in the GTA

	Population	0 to 6			7 to 19		
		Years	Years	Years	Years	Years	Years
	Total in 2006	Number in 2006	Growth Rate 2001-2006	As % of Population	Number in 2006	Growth Rate 2001-2006	As % of Population
Toronto	2,503,280	187,875	-8.0%	7.5%	367,950	-2.0%	14.7%
Peel	1,159,405	107,315	9.0%	9.3%	221,855	17.0%	19.1%
York Region	892,715	75,955	14.0%	8.5%	169,590	18.0%	19.0%
Durham	561,260	46,750	-5.0%	8.3%	111,850	8.0%	19.9%
Halton	439,255	39,030	16.0%	8.9%	78,380	15.0%	17.8%
GTA	5,555,915	456,925	1.0%	8.2%	949,625	8.0%	17.1%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada: 2001 and 2006

Peel's argument is that inequitable funding, in the Learning Opportunities Grant and the Early Learning Grant, has limited the ability of the Board to expand these important early years programs to respond to the growth in the region's pre-school population.

### The time for real funding change is now

There is a very direct relationship between Peel's rapid population growth and demographic changes in region, to the new and increasing demands on the school system. Increased demand has occurred in special education, early years programming and ESL. Peel has worked hard to maximize available funds as creatively as possible to respond to growing student needs and focus on our goals in the *Report Card for Student Success*, but has been unable to adequately address the continued pressure for additional support.

During this period of fiscal restraint, it is particularly important that support to our families with children facing socio-economic challenges are restored and enhanced. Frankly,

every single negative thing we see in the newspaper about the impact of the economy is directly experienced in our schools. As parents lose jobs, money becomes tight in households, it gets harder to provide the necessities needed, for those with jobs the stress levels rise. Children bring all these experiences to school, as clearly as they bring their backpacks.

In these situations, schools, more than ever, need to create the stability in our society. Our staff are under more pressure to reach out, support and nurture children and families. From our breakfast programs, to our hubs and readiness centers, to our social workers and classroom teachers, school leaders and secretaries – all have already begun to see what happens on the news at night – plays out in real life at the school level. This is not a time to take away one single dollar for resources that help us meet the needs of children. It is a time for a new level of funding fairness – a level based on the data that demonstrates the real needs of Peel students.

Therefore, it is imperative that the Province revisit the basis on which critical resources intended for these children is allocated. We submit the following specific recommendations to help us achieve our shared goal of student success:

**Recommendations for restoring funding fairness to Peel students:**

- 1) Use the most current census data (2006) to allocate the demographic component of the Learning Opportunities Grant in order to capture demographic changes of boards. This would ensure that LOG is provided to school boards as intended, that is, to address the socio-economic challenges of their students.
- 2) Establish a consistent HNA for school boards that reflects the cost of delivering program to high needs students, and apply this amount to the number of high needs students being served by each boards. The Ministry should be able to capture the student information through OnSIS.
- 3) Revisit the allocation of the Early Years Grant to reflect pre-school populations of boards.

Each day, our staff, no matter what their role, balance off these severe funding inequities and help students achieve success. They give a lifetime of service to Peel children. It is their work that inspires us to do the best we can at the board table. Every day they help students find their smile within – and as trustees, we deeply appreciate their work, commitment and dedication. They cannot continue to work with the inequitable and worsening funding experienced by the Peel District School Board.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to provide our insight into how the 2009/2010 GSN can better meet the learning needs of Peel District School Board students. We hope we have made clear the real and data-proved needs of the students we serve, the need to base our funding on current data, and a rationale for these changes happening in a time of fiscal restraint.

The case for a reallocation of funding is clear and urgent. We want to offer the chance for our finance staff to meet with Ministry finance staff should any clarification be required. In the meantime, we look forward to your response.