

Remarks to the Board - Director John B. Kostoff
Overview of School Opening, 2009
September 29, 2009

I would like to begin by thanking everyone in this room and in our school communities for making this year's start-up a very successful one.

I am pleased to report that our enrolment has exceeded projections. I believe this to be a vote of confidence for this board. Our elementary enrollment has increased by 35 students above projections to a total of 52,735, while our secondary enrolment is 34,475; 84 students above projections. A few other start-up facts are:

- ▶ 90% of all primary classes capped at 20 students for a total of 1,046 classes;
- ▶ 10% of all primary classes capped at 23 students for a total of 116 classes;
- ▶ combined $\frac{3}{4}$ class capped at 23 students for a total of 62 classes;
- ▶ board-wide average class size for grades 4-8 is 24.9 in 1,250 classes
- ▶ 161 self-contained special education classes;
- ▶ No blended kindergarten classes;
- ▶ No triple grades and for the first time, no additional staff needed to achieve this.

As a result of our extremely accurate enrolment projections, we had minimal reorganization in our system; the lowest number of classes reorganized in some five years. This goes a long way toward an early and smooth transition for our students.

This year, we have opened new programs in French Immersion at two additional schools as well as Specialist High Skills Major programs at additional two secondary school sites bringing the total number of SHSM sites to seven. The programs and corresponding schools are:

- ▶ Arts and Culture at Iona and St. Edmund Campion,
- ▶ Construction, Environment, and ICT at St Paul,
- ▶ Health and Wellness at St. Francis Xavier and St. Marguerite D'Youville,
- ▶ Hospitality and Tourism at Ascension of Our Lord, Cardinal Leger, St Francis Xavier and St. Marcellinus,
- ▶ Transportation at St. Joseph.

We also opened an additional Newcomer Assessment and Welcome Centre at St. Isaac Jogues School in Brampton. This is the sister site to our current facility at St. Veronica School in Mississauga.

In addition, we opened four new Parent and Family Literacy Centers at Canadian Martyrs, St. Teresa of Avila, Holy Cross and St. Monica schools.

Our new programs are consistent core programs located in our neighborhood schools and I believe they help make Dufferin-Peel a very attractive secondary school option for Catholic families and those families with students attending our secondary schools under Open Access.

In the area of construction, we have completed nine projects involving renovations and site improvements this year, as we strive to ensure that our schools are safe, healthy, caring and inclusive places to learn and to work.

The board recently approved the new H1N1 Communication/Management Action Plan, which helps prepare us to deal with the challenges that this influenza may bring to our students and staff. We continue to work on, and fine-tune, our system-wide pandemic plan and that will be coming forward in the next few weeks.

Last year, we reorganized our Families of Schools, and the transition has been a smooth one. I thank the superintendents and the principals in those families, and the trustees, for the implementation of a more efficient and effective family of schools network. The feedback I am receiving is that this reorganization has worked out extremely well.

In the area of Curriculum, we will be bringing forward, within the next few months, our new gender policy, based on the direction of the government as well as the piloting of our homework policy

As well, we are looking at an early spring completion of the Year II System Goals, which will indicate great progress at each school towards achieving the goals that were brought forward two years ago.

The selection process to deal with textbooks and literature resources will be developed this year to provide a common selection of resources that will be used in our system. This is a significant task but one that trustees and senior staff have supported.

Our EQAO test results continue to demonstrate that we are moving progressively in areas of improvement and discussions will be taking place this year with regard to applied math at the secondary level through my office and Associate Director Borelli's office.

In addition, it is my intention to meet with administrators from both secondary and elementary schools where the EQAO results seemed to have reached a plateau. This will be an opportunity for an exchange of ideas and understandings to see what additional resources, supports, or processes should be considered to continue to move these schools towards greater success.

Trustees recently received the ICT Governance Review, conducted by a third party, which indicated support for our current ICT program, and policies.

This year, we will also bring forward the Green Report 2009-10, which will indicate various activities in which schools will be engaged. It will also bring a common understanding regarding recycling and reducing in our system as well as environmentally-friendly products for our schools.

Finally, over the last two years, staff has been working diligently at developing a community history that shows the role that the Catholic community made in the formation of the Region of Peel and Dufferin County. We will unveil this curriculum resource for both the elementary and secondary schools in early spring as part of our Catholic Education Week celebrations. It will be the pivotal resource in our schools, so our students will have a greater understanding of the communities they live in, the history of those communities, significant people, and events that helped shape those communities. The result, hopefully, is that the Region of Peel and Dufferin County will not simply be perceived simply as large regions created by acts of government, but rather our students will understand the deep roots and importance of local communities our region and county.

With reference to the ARC process completed last year, I am pleased to report that those schools that were designated as receiving schools have all demonstrated an increased retention of students.

In the area of transportation, the transportation department office traditionally fields a high number of calls this time of year and, serving 395 schools, operating 1,312 buses, and utilizing over 3,400 bus stops. In transporting some 55,000 riders daily, 21,000 of which are Dufferin-Peel students, there are always challenges to manage. Currently the transportation department fields 800 calls in September and over 1,200 emails per day with a staff of 22.

Transportation staff has sought to respond to parents' concerns as quickly as possible. Staff is dealing with the Efficiency and Effectiveness review recommendations, which are directly tied to continued funding in the transportation area.

Challenges to our system remain:

- ▶ the increased cost of LTD for our system,
 - ▶ the gap in benefits between what the government provides and our actual current benefit costs,
 - ▶ increasing needs in Special Education, while partially addressed this year by government funding,
- significant items still remain that we would like to see addressed,
- ▶ ongoing budgetary issues that continue to challenge our board.
 - ▶ possible additional costs related to H1N1 this year.

This year, we were able to complete the Mid-Management Job Evaluation Process and we are in the process of beginning the CUPE Job Evaluation Process.

Many of the financial issues and challenges that the board will be dealing with will come up in our annual MPP Briefing Session scheduled for October 13.

This board remains eager to start full-day JK and awaits Ministry direction and funding in this area.

In an organization of some 87,000 students, 10,000 number of employees, 145 school sites and a budget of \$800 million dollars (well over 1 billion dollars if we factored in our capital budget), it would be impossible to say that we will not encounter challenges during the opening of schools in September.

I can report with confidence that, from an administrative point of view, this has been a very positive start up and I look forward to reporting back on many of the successes and the initiatives that the board of trustees has supported in the year to come.

JBK/September 29, 2009