

Positive Change That's Working

Submission of TDSB Trustees to the Governance Advisory Panel



May 2015

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Introduction

In response to the ongoing work of the Governance Advisory Panel, Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Trustees would like to provide the Panel with an update on the recent positive changes at the Board. Although unfortunately not included as part of the Advisory Panel's mandate, we would also like to draw attention to parent and community concerns that reinforce the Board's concerns around the state of our schools. Lastly, we would like to respond directly to suggestions for improvement raised by the Panel during the consultations.

The information contained in this submission is in addition to the comments made by individual Trustees during their interviews with the Panel.

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We took the oath of office with an earnest desire to begin a new chapter.

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Section 1: Update on the First 180 Days

Elections can be change agents and in the six months since the last municipal election, things have definitely started to change for the better at the TDSB.

The newly elected Board is comprised of both returning and first-time Trustees – a healthy blend of experience and a fresh approach. This is a powerful combination and one that is necessary to move forward and meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Equally noteworthy is the diversity of the Trustees who comprise the newly elected Board. We are a true reflection of Toronto's diversity in terms of racial and ethnic background, gender and age. This should be a model for others to follow.

We took the oath of office with an earnest desire to begin a new chapter. Over the last six months, we have demonstrated that our primary concern is working hard to do what's best for the education of Toronto's public school students.

Leading by Example and Strengthening Relationships

Since the election, one of the most notable changes at the TDSB has been the renewed focus on leading by example and strengthening relationships.

We recognize that if we expect our school administrators to lead and inspire teachers and students, then the Board of Trustees and senior management must do the same. We must lead by example, work as a team, and walk the talk.

Margaret Wilson's report into the TDSB temporarily darkened the Board's hallways. Now, it is encouraging to see how the new Board is working hard to build relationships with each other and senior staff, and how senior staff is working hard to support the new Board. We are in complete agreement that all staff and Trustees deserve to be treated as professionals and with respect. We will continue to work towards this goal by leading with integrity, doing what's in the best interest of students, and showing respect for all communities.

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*We must lead
by example, work
as a team, and
walk the talk.*

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Positive Changes

If there are any questions about how this renewed focus on leadership and relationships is impacting the work of the Board, one must only look at the list of positive changes that are in place after only a few short months since the election.

Examples include:

- The considerable cooperation demonstrated by the new Board in effectively and efficiently meeting the Minister of Education's directives, which were all accomplished in three short weeks;
- The newly-created Governance Policy, approved unanimously by the new Board, confirming the effective roles and responsibilities of Trustees, the Chair, committees, and staff to best support the success and well-being of students;
- The Board's continued advocacy, on behalf of the students we serve, for additional funding to close the gap between funding received from the Province and what is actually required to meet the needs of students;
- The Board's ongoing focus on continuing to develop balanced budgets and a long-term program and accommodation plan, and making difficult decisions around consolidations;
- The Board's leadership in voting to create an Office of an Integrity Commissioner, a decision that will be implemented very shortly. The TDSB will be the first school board in Ontario to have such a position. It will help ensure respect and adherence to good governance and oversight, and improve public confidence in the integrity of TDSB Trustees;
- Continuing with the theme of promoting ethical and professional conduct, a Whistleblower Policy will be brought to Board in June for approval. This will ensure that all employees – from caretakers, to teachers, to supervisory officers – as well as all parents, students, volunteers, partners, and community members, can come forward and report a wrongdoing in confidence without any fear of reprisal; and,
- The completion of the Director's Performance Review scheduled to report back to Board in June 2015.

As this school year comes to a close, it is worth reflecting on the notable achievements accomplished at the TDSB this year, including:

- An increase in graduation rates with 84% of our students graduating from high school;
- A steady increase over the years in TDSB EQAO results in most of the subject areas;
- The launch of Improving Success in Mathematics, the TDSB's new math strategy that aims to further focus our supports and efforts in the classroom, and improve student achievement in math;
- The development of leading-edge recommendations for continuous improvement in school and student safety;
- The early approval of a balanced budget plan for the 2015-16 school year with minimal impact to students and classrooms; and,
- New measures to improve oversight and management of capital projects and school repairs.

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Proud of Past Accomplishments

The TDSB is a leader in education. We are an ambitious organization and are proud of the accomplishments of our staff, students and school communities. We have been recognized both nationally and internationally for our commitment to equity and for a number of successful programs and initiatives that have enhanced the lives of thousands of students not only in the TDSB, but across the country and around the world. Here are just some of the highlights:

- We released the largest youth census in Canada, the TDSB's Grades 7-12 Student Census. Close to 90% (103,000) of students in Grades 7-12 participated in the Census, making the size and scope of its findings important in informing how communities support youth inside and outside the classroom.
- Our Parent and Student Census yield good results with 92% of students feeling safe in our classrooms and 93% of parents feeling welcome in our schools.
- As leaders in environmental education, we designed and launched Ontario's first EcoSchools program in 2003.
- To help ensure that students in the inner city grow up with the positive choices and opportunities they need to thrive, the TDSB started the award-winning Model Schools for Inner Cities Program.
- Our research report linking nutrition to academic success was the first-of-its-kind in Canada and helped determine the impact of nutrition on student health, behaviour, attendance, attention and achievement.
- We were the first school board to offer paediatric health clinics inside our schools to help support our students.
- We were the first GTA school board to create an Active Transportation Charter to support and promote safe, active, and sustainable transportation.
- In 2009, the TDSB established the first Gender-Based Violence Prevention office in Canada.
- We are proud that more than 80 of our schools have active student-led trans-positive Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Gender-Justice Groups that show tremendous leadership, advocacy and support in schools. Each year, outstanding GSAs are honoured through the Director's GSA Awards. In 2011, the TDSB's Board of Trustees officially declared themselves a GSA in support of safe and positive schools in the TDSB.
- We were the first school board to partner with the private sector on an exciting solar panel initiative where the revenue generated from solar panel installation is used to fund school rooftop repairs and replacements. Over the course of the project, approximately 4.3 million square feet of school roofs will be repaired or replaced.
- We are leaders in Aboriginal Education with a focus on closing the opportunity gap. We provide supports to enhance the achievement of Aboriginal students and infuse Aboriginal perspectives across curriculum.

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- We were the first board in Ontario to introduce an Africentric school and programs. Our staff have written new curriculum on Africentric education which was approved by the Ministry of Education.
- Our innovative work in Caring and Safe Schools has shaped provincial policy significantly.
- We are committed to supporting lifelong learning. With childcare centres in hundreds of our schools, we offer a seamless and integrated day for many students. We also support nearly 160,000 learners through our Continuing Education department.
- We offer more than 75 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres to engage all children, as young as newborns, to have a love of learning.
- We continue to engage parents and the community in a number of opportunities to learn, inform, advise and consult through regular Trustee ward forums, Parent Academies, Parent Involvement Advisory Committee Conferences, and other opportunities for engagement.

What's Next?

We have been busy implementing even more changes at the TDSB that will have a real, positive impact on the students and communities we serve, including launching a multilingual website and consulting on the future of our school needs.

Reaching out to Our Multilingual Communities:

We know that Toronto is one of the best places in the world to live, work and learn. One of our city's great strengths is the cultural and linguistic diversity of our youth and adult population, and this diversity is reflected in classrooms across the TDSB.

According to the most recent Student Census (2011-12), the majority (over two-thirds) of TDSB students are from immigrant families with both parents born outside of Canada (67%). Altogether, there are over 115 languages spoken by TDSB students and their families. We know that for many new Canadians who are learning English, navigating through everyday life can be a challenge. Public institutions and governments must do their part to ensure that language is not a barrier when it comes to accessing, engaging and understanding core public services.

Moving forward, we are proud that the TDSB will be taking the lead in digital outreach to Toronto's multilingual communities.

- In June, the TDSB will launch the most comprehensive multilingual website portal offered by any school board in Ontario.
- With this bold, new initiative, the TDSB will significantly improve its communications to Toronto's ethnic parents and students by offering numerous sections of the English website fully translated into 22 different languages.

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We believe this move will help support the Board's provincial leadership in meeting the needs of new Canadians and continuing to make them feel welcome in our schools. In addition, the TDSB also currently provides the following services:

- Newcomer Services, with three Toronto locations, offer a one-stop service for newcomers aged 13 and older. These sites provide free settlement services for newcomer adults, youth, seniors and persons with disabilities. Services include providing extensive and valuable information, referrals, group workshops and one-on-one assistance on various settlement needs.
- Welcoming Communities for TDSB Newcomer Youth & Kids is an eight-week mentorship program developed for students who are new to TDSB schools. This program matches local students with mentors to help ease their transition to Canada and school through supervised group activities.
- Enhanced Language Training is a 14-week adult program that includes eight weeks of in-class business English training followed by a six-week work placement to gain Canadian experience.
- Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada offers free English classes for newcomers and assists with the settlement process and integration into Canadian society.

Planning the Future of Our Schools:

It is unfortunate that the Advisory Panel is not considering school capital in its mandate because one of the most significant roles a school Trustee plays is providing decision-making and policy oversight for school capital – a school board's most significant financial and community investment.

It is the nature of demographics in this city that populations change. Prior to amalgamation, Toronto's public school boards renovated, closed and opened schools. Since amalgamation, the Board has closed 30 schools and sold 82 properties, generating \$400 million in revenue. And since 1999, the TDSB has executed several school accommodation reviews. These reviews have happened against the backdrop of indecisive, and at times contradictory, directions from the Ministry of Education. Since 2003, direction from Ministers of Education has gone from a moratorium on school closures to the beginning of what appears to be a focus on hasty sales of the TDSB's and the community's most precious assets.

Through all of this inconsistency and mixed messaging from the Province, the TDSB has stayed focused on a planned, orderly, thoughtful and consultative approach to the future needs of our schools while struggling with the ability to provide well-maintained buildings and schools in growth areas.

We know that making hasty decisions about selling our schools is not the answer. That's why over the next number of years, the TDSB will continue with one of the most comprehensive reviews of our school accommodation and program needs. During this process, the Board welcomes the engagement, participation and input of parents and the community.

Our reviews will not be driven by narrow choices of school space consolidation. The Board's approach will involve the consideration of a number of different factors derived from comprehensive studies on demographics, residential growth, program delivery models and community use of schools.

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We're not saying that schools won't close as a result of this process – some may. But the TDSB's school accommodation review plan will also consider a wide range of factors and options, such as modifying attendance boundaries and program changes, to find the best long-term solutions for our students and the community.

Factors considered in school accommodation reviews include:

Student and Program Needs:

- The reviews will focus on ensuring that students have choice and geographic equity of opportunity to access specialized schools and programs throughout the city.
- The reviews will also evaluate how schools need to change to deliver new, innovative and exciting program models to meet the evolving expectations of learners, post-secondary institutions and employers.
- In addition to the core curriculum, the Board will focus on delivery-enhanced programs in eight priority areas: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM); Aboriginal Education; Information Technology; Skilled Trades; The Arts; Special Education and Inclusion; French Immersion and Extended French; and, Continuing and International Education.

Past and Current Growth in Population and Student Enrolment:

- Schools in some parts of the city are bursting at the seams with enrolment.
- Investment strategies will be needed to keep these schools in a state of good repair, build modern additions to replace out-dated and inefficient portables, or re-build schools if it makes financial sense.

Future Growth:

- Some school communities have experienced declining enrolment, but historically, we know enrolment that goes down can also come up. If we rush to sell off school properties and then need a school 10 years from now, the land alone could be five times more expensive.

Community Use of Schools:

- Schools are the heart of many communities. Like libraries and community centres, they are hubs of local activity.
- We have been pioneers in creating school/community hubs and there are countless examples across Toronto where school hubs are now in place. In fact, a new school just approved by the Board will serve as a model for school hubs of the future.
- In addition to teaching and learning, new models for schools now include public recreational facilities, childcare centres, community services, and health and wellness services.
- Now, for the first time, the Province has appointed a Special Advisor on Community Hubs, recognizing that schools can be used to house many community services. But to this day, the Ministry of Education only provides funding to operate schools for educational purposes for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and not as community hubs.

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- Provincial and municipal governments must work with the TDSB to create the community hub model for schools. We welcome the interest in our public schools shown by the City of Toronto and look forward to receiving the City's suggestions for "alternate funding sources beyond municipal funding" for maintaining school space for community use.

Strategic Education Partnerships:

- New learning partnerships in Canada are now underway that combine high school and post-secondary institutions under one roof.
- Toronto is rich in post-secondary institutions and there are dozens more within driving and public transit distance of the city. These schools may wish to open specialized, satellite or micro-campus in our schools to bring their unique programs to the Toronto and GTA markets.
- Shared space between high schools and post-secondary institutions would also provide critically important mentorship opportunities and create new post-secondary pathways for high school students.

In addition to our school accommodation reviews, a review of our already closed facilities will also take place. Both of these types of reviews will include community and stakeholder consultations. Strategies will be developed to determine how to best deal with these already closed schools. Options include, selling the property or leasing the property to keep it for future use. In some cases, where the sale of property makes sense, the capital plan will use the revenue generated for school renewal. In other cases, we will look to creative ways to use our schools as community hubs in partnership with the City of Toronto and other community agencies.

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Section 2: Sharing Parent and Community Concerns on Capital – Fix Them, Don't Pitch Them

Everyone at the TDSB cares about the quality of our learning environments. Now more than ever, parents are also speaking out about the importance of safe and modern schools. Recently, a number of advocacy groups and networks, such as Fix Our Schools: Parents Advocating for Safe and Well Maintained Schools at the TDSB, have been formed. Although not included in the Advisory Panel's mandate, a disappointment to many parents, we think that it is important to draw attention to these concerns in this response.

Parents have told us that one of the top priorities facing schools is the need for adequate and predictable funding from the Ontario government to repair and modernize schools – funding that is needed to make real and lasting improvements. Historically, the government has responded with inadequate funding and has been unwilling to provide a long-term funding commitment. This has made it difficult for the TDSB to follow a long-term plan for renewal.

Between 2008 and 2013, the TDSB accounted for 12% of all pupil places in Ontario but received only 5% of the Ministry of Education's annual funding allocation for school repairs. Our repair backlog has now exceeded \$3.3 billion and is growing every year.

The Board's recent advocacy, supported by the growing chorus of TDSB parents, has paid off this year as the TDSB is now getting its proportional share of \$500 million for school repairs. Although the \$112 million received this year is a far cry from the true needs of fixing our buildings, the TDSB will stretch every dollar and put the funding to good use by continuing to allocate funding to new roofs, heating and ventilation systems, and windows. By tackling these building infrastructure jobs, the Board will reap some immediate benefits from energy savings and by reducing costly water damage repairs.

While the funding announced this year is an improvement, it must continue in future years.

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New Revenue Tools

Some parents ask why we continue to repair older schools, especially in high growth parts of the city, when it seems like it would be cheaper to just build new ones. The answer to this question is more complicated.

In some cases, our older schools are bursting with enrolment. These schools serve communities that have experienced considerable new residential development. However, while the Catholic and French-language school boards in Toronto can raise funds through development charges to build new schools in response to growth, the Ontario government refuses to allow the TDSB to do the same, even in neighbourhoods where schools are overflowing in the face of unprecedented residential growth.

If the Advisory Panel could do one small undertaking for TDSB schools, it would be to recommend to the Ontario government that the Board have equal access to development charges. With access to development charges, millions of dollars in desperately needed revenue could be used to accelerate school repairs or replace older buildings.



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Section 3: Role of Trustees and Governance

The Role of Trustees

Despite the Minister of Education's actions to strip Trustees of what few resources we had to support our role as effective advocates for school communities, we remain deeply committed to serving students, parents and the community in the best way we can and in the best interests of public education in Toronto.

At a time when parents and public school voters want and need to know more from Trustees, it is wrong to reduce the capacity of Trustees to do their jobs effectively. This has to change dramatically. The TDSB will continue to show leadership in this area by increasing awareness of the role of Trustees and working with the Ontario Public School Boards' Association to build on the Ministry of Education's definition.

Ontario's Ministry of Education outlines the basic role of school Trustees as follows:

Trustees are members of the school board. They provide an important link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their constituents to board discussions and decision making. Trustees are elected every four years during municipal elections.

Under the law, only the elected board has the power to make decisions. Trustees do not have individual authority, but do have an important role to play as members of the board, including:

- *Working in partnership with school councils;*
- *Explaining the policies and decisions of the board to community residents; and,*
- *Supporting and encouraging public education.*

In addition to these requirements, TDSB Trustees also:

- Attend monthly board meetings, committee meetings, and expulsion hearings;
- Attend school events, school council meetings, ward forums, planning meetings, briefings, and information sessions; and,
- Interact with parents, community stakeholders, and public school voters and taxpayers on a daily basis, responding to concerns and explaining the policies and decisions of the Board to community residents.

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It is our hope that the Advisory Panel will recommend strategies to the Ontario government to help Trustees meet the minimum requirement of their role as set out by the Ministry.

The reality is that Trustees at the TDSB, and across Ontario, go above and beyond the Ministry's basic requirement for their role. On a daily basis, Trustees are in touch with parents and community members, whether it's through emails or phone calls, or by attending ward/community forums or school council meetings. This is on top of the work that we do in contributing to the overall betterment of the TDSB system by overseeing board-wide policies and initiatives.

Trustees are intrinsically linked to the communities they serve. We approach all issues with a community-focused lens because we live in the communities we serve and we walk the same streets as our constituents.

We are advocates for local education-related issues. In some cases, we are the only advocates. We speak up for the issues that matter to our communities and we speak up at the Board table for the resources that students need to help them succeed.

Board Governance Models

Trustees look forward to hearing the views of the Advisory Panel on TDSB governance. As the Panel begins to form recommendations, we feel the need to share the following feedback and concerns on a number of issues raised during community consultations.

Breaking Up the TDSB – A Step Backward:

The vast majority of Trustees have strong feelings about breaking the Board into smaller entities, what we consider to be taking a step backward in the evolution of the TDSB since amalgamation.

We feel that it is important to caution the Advisory Panel of the dangers of thrusting the TDSB into a state of de-amalgamation. Breaking up the TDSB would pit region against region, leaving some communities behind. It would also undo years of work in ensuring an equitable distribution of resources so that each and every student has the supports they need to be successful in school.

Amalgamating the city's public school boards cost taxpayers more than \$75 million in 1998. Today, it would likely cost more than \$100 million to undo this work. Such a step backward would redirect considerable time and resources away from where the focus is and should be: on delivering high-quality programs for students in well-maintained and modern schools.

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On the other hand, one Trustee, who served on a legacy school board, believes the TDSB could be improved if it were separated into two boards. The key to this approach would be minimizing the disruption to school operations. The 1998 amalgamation was rushed and guided externally by the Ontario government with what seemed like very little regard for the impact on schools and most importantly students. The Panel needs to look at strategies for the Ontario government to work with the TDSB and its communities as a partner rather than an adversary in any process that could lead to a transformation or evolution into two entities.

City Governance Model:

We also understand that the Advisory Panel is exploring the city governance model of a central council with four local community councils.

The city governance model requires councillors to attend and prepare for community council meetings, in addition to regular council and committee meetings. However, unlike Trustees, city councillors are employed full-time in their role and are paid for full-time work. They also have considerable staff resources at their disposal to manage and support these meetings, in addition to their constituency work. The Advisory Panel must give serious consideration to how a school Trustee, with no local staff support, could manage these meetings and work load.

At least one of us, however, feels that the community council concept may help consolidate local or regional community and school-based concerns into one time and place. This may create a more efficient process than the central boardroom, provided that at least some decisions can be made regionally and would not have to be reconsidered again for final approval at the monthly board meeting.

Appointing or Reducing the Number of Trustees:

The Panel has interviewed several TDSB Trustees. In these interviews, we were perplexed by the Panel's questions regarding the possibility of appointing TDSB Trustees.

We were perplexed because Trustees in Ontario are currently elected; therefore, we are to assume that the Panel may be advising the Minister on the matter of elected vs. appointed Trustees across the Province. We are forwarding a copy of our submission to the Ontario Public School Boards' Association who we believe will not only be surprised to know that the Panel is making such a sweeping consideration, but will also want to respond to this issue.

The Panel may believe it is conceivable that only TDSB Trustees could be appointed, while Toronto's Catholic and French-language Trustees would continue to be elected. We do not share this view.

We fail to understand how Toronto's public school voters, who number in the hundreds of thousands, not to mention the hundreds of thousands who are also parents of school-aged children, could be in jeopardy of forfeiting their right to democratically-elected governance in education, while the Catholic and French-language voters retain these rights.

We would like to say to the Panel that the discussion of elected vs. appointed school Trustees is, at its very core, a discussion about the fundamental role and function of democracy in the governance of education and the rights of school board voters. The discussion is, with all respect, well beyond the scope and mandate of the Panel and certainly deserves far more consideration than could ever be covered in a single interview.

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The Panel has also inquired if the TDSB has too many Trustees. The size of the Board is determined by the Ontario government based on principles of representation by population, which also include minimum numbers of school Trustees when it comes to small and isolated school boards. In Toronto, the Catholic Board has fewer Trustees because it has fewer voters. The TDSB has fewer Trustees than the City of Toronto has councillors because the City of Toronto has a larger number of voters. The determination of the number of Trustees at the TDSB is based on standards of representation by population. It is not, in our view, an arbitrary or notional determination. Can 22 Trustees reach consensus and make decisions? The answer is yes. In the last six months, the Board has demonstrated this time and again.

Might it be easier with fewer Trustees? Possibly. On the other hand, fewer Trustees mean larger constituencies. If we place a high value on the importance of Trustees bringing the concerns and needs of their communities to the boardroom, then fewer Trustees may very well come at the expense of local input into decision making. That would be a real and significant trade-off.

At-large Elections:

City-wide, at-large elections would, in our view, guarantee the obscurity of Trustees rather than promote a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In addition, given the expense associated with at-large elections, many potential candidates would be disenfranchised, especially those from lower income groups. Such an outcome would be considered highly regressive in terms of both equity and equality of opportunity. We also believe such a move would completely disconnect Trustees from their local communities, undermine the ability of Trustees to bring the concerns of local communities to the board table, and disenfranchise local communities from holding their Trustees accountable.



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Part 4: Working Together to Continue Moving the TDSB Forward

If one phrase best describes the role of TDSB Trustees, it is this: governing globally, acting locally. Trustees provide broad, board-wide fiscal and policy oversight, while interacting with parents and public school voters close to their schools and where they live. Hearing directly from the communities we serve has always been one of the most important things that we do. Community feedback guides the decisions we make in the boardroom and has a direct impact on what happens in our schools.

As individual Trustees, we have shared our opinions on possible ways to improve governance. As a Board, we look forward to receiving the Panel's recommendations. More importantly, we look forward to working together with senior staff and in partnership with our stakeholders – the Province, the City, parents and community members – as we come up with responsible and creative ways to move the TDSB forward.

The TDSB is a mosaic of rich cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity. But the one characteristic that we all share is that we care. We care about the quality of education in our schools. We care about our communities. We care about the future. It is this commonality that connects us and will allow us to work together effectively to continue to make real, positive changes at the TDSB for the betterment of Toronto's public education system.

We, the Trustees at the TDSB, respectfully submit our views for your consideration.

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We care about the quality of education in our schools. We care about our communities. We care about the future.

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Toronto District School Board Trustees 2014 - 2018



Michael Ford
Ward 1



Chris Glover
Ward 2



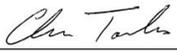
Pamela Gough
Ward 3



Tiffany Ford
Ward 4



Howard Kaplan
Ward 5



Chris Tonks
Ward 6



Robin Pilkey
Ward 7



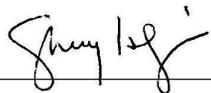
Jennifer Arp
Ward 8



Marit Stiles
Ward 9



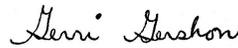
Ausma Malik
Ward 10



Shelley Laskin
Ward 11



Alexander Brown
Ward 12



Gerri Gershon
Ward 13



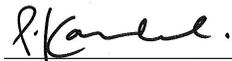
Jennifer Story
Ward 15



Sheila Cary-Meagher
Ward 16



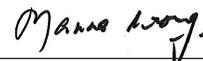
Ken Lister
Ward 17



Parthi Kandavel
Ward 18



David Smith
Ward 19



Manna Wong
Ward 20



Shaun Chen
Ward 21



Jerry Chadwick
Ward 22



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**Submission of TDSB Trustees to the
Governance Advisory Panel**

