

The Trustee Report

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Parents as Partners

The contribution of many parents and grandparents as volunteers in its schools is valued by the Durham District School Board. Each year a volunteer of distinction from each school is recognized by the Board. Last year's recipients included:

Goodwood P. S.
Salina Yee

Joseph Gould P. S.
Stacy Kearley

Quaker Village P. S.
Bobbi-Leigh Pick

Scott Central P. S.
Jennifer Wilson

Uxbridge Public School
Tara Rosen

Uxbridge S. S.
Heidi Goodman

Beaverton Public School
Janice Teel



McCaskill's Mills P. S.
Cyndi Wolsey

Brock High School
Paul Koot

Sunderland Public School
Maureen O'Malley-Smith

Once again this year, the Board is planning to celebrate the work of our school volunteers. I look forward to recognizing these special people.

Thorah Central P. S.
Laura-Marie Leathley

K.D. Munroe Scholarship

One of the pleasant tasks extended to school trustees is recognizing the special achievement of staff & students.

The K.D. Munroe scholarship was established to recognize

the 37 years of dedication to public education by a former Director of Education.

This award recognizes a student who models exceptional persistence and work ethic in

achieving an excellent academic record.

At the Board's June meeting, I was thrilled to join in the presentation of this scholarship to **Dean LeBlanc**, a Brock High School graduate.

2009 / 2010 DDSB Budget

After a good deal of debate, last June, the DDSB passed an operating budget of \$623,521,610 for the 2009 / 2010 school year. This balanced budget falls within the funding grants provided by the Ministry of Education. While this budget reflects increased expenditure over the previous school year, the cost of wage settlements exceeds the budget increase necessitating reduced expenditure in other

aspects of the budget. Less will be spent next year on classroom computers, library books and textbooks.

Given the threat of a flu pandemic, additional funds were devoted to increased caretaking staff and environmentally friendly cleaning products.

The complement of teaching assistants was the source of considerable controversy during budget

deliberation. Because the DDSB's per pupil expenditure on special education exceeded the provincial average, the related provincial grant was reduced. The Board had to address this loss of funds. Consequently, while the overall number of teaching assistants provided in the previous year's budget was retained, the number of teaching assistants with specialized training in behaviour management was reduced.

"Programs for young children produce a 7:1 return on investment compared to a 1:1 payback from adult education."

Charles Pascal, 2009

Environmental Education

The Durham District School Board recently honoured 66 schools for achieving Ontario EcoSchool certification. The Ontario EcoSchools program provides the

opportunity to engage students in environmental education and hands on initiatives that make an environmentally friendly difference in our schools and our community.

Congratulations to Brock High School, Sunderland Public School and Scott Central Public School for achieving Ecoschool certification

Board Improvement Plan

Trustees are very interested in board and school performances on the provincial testing program (EQAO). Results for all publicly funded schools are available on line (www.eqao.com). Generally the results for the DDSB reflect continuing student improvement.

Trustees spend a good deal of time engaged with staff discussing these test results and related strategies to pursue improvement.

The Board Improvement Plan discussed at its September meeting addresses some of the

issues emerging from these discussions. As an example, this plan addresses the need for improved strategies designed to encourage improved reading and writing performance among young boys; a serious concern identified by the Board.

Early Years & Child Care

Over the past year, a working committee of staff and trustees examined a number of questions related to early years' education and child care. I was privileged to chair this committee. Stemming from this work are a number of initiatives designed to strengthen the school board's partnership with those services devoted to the support of young children. A formal partnership was

formed with the Durham Best Start Network and several program initiatives have been undertaken. Through this effort, "School's Cool" summer programs were offered in Cannington & Uxbridge and a "Parent & Family Literacy Centre" is now in operation at Beaverton Public School. All of the work stemming from this committee has been funded by provincial and federal grants at no cost to the DDSB.

There is a wealth of evidence that programs designed to better prepare young children for school will pay huge dividends in subsequent success at school. This work should also prove invaluable as the province moves to implement Charles Pascal's recommendations to the Premier on the implementation of full day kindergarten programs.



New School Construction

Working with a capital budget of nearly \$100 million this past year, the DDSB managed the construction of seventeen major school additions as

well as building four new elementary school and a high school. Locally this has meant the elimination of ten portables with new additions having opened at

Joseph Gould Public School in Uxbridge and McCaskill's Mills Public School in Cannington.

School Board Accountability

A current legislative proposal (Bill 177) before the provincial legislature is intended to ensure that school boards are held to a higher level of accountability. Provisions within the bill are meant to hold the board of elected trustees responsible not only for the careful management of public dollars but as well for continuous improvement in student achievement. School boards that fail to

account could face takeover by the province.

As one who believes in accountability, it is troubling that I have many questions about this proposed legislation.

Like you, I am outraged when I hear of abuses in expenditure by elected officials. Such behaviour leaves a black mark on everyone in the public system. Nonetheless, the Minister of Education may

be using a sweeping approach to address a few localized concerns.

The DDSB has a clear policy in place regarding financial regulation including trustee expense. Being accountable, my expense report, the highest among DDSB trustees is made public each year. Given the travel distance to the DDSB office and my commitment to full participation as trustee, I have no reservation about

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expense. Neither have I any concern that the current DDSB practices with regard to financial accounting will comply with more stringent regulation.

However, being held accountable for improved student performance is quite another issue. I wonder what mechanisms will be used to measure student performance. Surely there is much more to quality education than that measured by the annual provincial tests. I also worry that without taxing privileges, a school board might be handcuffed and unable to pursue necessary measures to influence improved student performance.

In my view, the election process and the law are established and legitimate mechanisms that hold trustees accountable. Moreover, elections align trustee accountability with local interests not those of a provincial agenda.

Trustees on the DDSB have discussed Bill 177 publicly and directed their concerns to the Minister of Education through the Ontario Public School Board Association.

School Transportation Policy

As your trustee, I deal with many concerns regarding school bus transportation. In rural Brock & Uxbridge, many families depend upon this service, one provided by Durham School Transportation Services (DSTS). Under the management of DSTS, the integration of bussing services for the Public & Catholic school boards continues to evolve. Over the past year, the DDSB formed a Transportation Committee to review its transportation policy and address some of the emerging issues. I welcomed the opportunity to chair this committee that reported to the Board in May.

Stemming from this work, DSTS has undertaken a commitment to regularly report to the Board all bus routes taking longer than one hour to complete. While there are situations where lengthy runs are unavoidable, the intent here is to ensure such runs are kept to a minimum.

The policy maintains a provision to accommodate families who have separated, provided the parents each live within the local school attendance area. The policy was modified to ensure that it is the will of both parents, to have children transported on a week about basis to both parents' homes.

Procedures to ensure that DSTS is fully aware of local weather conditions were examined. The Board feels assured that decisions regarding bus operation will be informed through timely contact with the regional police and township road maintenance officials.

A study to determine the implications of a more flexible transportation policy that would better accommodate child care needs has been undertaken. This study likely has greater implications for us in the north where there seems to be fewer child care options and a greater dependence upon school transportation service. I intend to stay connected with this work.