

April 25, 2005

The Honourable Gerard Kennedy
Minister of Education
Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Kennedy:

The Toronto Catholic District School Board supports the government's commitment to implement a cap of 20 students in all JK to Grade 3 classes. There is no doubt that this initiative will allow for classroom teachers to focus more on meeting the various learning styles of a smaller group of students and deliver programs that will continue to enhance the accomplishments of all students during these critical formative years.

We continue to work towards its full implementation by the year 2007; however we are faced with a number of challenges. While we are appreciative of the financial resources made available to address the additional teachers that we are required to hire, we have very grave concerns regarding the lack of financial resources to meet the accommodation needs of those students. This great initiative to address enhanced student learning has a direct impact on the physical space that students learn in.

Every month at our Administrative and Corporate Services Committee of the Board, we hear delegations from our parent communities regarding the terrible physical condition of their schools, the overcrowding in many that are well over capacity, the lack of washroom facilities, and the high number of portables on their school site. Some of our students have spent more than half of their elementary education in a portable. Parents also express their concerns about health and safety aspects of teaching children in these non-permanent structures.

The challenge and frustration for us as a Board is that we completely agree with the concerns expressed by our parent communities, but there is very little that we are able to do to address these very serious and unacceptable learning environments in which we place our students and staff.

The Board has worked hard since 1998, and has built (and is grateful to have received the funding for) 17 new replacement schools and additions. The number of portables has been reduced from 700 to 542. This is just the beginning of our need to replace our aging building stock so that our students can be taught in the learning environment that meets current program and jurisdictional requirements.

In 2002 the Toronto Catholic District School Board welcomed the introduction of the Ontario School Renewal Initiative. We have concerns, as stressed in our briefs to you, that Program needs are not being addressed in the methodology used to assess the needs of the Board. We are naturally pleased to receive an allocation in the Good Places to Learn first allocation, but we are concerned that all of TCDSB's deferred maintenance needs have not been identified and hence will not be addressed.

The Primary Class Size Reduction initiative mandates a full implementation by 2007/08. Notwithstanding funding issues, additional pupil accommodation cannot be constructed in the very short time period remaining. This resulted in the TCDSB Board of Trustees being forced to approve the purchase of additional portables for \$1 million. It is our hope that additional pupil accommodation grants will be allocated so that this interim solution does not become a permanent means of accommodating students and additional teachers required to meet this initiative. The Board is concerned that many of our buildings do not meet the needs of existing educational programs and we are worried that new program initiatives will require substantial capital investments. We cannot continue to introduce band-aid solutions to our capital issues such as the use of portable classrooms. We have done this for far too long and in the long run it is not cost effective. What we need is the allocation of appropriate level of financial resources to properly address them.

Our students, their parents and our staff deserve better. They have every right to be concerned and to receive some answers. As a Board of Trustees, we have examined every possible solution including a recent decision to purchase additional portables. We are not proud of the decision we were forced to make and our parents are not either. We now look to you for some answers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oliver Carroll".

Oliver Carroll
Chair of the Board

Cc: Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education (OAPCE/TAPCE)
Greater Toronto Catholic Parent Network (GTCPN)