

Inaugural Address, Janet McDougald, December 1, 2011.

First of all, let me thank *Steve* for the kind nomination and to all the board members for their support. It is truly an honour to serve the board in this capacity—and a privilege that I take respectfully and seriously.

And I want you to know that I never take this role—or your support—for granted.

As I said in my nomination note to all of you last week, I have always had a great appreciation for the co-operation all of you have shown me and each other, but no greater than in this last month. I felt that support at the board table and I thank you for it.

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As a board, our ability to disagree civilly, work together well, reach consensus and always treat each other with respect makes us not only highly effective, but I believe a model for other boards. Why? Because underlying how we treat each other, how we work together, how we support each other is the key belief that what we do is not what is politically expedient, or what might make headlines, or even what is

“popular”, but rather what we absolutely know to be best for the students of Peel.

As I reflect on my 14 years as chair, and my twenty plus years as a trustee, I’m struck by how well that guiding principle—students first—has served this board, our students and this community.

32 In good times and bad, our unwavering commitment to the needs of children has guided us and made sure that our decisions were the right decisions for the right reasons. That is something we should be proud of as a board—it is our greatest strength.

Just a week or so ago we had a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the 25th anniversary of this building’s grand opening with a reception for current and former staff. I was amazed by how many former trustees and senior administration came back for the event. It tells a powerful story about the commitment to students and the dedication to this work that we share now, and in the past.

This building may have been constructed 25 years ago, but it is never really “finished”...maintaining it, updating it, improving it It is a work in progress!

In the same way, everything we do as a board is built on a legacy. One constructed by us and those before us. But that legacy, that work, that vision is also one that **we** continue to construct **together**. In large ways and small ways. Every day.

Our approach—a stable board, focused on helping children succeed to the best of their ability, respect for each other, and for the role of administration—that is our formula for success.

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And what’s interesting is that the research shows that this approach is actually the right one. I am sure you have all read the books *Good to Great* or *Built to Last* by Jim Collins. Well, he has a new book called, ominously, *How the Mighty Fall*. In it, his research shows that the organizations that survive, that thrive, that succeed are the ones that keep a steady focus on what matters, in spite of what happens around them.

He says that, “whether you prevail or fail depends more on what you do yourself, than on what the world ‘does’ to you. Greatness is not a function of circumstances. Greatness is a matter of conscious choice and discipline”.

I like to think that’s an accurate description of how we work as a board, and as a system. Conscious choice to help do what is best for students, and a discipline to not be distracted from that focus. And indeed in the
34 next year or so we have some significant and important work to do as part of that conscious choice and discipline:

- We need to continue our work on the full day kindergarten program—and the buildings needed to support it. The power and potential of this program is unquestionable.
- Our French Immersion program continues to be in high demand, so much so that it’s hard to accommodate and staff. Our French Immersion review will be important as we look at how to sustain this popular choice and create more access for those who wish to

choose it.

- As a board, we have heard from parents that they want greater choice in the programs and offerings at their local schools—not just a few regional programs. Our extensive research this year provides an excellent roadmap for how to expand existing programs of choice, and create new ones to engage students and provide greater equity—without negatively impacting our wonderful neighbourhood schools.

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- Along with choice, parents, staff and students are unanimous in their desire for greater use of technology. As a board, our technology review shows that we must move schools into 21st century technology with adaptive curriculum. There will be some tough choices ahead—because this crucial work has a high price tag.
- Our diversity work on the Co-Accountable Model has barely begun but shows clear potential for supporting all five groups

identified within the Human Rights Code. We will ensure that we achieve our Report Card Project to continue to hire staff reflective of the communities we serve. And I mean **all** of the communities we serve.

- Finally, after an election year pause, we now need to return to the important focus of ensuring Peel receives our fair share of funding to support the students we serve. With the help of our school councils and community leaders, we have made progress with the province—and we appreciate that—but there is so much more to do.

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I'm looking forward to this important work—especially because I know we will do it together. As Tony says—relationships are the key to our success. As we work together in the year ahead I know I can count on my trustee colleagues, and our dedicated senior administration and the incredible team in the Director's Office to make sure our efforts remain focused on children, and growing success.

I appreciate your confidence and I thank you – once again for this opportunity. I look forward to the year ahead.

