

**Realign, Refocus and Reinvest:
Ensuring a Sustainable Future for the
Toronto Catholic District School Board**

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Introduction

Toronto's Catholic schools pride themselves on being schools with a difference. Rooted in, and permeated by Catholic beliefs, a committed, competent and caring staff strive to create a culture that supports the highest levels of student achievement and produces learners who are:

- discerning believers formed in the Catholic faith community who celebrate the signs and sacred mysteries of God's presence through word, sacrament, prayer, forgiveness, reflection and moral living;
- effective communicators who speak, write and listen honestly and sensitively, responding critically in light of gospel values;
- reflective, creative and holistic thinkers who solve problems and make responsible decisions with an informed moral conscience for the common good;
- self-directed, responsible, life-long learners who develop and demonstrate their God-given potential;
- collaborative contributors who find meaning, dignity and vocation in work which respects the rights of all and contributes to the common good;
- caring family members who attend to family, school, parish, and the wider community;
- responsible citizens who give witness to Catholic social teaching by promoting peace, justice and the sacredness of human life.

Fostering these goals ensures that not only are we schools with a difference, but schools that make a difference.

Our success speaks for itself:

- every day over 92,000 students are encouraged, supported and challenged to reach their full potential in a safe and welcoming faith community at our 200 schools;
- during the past year our schools were the choice of 80% of all students eligible to attend catholic schools;

- almost 90% of our elementary school graduates chose to continue their education in Catholic secondary school; and
- applications to most of our secondary schools continue to exceed our school capacities;

We are clearly the system of choice for Catholic families in Toronto, and at times beyond.

Our programs are among the most innovative in the province:

- during the last year exemplary practice awards were presented to 10 elementary and secondary schools for their efforts to enhance and improve learning through bold new approaches that make a difference in the lives of their students;
- the programs at our specialized arts schools continue to be among the most sought after in the GTA and continue to graduate leaders in all media;
- our international baccalaureate and advanced placement programs offer internationally recognized opportunities for development.

Our teachers and support staff are recognized as among the most creative and committed in their professions:

- five of our teachers were selected by the Appawapiskat Board of Education to develop and deliver programs to assist their teachers in promoting literacy among first nations pupils;
- teachers at Neil McNeil were recipients of the 2009 Premier's Award for Teaching Excellence;
- a Child and Youth Care worker at St Joseph's College School received the Krista Sepp Memorial Award recognizing excellence among counselors from across the province;
- a member of the Community Relations Department was given the 2009 Volunteer Award from the Government of Ontario for her work with the city's Latin American Community.

Most importantly, the achievement of our students continues to improve in all areas:

- grade 3 reading scores in Toronto's Catholic schools now surpass the provincial average;
- results for grade 3 and grade 6 writing are consistently higher than the average in the province;
- grade 9 math scores in the academic level have increased by 7 % from the previous year and those in the applied level by 10% over the last five years;
- Special Needs Students have seen their writing scores improve by a total of 17% since 2003;
- students from all our schools continue to be recognized through provincial, national and international honours ranging from Canadian Parents for French and the National Society of Black Engineers to international assistance in Africa and India;
- The number of student successfully graduating from our school continues to increase.

A shared vision among educators, parents and community members and the strong partnership between home, church and school make the achievement of these successes possible. Labour stability achieved through agreements with all 17 employee groups ensures that this focus can continue uninterrupted.

While there is much to celebrate we recognize and accept the continuous challenge to improve the quality of programs and to increase student achievement beyond current levels. Gaps must be closed. Opportunities must be seized and expanded and success must be available for all.

Achieving these goals requires programs clearly focused on student achievement, services and supports fully aligned with strategic directions, and investments that sustain key objectives. These three themes will guide the second phase of the supervision process.

The Road Ahead

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.

As noted in our inaugural report - ***Strengthening Public Trust and Confidence: A Call to Stewardship and Service*** achieving this goal requires a multi-faceted, multi-year approach which:

- ensures that high levels of achievement for all students is the guiding principle for all actions and decisions;
- enhances the capacity of trustees and staff to support the primary purpose of the Board and permits system effort to be consistently directed thereto;
- focuses governance on system-wide policy matters; and
- addresses issues that strained public confidence in the Board and reduced staff morale.

Significant inroads have been made on this agenda. Since June 2008:

- a new policy governing Trustee Expense claims has been put in place;
- all trustee expenses since 2003 have been audited and arrangements made to recover ineligible reimbursements;
- 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 appointed;
- an additional student success leader has been appointed to assist with the Board Improvement Plan;

- CIPIC representatives have been elected and a new Chair has been put in place;
- 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; and
- 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;

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.

Strategic Renewal

In order to achieve these objectives we have requested the Director of Education to launch a strategic renewal process. Over the next 24 months we will examine all facets of the organization to ensure that our vision, mission, structures and processes all contribute to the fullest extent possible to our primary goal of improving student achievement and ensuring the well being of each and every person entrusted to our care.

A Strategic Renewal Committee, chaired by the newly appointed Director of Education, will coordinate the strategic renewal process. Over the next 24 months it will lead us through a re-examination of our programs, services and supports to ensure that they all contribute to our mission: to nurture the Catholic community; to improve student achievement and learning; and to build capacity to lead and to learn.

In the initial phase, the Committee will:

- build an understanding and commitment to renewal among all the board's constituencies;
- develop a comprehensive plan with both short-term and long-term goals for release to the community by the end of June 2009;
- provide TCDSB stakeholders with opportunities for input through established advisory groups as well as regular progress updates on the TCDSB website;
- engage external expertise through consultants at appropriate stages in the implementation process to sure that the objectives of the plan are met.

A Superintendent of Education will be designated to lead and coordinate this process.

In developing the strategic renewal plan, the Supervision Team has requested the Committee to 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 and innovator in the Catholic education community.

We have much of which we can be proud. However, as good stewards we must also strive to ensure that what we do today results in an even better tomorrow.

Realigning Supports

The primary purpose of any school board is fostering the achievement and well being of its students. In order to achieve this objective the systems that support the achievement agenda must be fully aligned with best practices for four major reasons.

First, schools must be organized and teachers must be assigned so that the range of programs and services required to promote high levels of achievement are available to all students. Without such alignment equity of outcomes is difficult to achieve.

Second, a board's governance process determines the core objectives to be achieved and strongly influences the culture within which goals are pursued. Unless these processes are system directed, respectful and mutually supportive, the focus, trust and confidence necessary for success are difficult to establish.

Third, a board's administrative structure provides the information and coordination for teachers and schools in pursuit of their mandate. In addition, they assign and monitor the fiscal and human resources necessary for students to be able to achieve at the highest level. If these structures do not reflect best practices, efforts are too easily dissipated.

Finally, support systems must be structured in the most effective and efficient manner possible. Otherwise, resources are diverted from our primary mission to serve students.

While the primary driver of achievement and well being of students is what happens between teachers and their pupils, the design of support structures can enhance or detract from that priority. Therefore the next phase of the supervision process will focus on improvement in three major areas.

Board Administration and Decision Making

The Ministry of Education recently established a program of operational reviews for School Boards across the province. The purpose of these reviews is to assess opportunities to enhance management capacity, process effectiveness and organizational structures of school boards and to identify best practices that can be implemented across the province.

In the fall of 2008, the Supervision Team requested the Ministry of Education to conduct an in-depth organizational review of the Toronto Catholic District School

Board focused on three functional areas: Business Services; Human Resources; and Planning and Facilities, as well as the supports provided to these areas by the Information Technology, Employee Relations and Continuing Education departments. The objective of the project was to provide the Supervision Team with:

1. a current state assessment of the capacity of key processes and organizational structures within TCDSB;
2. issues that need to be addressed and opportunities for change;
3. recommendations for improvement; and
4. a plan for implementation including recommended timelines and the resources required to effect the change.

The report concluded that, while staff of the Board are skilled, committed and knowledgeable, opportunities exist to improve:

- process effectiveness through the redesign of time-consuming manual effort, the elimination of duplication and more efficient sequencing;
- organizational capacity through redesign of areas where legacy decisions have led to organizational fragmentation;
- strategic focus by concentrating the efforts of the senior leadership on system priorities rather than transactional management; and
- coordination and effectiveness through optimization of the Board's information technology systems.

The report identifies 22 key issues that should be addressed by the end of 2010. The full report from Deloitte and Touche - LLP is available on the Board's web site at www.tcdsb.org. Implementation of these recommendations will be among the major priorities assigned to the Strategic Renewal Committee.

Board Governance

On May 1, 2009, the Trustees of the TCDSB submitted a proposal to the Supervision Team outlining a process to restore control of the Board to locally elected officials.

Moving Forward Together acknowledges that most of the difficulties experienced by the Board over the past year are the result of an “institution on the wrong track”. The trustees further note that political processes bred an atmosphere of mistrust, an absence of mutual respect and a lack of commitment to common objectives.

In April 2009, the Governance Review Committee established by the Minister submitted its report entitled ***School Board Governance – A Focus on Student Achievement***. In response to the committee recommendations, legislation has been tabled in the Provincial Legislature which deals with a number of these issues such as, a Code of Conduct, a mandatory training program for trustees, a clearer definition of the role of trustees and the Director of Education, and a trustee focus on student achievement.

To support these directions and the trustees’ proposal to begin the road to restored governance we will honour their requests for:

- improved training on their role and responsibilities especially as it relates to the achievement agenda;
- assistance to develop effective strategies for working together as a governance team; and
- specific projects that demonstrate the willingness and capability of trustees to undertake meaningful system tasks.

Progress on these objectives will be evaluated to determine how the role of trustee should evolve during supervision.

Declining Enrollment

Over the past 10 years enrollment at the TCDSB has decreased by over 9,000 pupils. The majority of this decline has been at the elementary level where enrollment is expected to continue to fall until 2012 at which point a modest increase is expected. Secondary enrollments are increasing, but will also begin to decline by 2013.

Toronto Catholic District School Board has traditionally operated smaller schools than other boards in the GTA. The Dufferin Peel CDSB, for example, has almost one-third fewer schools for nearly the same population as TCDSB. While parents are often strongly attached to such “small schools” they pose two

difficulties for the achievement agenda. On the one hand, they are far more expensive to operate, thus diverting resources to administrative and operating expenses. On the other hand, they often lack the critical mass to support the range of programs and services necessary for the achievement agenda.

Furthermore, the Board has been reluctant to make the adjustment to teaching and support staff to reflect this shift in enrollment. This misalignment has resulted in the inability to direct resources to those areas in the greatest need of support.

The Supervision Team has requested staff to address these imbalances in the operational and budget plans for the next two years.

Refocusing on Priorities

Organizations are driven by the priorities they establish and the strategies they develop to achieve them.

The achievement agenda demands that the focus of all programs and services be the unswerving dedication to enhance student performance and ensuring their well being while in our care. To this end the Supervision Team requested a multi-year review of all programs and services offered by the TCDSB.

In the first phase, emphasis was on programs and services that support our most vulnerable students.

This review concluded that there is a need to provide better service for students with special education needs and to refocus and realign the delivery of these services with a renewed emphasis on:

- student achievement and assessing progress;
- needs/results based accountability;
- a proactive model which includes activities across a continuum of service from instruction to intensive support;
- equitable access to education;
- developing structures to support more effective teaching and learning practices;

- emphasizing teaching and learning over formal documentation;
- providing supports for all students with inclusion as a priority;
- recognizing that all educators are responsible for all students; and
- engaging students and families in the education process.

It was also concluded that the refocusing of services to special needs populations must, in the first stages, provide for:

- better and new behavioural programs and supports;
- enhanced service for students with autism; and
- more clearly dedicated services for students whose first language is other than English.

The Supervision Team has requested staff to develop strategies to achieve these ends in the budget, operational and strategic plans over the next two years.

Reinvesting in Stability

While balancing the operating budget and eliminating the accumulated deficit are important goals for the supervision process, the creation of conditions for a stable future, focused on student achievement, is far more critical. We must invest in sustainability for tomorrow, while we are rationalizing our expenditures in the present.

Our investment strategy will be guided by four major principles:

- decisions to implement new, and/or retain current, programs will be based on their relative effectiveness in the achievement agenda;
- proposals for new investments must provide for equity of access throughout the system;
- administrative and operational supports, which have become outdated and seriously threaten our ability to achieve priorities, must be addressed; and
- investments made today must result in increased efficiency in the future.

While the majority of our programs services are sound, some do not meet these tests. Certain specialty programs and or services, for example, are only available to a select number of students. Some are not as effective as others in meeting critical cognitive and performance standards. Reduced class sizes at the primary level have been realized at the expense of other divisions. Staff that maintain and support our physical facilities are stretched beyond the optimal and the large inventory of portable facilities continue to divert resources from more productive long-term investments.

We have requested staff to address these issues in the operational and capital budgets over the next 24 months.

The Multi-Year Budget Plan

The Supervision Team has instructed staff to develop a budget plan that addresses the critical elements of strategic renewal for the system. While balancing the budget through greater effectiveness and efficiency are important goals the staff plan must also reflect the stability required for future sustainability. Therefore, staff has been 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.

We have requested the budget plan to be publicly presented at the May 27, 2009 meeting of the Supervision Team for subsequent discussion and consultation prior to approval in the later part of June 2009.

Conclusion

The schools of the Toronto Catholic District School Board are healthy, robust and successful places where students can thrive. Our staff is competent, caring and dedicated to their success. And we continue to strive to align our supports with our mission and goals.

While there is much that is strong, there is, as in all human endeavours, room for continual improvement. The remainder of the supervision process will focus on the creation of a sustainable future through realigning supports, refocusing priorities and reinvesting in future success. By working together in a shared and unified context, education for Catholic students in Toronto will be second to none.

As Archbishop Collins clearly articulated:

“The fundamental theme is simple: selfless dedication to the common good which is a Catholic education, rooted in the Gospel, for the benefit of the children who receive it.”

The students and families of Toronto’s Catholic schools will be its ultimate beneficiaries.