



Listening, Learning and Leading – Inaugural speech of Director of Education Chris Spence to the TDSB Board of Trustees

August 26, 2009

I appreciate this opportunity to update you on my activities over the summer. As you know the cornerstone of my entry plan is Listening, Learning and Leading.

I have been doing a lot of listening and learning these past few months as I met with Trustees-- members of the senior team, and other internal and external stakeholders.

So far I have met with more than 100 people to talk about the TDSB – what’s working, what’s not... and what we need to do on our journey to excellence. I still have a number of people and groups to meet with and will be doing that over the next few weeks.

But I must say I am really appreciative that every trustee and every senior staff member took the time to provide me with very thoughtful, insightful and, in many cases, achievable suggestions that I will take a very close look at.

To help facilitate my discussions I developed a survey that includes questions such as:

- *What are the TDSB’s current strengths?*
- *What areas require the most improvements?*
- *What will TDSB look like in 5 years, if we are successful in changing what is needed and preserving what is valuable?*

Let me summarize a few themes that have emerged from the survey results.

The responses to the survey questions were organized into five priority areas:

1. Student Achievement
2. Governance



3. Parent and Community Engagement
4. Strategic Planning and;
5. Management Issues

Management Issues were further reduced to smaller sub-categories:

- a. Organizational Structure
- b. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- c. Professional services
- d. Facilities management
- e. Administration
- f. Human Resources
- g. Communications and;
- h. Finance

It has been an enriching experience for me and I do believe, together, we can address many of the emerging themes in particular building a culture of continuous improvement with clarity of purpose, that is collaborative, focussed on results and supports the development of the whole child.

We all share a common preoccupation with the question of how we can provide leadership in protecting and promoting learning environments where everyone can achieve their full potential.

However, we must be honest about the fact that, while our system is extraordinary in so many respects, it is a work in progress in others.

My arrival gives us a unique opportunity to put every thing that we do on trial and subject it to the relentless question...is it working?

I will publish my first report to the entire TDSB community in late October that will reflect what I have heard and an action plan to address what I have learned.

Some of the key deliverables will be a plan to address financial stability- ***through partnerships, revenue generation***, closures and consolidations; parent and community engagement, internal and external communication; the reorganization of central office-because I believe central office exists to support our schools so I want to reorganize ourselves to do that best;



improved student achievement through the school effectiveness framework; safe and caring schools; the integration of technology that can fuel new forms of teaching and learning; and the expansion of program options available to students.

We must be relentless in our pursuit of success for every student because we know what the future holds for individuals who are constrained by an inadequate education. The research is clear:

They are more likely to live their entire lives in poverty, more likely to lack adequate healthcare, and more likely to be incarcerated... I know that is not what we want for our students!

Together we must make a simple but powerful commitment to our students:

We must promise them that the opportunity to pursue their dreams will be constrained only by the limits of their imagination, and never by their postal code.

And I believe deeply, with every fibre of my being, that as a Board of Education we can fulfill this obligation.

I believe this because I have found that the achievement gap is ultimately vulnerable to the greatness inherent in all children and to the power of talented, hard-working adults of vision.

Those of us who have worked in the classrooms on the front lines of the achievement gap know that our students' potential to succeed is nothing less than extraordinary.

The critical question of our time, then, is how do we tap that potential and ensure high levels of achievement for all students at the TDSB?

What I believe is that effective teaching and effective school leadership are key, and that high expectations, like low-expectations, are a self-fulfilling prophecy and that success, during our stewardship, lies in working together with a profound sense of urgency and in recognizing that our students are as



capable as any students in the province and that with skilled and knowledgeable instruction in caring and safe environments—they can, and will, be successful.

Of you I ask for your support, your ideas and your leadership, as we work together on behalf of our students, staff and community.

In turn, I pledge, on behalf of my team, our devotion to-- and full focus on -- seeking the ever changing answer to the most simple and also the most complex of education's questions: what's best for our students, staff and community?

We believe that our students, the future leaders, staff and community of the Toronto District School Board, must have access to an educational system that prepares them for success in their future roles and to do that I see...

- a TDSB where every student will have an opportunity to develop to his\her fullest potential
- I see a TDSB where every employee, irrespective of job category, will have the opportunity to develop to his\her fullest potential and where his\her contributions to the mission of the TDSB are recognized and valued
- I see a TDSB that will be a community leader in everything that we do and assists and inspires others
- I see a TDSB that will use the power of innovations and our partnerships with our community to enhance student success
- I see a TDSB that works cooperatively and collaboratively with all others that are engaged in developing the whole child
- I see a TDSB and circles of partners that can serve the increasingly diverse populations of the Toronto of today and tomorrow



- I see leadership of, in, and by the TDSB that will be based upon service rendered by our leaders-leadership that derives from quality service
- And I see a TDSB that is engaged in continuing dialogues, that does not seek permanent answers to our questions, but rather the wisdom to think anew, time and time again

I hope what I see for the TDSB is fully shared by you.

Thank You!