

Focused Service Delivery Budget

**Supporting a Sustainable Future for
Toronto Catholic District School Board**

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Introduction

On June 4, 2008 the Lieutenant Governor in Council issued an order which vested control and charge over the affairs of Toronto Catholic District School Board in the Minister of Education. Pursuant to subsections 2 (4) and 257.24 (2) of the Education Act, the Minister delegated power over the exercise and performance of the powers, duties and obligations of the Board to a Supervisor and Associate Supervisor.¹

The Terms of Reference under which the Supervision Team operates require it to take the measures necessary to bring the Toronto Catholic District School Board into “full and immediate compliance with the recommendations set out in the report entitled “*Enhancing Public Trust and Confidence*”² and prepare and implement a plan that returns the Board to a balanced financial position”.

The goal of supervision is to ensure that the Board emerges from the process as an organization clearly focused on its mission and well prepared to deal with future challenges in a financially stable position. While there must be significant emphasis on budgetary issues, attaining these objectives also requires the rebuilding of public trust and confidence in the political governance of the Board and the re-establishment of TCDSB’s rightful leadership position in the Catholic education community within Toronto and throughout the Province.

The initial steps required for the successful rebuilding of Toronto Catholic District School Board were detailed in *Strengthening Public Trust and Confidence: A Call to Stewardship and Service*.³ As a result of the initiatives proposed in this report significant inroads on the confidence and trust agenda were made. Since August 2008:

- a new policy governing Trustee Expense claims has been put in place;
- trustee expenses incurred since 2003 have been audited and arrangements made to recover ineligible reimbursements;

¹ Due to a potential pecuniary interest in matters related to the powers, duties, salaries, remuneration appointment and dismissal of teachers of the Board, authority over such matters was delegated to the Associate Supervisor. While this report is a joint report all budget decisions related to such matters have been solely decided by the Associate Supervisor.

² This report which contained recommendations for revisions to policies and procedures governing Trustee expenses was released on May 7, 2008. The full report can be accessed through the Board’s web-site at <http://www.tcdsb.org/trustees/Trustee%20Expenses/trusteeexpenses.htm>.

³ This report was originally released on August 26, 2008. The complete report is available on the Board web-site at <http://www.tcdsb.org/homePage/ministry%20supervision/supervision.htm#Reports>.

- a public delegation and decision-making process was designed for supervision;
- Community Advisory and Staff Liaison committees have been established to further enhance public participation in the supervision process;
- electronic versions of the Directors Bulletin and an E-News Service have been put in place to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication with parents, staff and the broader community;
- a new senior leadership team has been put in place;
- an additional student success leader has been appointed to assist with the Board Improvement Plan;
- CPIC representatives are in place and its Chair and Vice-Chair have been elected;
- an independent review of the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative structures and processes has been completed;
- a strategic planning process that will provide for organizational renewal over the next 24 months has been launched;
- the cost of political governance of the TCDSB has been brought into line with other school boards in the province;
- new by-laws to improve fiscal responsibility, political governance and enhance transparency in trustee expenditure reporting have been adopted;
- the Ward 8 trustee vacancy was filled in April 2009;
- the in-year operating budget of the TCDSB has been balanced;
- the accumulated deficit was reduced from nearly \$17M to approximately \$10M for 2008-2009;
- temporary constraints on political and administrative expenditures were put into place to ensure that deficit elimination was shared fairly by all constituencies.

Most importantly, the quality of our programs, the dedication and commitment of our staff and the achievements of our students continue to improve.

Parameters for the Staff Budget Plan

While these strategies have contributed significantly to the long-term health and stability of TCDSB, much remains to be done. The road ahead will build on the accomplishments of the past year and set the stage for a stable and successful future.

Set within the context of a strategic renewal process, the next phase of supervision must focus on three major themes:

- **realigning** our administrative and political structures with best practices and statutory requirements;
- **refocusing** our programs and services to better support the achievement and well being of our students; and
- **reinvesting** in programs, services and supports required to restore TCDSB to its role as leader in the Catholic education community.

The specific areas that we believe must be addressed in the coming year are outlined in greater detail in *Realign, Refocus and Reinvest: Ensuring a Sustainable Future for Toronto Catholic District School Board*.⁴

To support these initiatives the Supervision Team instructed staff to develop a budget plan that addresses the critical elements required for strategic renewal. While balancing the budget through greater effectiveness and efficiency are important goals the staff was requested to ensure that their plan also reflects the stability required for future sustainability. Therefore, staff was directed to develop a proposal which:

- provides for the realignment, refocusing and reinvestment necessary for strategic renewal;
- balances the operational budget in 2009-2010;
- significantly reduces the accumulated deficit from its current level of approximately \$10M in 2009-2010, and
- eliminates the accumulated deficit and creates future surpluses as of the 2010-2011 budget cycle.

⁴ A complete copy of this report is available on the Board web-site at <http://www.tcdsb.org/homePage/ministry%20supervision/supervision.htm#Reports>.

Focused Service Delivery

Staff tabled its response to these directions on May 27, 2009. Entitled *2009-2010 Proposed Budget: A Focused Delivery Model*,⁵ staff proposed a three year plan to address the structural, program effectiveness and services efficiency issues required to ensure a sustainable future.

Key highlights of the proposal include:

- reducing class sizes in grades 4-8 to met the provincial standard of 24.5 students per teacher by 2011-2012;
- increasing staffing to reflect the continued growth in the secondary panel;
- providing dedicated support to English as a Second Language learners;
- renewing the technology infrastructure that supports schools and administrative activities;
- aligning elementary school staffing with projected enrolment declines;
- restructuring the special education service model to reflect provincial requirements and better meet identified needs;
- matching expenditures on learning materials to provincial grants;
- introducing greater efficiencies through consolidation of non-instructional use of space, reduced staff travel time between schools and implementation of organizational and process improvements recommended in the Deloitte review,⁶
- continuing the restraint on vacant administrative positions and furniture and equipment spending; and
- launching an aggressive capital program to reduce the number of portables in the system to under 400.

Taken together these measures will produce an operating surplus in 2009-2010 and eliminate the accumulated deficit by the following year. As a result

⁵ The full report is available on the Board web-site in the addendum of the May 27, 2009 meeting of the Supervision Team at www.tcdsb.org/trustees/Agendas/agendas.html#Supervision.

⁶ This report is posted on the Board website at

of the plan the Board is projected to have an overall surplus of slightly more than \$2M for additional reinvestment in 2010-2011, rising to \$3.3M the following year.

Issues and Concerns

To ensure transparency, a public presentation of the staff budget proposal was made at the May 27, 2009 meeting of the Board. In addition all stakeholders were invited to attend and listen to discussions at consultation meetings with the Catholic Parent Involvement Committee, the Staff/Union Liaison Committee, the Community Advisory Committee, the Special Education Advisory Committee and Trustees of the Board. A delegation evening at which community members could raise issues and concerns was held on June 17, 2009. Finally, individuals who were unable to avail themselves of the forgoing opportunities were encouraged to provide written submissions regarding the staff proposal.

As of June 19, 2009:

- six information/discussion sessions were held;
- ten presentations were made at the delegation evening; and
- 48 written submissions were received.

In addition staff and the supervision team received numerous emails regarding various aspects of the proposed budget.

Concerns raised through these processes focused on 5 major themes.

1. Consultation and Decision-making Process

Some advisory committee members expressed concern that the staff budget proposal was developed in too short a period of time, without the benefit of extensive community consultation and excluded trustees from the decision-making process. As a result the proposal may not adequately reflect the priorities of stakeholders.

2. Elimination of the Accumulated Deficit

Concern was also raised that eliminating the remaining accumulated deficit of \$10M by the end of the 2010-2011 was overly aggressive. Since deficit reduction can only come by not investing in programs and services that would otherwise benefit students, the Supervision team was requested to explore alternatives. Suggestions included seeking forgiveness of the debt, obtaining "bailout loans" and/or spreading the

debt reduction plan over a longer period of time so that other priorities could be addressed.

3. *Reduced Staffing Levels*

The net reduction of teaching positions in the first year of the three year plan raised questions regarding the impact on access to programs and services. Fewer teachers, it was suggested would lead to reduced service for students. Similar observations were made for support staff reductions that would accompany fewer teachers, especially in the elementary panel.

4. *Revisions to the Special Education Delivery Model*

Concerns regarding revisions to the special education delivery model were twofold. On the one hand, it was argued that since supports for special education are inadequate, any reduction of teachers would have a detrimental effect on the Board's most vulnerable students. On the other hand a number of schools expressed concern that the relocation of programs and teachers from their schools would negatively impact their school community.

5. *Arrowsmith Programming*

By far the largest number of submissions related to the continuation of the Arrowsmith programming. Petitioners argued that it was highly successful, effected permanent change in the cognitive capacities of its 'graduates', and could not be replaced by any other LD intervention strategies. If the privately operated program could not be continued it was suggested that it be phased out rather than cancelled and that the board explore the possibility of developing its own programming model based on the principles of neuroplasticity. Others suggested that the Board explore cost sharing/cost recovery models that would permit Arrowsmith to be continued, rather than force parents to transfer to private schools to obtain the service.

Other suggestions for cost savings included additional administrative and support staff reductions, eliminating the over-expenditure in transportation, setting the maximum expenditures permitted in school operations at the revenue received and purchasing textbooks and learning materials through BOOKSWAP.

Our View

We very much appreciate the observations, suggestions and concerns raised through the information-sharing/consultation/delegation processes. They provide an additional lens for the evaluation of the staff budget proposal.

If critically and objectively examined, most of the issues raised have been, or will be, addressed within the three year time-frame in the proposed budget. While the solutions may not be exactly those proposed by delegates or occur later in the process than desired, most concerns have been anticipated.

Consultation and Decision Making

We share the view that the process used for the development of this budget proposal is not one that a Board should employ over the long term. Wide-ranging consultation, meaningful involvement of stakeholders, as well as sufficient time and opportunity for dialogue and reflection are the hallmark of resource allocation processes that generate trust and confidence.

The staff proposal recognizes that these principles must be the foundation for the process on a go forward basis. Therefore, they have proposed that the 2010-11 budget process begin in November, conclude the following June, be iterative in nature and provide multiple opportunities for stakeholder input.

While such a process is essential for “normal times”, the first phase of any restructuring process, as many have become aware from reorganization occurring throughout our economy, is far from normal. For future sustainability this phase must:

- address structural adjustments that are the underlying causes of fiscal deficits;
- enhance the effectiveness of core programs; and
- invest in efficiencies that enhance future success and restore infrastructure which threatens system viability.

These elements form the core of the 2009-2010 portion of the budget proposal. With the restoration of true “choice” in 2010-2011 the current information sharing/discussion session and delegation process will be replaced with a far richer consultation and priority setting process.

We also agree that it would be preferable to have budget decisions made by elected rather than appointed officials. However, that is not the nature of the supervision process. The order in council that removes this possibility was, in a large part, due to the Board's unwillingness to implement its deficit management program. Instead it significantly increased an initial deficit of \$4M to almost \$19M by 2007. Barring a Cabinet decision that supervision is no longer necessary, the power to make financial decisions cannot be restored until the audited financial statements demonstrate that the Board is in a balanced financial position. The earliest this could occur is November 2010.

Despite the foregoing, provision was made to seek Trustee input into the staff budget proposal through information/consultation sessions, written submissions and informal discussion of proposed initiatives.

Administrative and Operational Efficiencies

We also concur that the burden of deficit reduction should be equitably shared, that efficiencies in governance, administration, and school operations which do not threaten the ability of the system to provide core supports are preferable to service reductions, and that the approach to deficit elimination must be measured. The staff proposal incorporates these principles.

Spending on administrative and governance activities are \$23.5M. At 2.6% of \$910M in planned expenditures it is below the provincial average of 3% of education expenditures. It is also well below the accepted standard for service organizations.

Over the past year nearly \$1M was eliminated from this budget as a result of changes to trustee reimbursement policies and freezes on administrative vacancies for which direct funding was not available. The staff budget proposal continues these initiatives. More importantly, the proposed budget calls for implementation of the recommendations of the Deloitte & Touche LLP review of organizational effectiveness in TCDSB. This review identified 22 key issues related to process effectiveness, organizational capacity, strategic focus and optimization of the Board's information technology systems. These improvements are expected to increase efficiency and effectiveness as they are implemented. Since actual estimates have not yet been developed, projected savings are not incorporated in the budget plan. This will occur through the 2009-2010 revised budget process and the 2010-2011 budget development.

Approximately 9.4% of the budget or slightly over \$85 M supports school operations and maintenance. Historically the Board has spent more on this function than it receives in provincial grants.

Although there are a variety of factors that account for the over-expenditure in this category, the relatively large number of small schools operated by the board and the non-instructional use of surplus space account for a significant portion. Initiatives have been put in place to review small schools, consolidate administrative space and sell surplus facilities. Savings of \$3.8M are incorporated in the staff proposal to reflect these initiatives. Savings from future consolidations will be reflected as they are expected to be realized.

Historically the transportation budget has also been over expended. Much of this is also due to the greater distance between schools than our coterminous board and the ever increasing cost of fuel escalators in our contracts. Many efficiencies have been introduced to manage these costs. Buses are scheduled for double or triple runs, bell times have been adjusted to provide the opportunity to use the same bus more often and many buses have been taken “off the road”. The most significant initiative in this area is the formation of a transportation consortium with the Toronto District School Board. This initiative will not only help reduce cost, but will also enable the TCDSB to qualify for efficiency and effectiveness grants that will significantly reduce the difference between revenues and expenditures.

Finally, the approach taken to the elimination of the accumulated deficit has been gradual and measured. The problem emerged over a number of years; and the solution is also seen as a gradual one. In the first year of supervision, the deficit was reduced by slightly more than \$6M. The second year adds a further \$7M reduction, while re-investing \$3.2M that could have been cut. The final \$2.3M is eliminated in the 2010-2011 budget.

Reduced Staffing Levels

Significant concern was expressed that the staffing reductions proposed by staff would result in reduction of service to students. However, when the proposal is objectively examined, most staffing changes are reassignments to priority areas, rather than “cuts to service”. In fact the number of secondary school teachers actually increases by 29 positions in 2009-2010. Although it appears larger, the net number of elementary positions eliminated, equals the number of staff required as a result of enrolment decline. In future years, the number of teaching positions actually increases despite a continued decline in elementary enrolment.

Revisions to the Special Education Model

As stated in our report of May 22, 2009:

“The purpose of supervision is to ensure that administrative, governance and support structures are aligned with organizational goals and that the Board emerges from the process clearly focused on its mission and well prepared to deal with future challenges in a financially stable position.”

Future sustainability which ensures high levels of achievement for all students is our paramount goal. We have concentrated our efforts in order to achieve this end. Our staff was asked to review our programs to see if resources both human and financial were best organized to ensure and enhance student achievement. In particular, the staff was asked to assess program strengths and weaknesses to see where there is a need to realign, to reassess and to reinvest so that the goal of increased student achievement can be achieved.

This review began with programs and services for our most vulnerable students. In reviewing the delivery of Special Education programs and services as well as taking into account a funding increase of \$1.8M for the current budget year, it was verified that TCDSB spends \$17M more than it receives for these services. Also, it was confirmed that the teacher entitlement was in excess of the norm by some 67 teachers.

An analysis of the teacher assignments indicated that 21 of the 67 teachers were charged to Special Education whereas they should have been charged to other appropriate funding sources. Of the 21, 15 teachers were teaching ESL and 6 were teaching JLI/5th Block. Further, there was a decline of 132 students in Special Education over the 2006/2007 enrolment. Declines in enrolment should have resulted in the reduction of teachers, however adjustments were never made. Therefore, at the minimum, 21 of the 67 teachers recommended for redeployment relate to either staff adjustments not made due to an enrolment decline or teachers being charged to an inappropriate funding source. Given this reality, we concluded that these 21 teachers should be re-deployed and charged to other appropriate funding sources.

A further analysis of the deployment of the remaining 46 teachers recommended for re-deployment from Special Education programs indicated that although assigned to Special Education duties, they did not have a register with any students assigned to them.

In May 2009, staff presented a proposal to SEAC for Focused Instruction and Intensive Support for All Students with Special Education Needs. The strategic focus of this realignment of service has three goals:

- a high level of student achievement;

- reduced gaps in student achievement; and
- Increased confidence in publicly funded education.

Further, this realignment of service is intended to:

- develop structures to support more effective teaching and learning practices;
- emphasize teaching and learning over formal documentation;
- provide supports for all students with inclusion as a priority;
- ensure that all educators are responsible for all students;
- support student and family engagement in the educational process;
- provide equitable access to education for students with special education needs;

These realigned strategic directions allow for a more effective delivery of service.

They also will:

- create an additional special education regional support centre for a total of five to match field operations
- establish consistent and accountable multidisciplinary teams for each of the five regions
- provide system coordination and automation for Special Equipment Amount (SEA) claims
- provide central expertise, coordination and reporting for Special Incident Portion (SIP) high needs funding
- geographically redistribute Intensive Support Programs (ISP) to reflect shifting student needs and demographics
- ensure funding integrity

- focus on best practices and increasing capacities to deliver differentiated instruction

In addition, there will be reinvestment in Special Education services to:

- create new Intensive Support Programs (ISPs)
- establish an Autism Services Department
- reduce formal assessment wait times for students and families, and
- improve supports for Assistive Technology (AT)

Having reviewed the staff report and recommendations on the realignment, refocus and re-investment of Special Education services, as well as the concerns and issues raised in e-mails, input from advisory groups, delegations and other submissions, we have concluded that the reassignment of 46 Special Education teachers without students on their register is justified.

Arrowsmith Programming

Of the myriad of decisions required for the 2009-2010 budget, none have generated more controversy than Arrowsmith programming. On the one hand there is the passionate commitment of the families whose children are receiving this programming support. On the other, is the lack of ***comparative evidence*** for enhanced impact on results for which school boards are accountable.

Arrowsmith Programming was introduced at the TCDSB in the late 1990's. The program was developed by Barbara Arrowsmith Young and is designed to remediate learning disabilities by strengthening several cognitive skills that affect learning. Students spend 50% of their school day engaging in a number of cognitive exercises delivered in three formats – pen and paper, auditory and computer. Arrowsmith School describes it as a 3 to 4 year cognitive program. Most students attend for a minimum period of 2 years. The exercises target particular processing deficits such as spatial reasoning, motor symbol sequencing, memory for information or instruction and symbol recognition. The cognitive exercises have limited connections to Ministry of Education curriculum. Students miss 50% of instructional time in the core curriculum areas. There is no specific homework component to the program. TCDSB is the only publicly supported school system offering Arrowsmith programming. Otherwise, the program is offered in other private school settings in North America with tuitions averaging over \$20,000 per year.

Currently, 64 students receive Arrowsmith programming support at 7 locations

within the TCDSB. It has produced positive results, is highly supported by parents whose children have engaged in it, and they are understandably passionate about it.

However, for most it appears to be the first experience of programs outside the regular TCDSB classroom. For example, of the 64 students enrolled in the program, 30% are from outside the system. None of these students or their families have had any experience with the programming supports for Learning Disabled students offered to the other 5,000 pupils identified as learning disabled. A further 27 (42%) entered the program directly from regular placements in TCDSB classrooms and also have no first hand experience with Intensive Supports for the Learning Disabled. Finally two students in the program have never been identified as learning disabled.

The contract between Arrowsmith and TCDSB involves an annual license fee of approximately \$175,000. In addition, the teachers who deliver the program are specifically trained by Arrowsmith at a one-time cost of \$4,000 per teacher. There are currently seven TCDSB teachers who are trained to deliver the program. The other costs involved are for materials purchased annually. Excluding the teacher training cost of \$4,000 the additional annual cost per class of 10 students is over \$28,000.

The contract between Arrowsmith and TCDSB terminates as of June 30, 2009. Renewal of the contract must be considered not only within the context of the 2008-2009 budget but also on the basis of comparative program effectiveness.

Currently, TCDSB has approximately 5,000 students receiving LD programming supports throughout the system. Teachers use a variety of teaching techniques to address the needs of these students. Some of these students are placed in closed class settings, others are in withdrawal settings and others fully integrated. The goal is always to have the students reach a stage where they are fully integrated and able to function effectively within a social and educational environment. Research has shown that students learn best when integrated with peers.⁷

The issue that needs to be weighed is not whether Arrowsmith produces positive results, but whether it is more successful than other Learning Disability programming used within the TCDSB. To date, we have not been made aware

⁷ TCDSB also provides programming called Empower which is based on its collaborative research with the Hospital for Sick Children. It is a research-based remedial reading program which is classroom-based and teacher-directed and directly linked to the Ontario curriculum. It is a combination of direct teaching and dialogue based metacognitive exercises. A one-time cost of \$1,100 is incurred for the supply costs of teacher training. Once the teacher has been trained, the program can be delivered at a one-time material cost of \$3,000. The program has proven to be highly successful. It is offered in 3 Ontario district school boards as well as the Provincial Demonstration schools and the Hospital for Sick Children.

of any comparative research studies. The only comparative data is from a Board analysis which suggests that the TCDSB's own program supports have a greater impact on measures of performance than Arrowsmith.

In recognition of the lack of comparative research evidence, staff recommended that intake into the program be suspended and that a formal evaluation of the approach be initiated. TCDSB approached Arrowsmith to initiate a joint partnership similar to the Hospital for Sick Children initiative to evaluate program effectiveness. The offer of a shared partnership was rejected by Arrowsmith on two occasions.

We are not alone in our concerns. A 1999 TCDSB staff report on Arrowsmith programming also raised issues regarding peer reviewed evidence on the effectiveness for students with Learning Disabilities, and limited connection to the Ontario Curriculum among the reasons for its discontinuing the program at St. Patrick and St Theresa Shrine schools.

Earlier this year, Toronto District School Board requested their staff to evaluate and compare five learning disability programs with the possibility of their introduction as part of that Board's programming resources. A review committee composed of:

- Supervising Principals of Special Education;
- Senior Manager-Professional Support Services;
- 4 Co-ordinators of Communication Exceptionality; and
- Psychology and Speech-Language Pathology staff

prepared a report on five available programs: Fast ForWard, Cogmed, Arrowsmith, Wasdell SMaRts and Empower. The report reviewed the research available on all five programs. For Arrowsmith programming the authors concluded that none of the studies met the Quality Research Standard adopted for their program evaluation.

The report's summary comment on Arrowsmith states:

“There has been no research that meets the Quality Research Standard” or any that has been published in a peer journal. There were no control groups, and the research lacked evidence that skills are transferred effectively. Consequently, the current body of research doesn't allow for an objective endorsement of the effectiveness of the program.”

The full report is available on the TDSB website.⁸

⁸ A complete copy of the TDSB report is available at www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/programs/special_education/docs/090511.pdf - 2009-05-20

Given that:

- there is no available research which proves that Arrowsmith programming is more effective than the other LD programming offered by TCDSB;
- that the majority of families whose children are enrolled in the program have limited comparative experience with other TCDSB Learning Disability supports;
- disability profiles of students receiving Arrowsmith programming mirror those of the other LD students in the system;
- current LD programs are continuously being realigned and refocused to best meet individual LD student needs;
- students currently receiving Arrowsmith programming through their special education placements at TCDSB would remain in the same placements, locations and with the same teachers in the next school year; and
- Arrowsmith has expressed no interest in a shared partnership with TCDSB for a comparative evaluation of the impact of its approach;

we have decided that the contract with Arrowsmith will not be renewed.

Students currently receiving Arrowsmith programming will not have a change in placement. Rather they will receive different LD programming and services in the student's current placement. As with all students receiving intensive support, programming and services will be adapted to the specific learning needs of the child.

To facilitate the transition, parents of children currently receiving Arrowsmith programming will be contacted by the principal of their child's school and requested to attend a meeting at the school in September 2009 for a consultation about LD programming and services that are available.

After the consultation is complete an Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be developed and, as required by Ontario Regulation 181/98, will be provided to parents.

Moving Forward

We appreciate that whenever changes are made to the manner in which programs and services are delivered, adjustment can be difficult. We also recognize that there will be those who believe they have been requested to carry an unfair share of the burden of establishing the conditions for a successful future. These concerns must be acknowledged and addressed with understanding and compassion as we move through the implementation phase.

It is our fervent hope that all parties will embrace the recommendations contained in this report so that Toronto Catholic District School Board can continue to serve its students in a manner that provides for the best possible educational experience. As noted in another context:

“by exercising discipline today, the Board achieves flexibility in the future in order to ensure that it is able to deliver quality programs and services.”

To support these directions the budget proposed by staff on May 27, 2009 in the report entitled *2009-2010 Proposed Budget: A Focused Delivery Model* is approved.