



DIRECTOR'S BOARD UPDATE

DATE: September 23, 2009
TO: Chair and Trustees of the Board
FROM: Chris Spence, Director of Education
RE: Director's Update, September 2009

There's no doubt that TDSB's size and diversity present a unique governance challenge for Trustees. Your individual role as the voice of your local constituents is coupled with your collective responsibility for making difficult decisions that impact our students, families and communities across all of Toronto.

My role is to support your work by:

- ensuring you receive the most accurate, comprehensive information available on which to base your decision-making;
- offering you the wisest professional advice and judgment I can muster to help you do that; and
- making sure your directions are implemented effectively, completely and successfully.

To supplement all the updates that flow to you through staff reports, committees and your individual conversations with staff, I would like to begin each Board meeting by offering a brief update on how MY work to support YOUR work is proceeding.

Coming up at your October Board meeting, I look forward to spelling out my vision and operational agenda for the current year in some detail. For tonight's first Board meeting of the new school year – one with a very full agenda - I will keep this initial update especially brief by highlighting some of the new initiatives being launched. Let me start by saying that – as I've already warned my staff – this is going to be a very busy year and we have a lot of work to do.

Body, mind and spirit

Collectively, our mission as the TDSB is to provide ALL our students with an education that promotes excellence in body, mind and spirit. Everything we undertake needs to serve those ends. These new initiatives will reinforce the many, many excellent programs and partnerships underway in our schools and communities that already do.

I mentioned the duality of your challenge as Trustees in serving all the people of this city. As educators, we have an analogous challenge in our schools. Our focus is on equity **and** excellence – high expectations for every student and also high expectations for ourselves. Our challenge is overcoming the barriers -- like poverty -- that stand in the way of many students' learning.

As educators, while we should use our awareness about the impact of poverty on learning to improve how we teach, we can never let poverty or any other barrier be an excuse for low expectations. Poverty does not mean failure. Education is a way out of poverty. And that education must serve every student, the whole student, body, mind and spirit.

Body...

First, the body. We know the positive impact that good nutrition, fitness and healthy lifestyle choices have on a student's ability to learn and achieve. But it's the students themselves, and their families, who really need to understand that connection. In 2009-10, we'll be launching the Director's Health Initiative, a

comprehensive awareness campaign to promote the benefits of nutrition and physical activity across the system.

I'd like to share a very troubling statistic: TDSB's NW5 quadrant has the highest incidence of diabetes in Canada.

November is Diabetes Awareness Month. This will be a key focus of the **Director's Health Initiative** for 2009/10, and we will integrate this principle into existing programs, curriculum, to reinforce diabetes awareness.

As well, the Director's Health Initiative will work to address another greatly underserved issue: youth mental health. By coordinating support from Ministries of Education, Health, Children and Youth Services and Citizenship and Immigration, TDSB will engage youth and support mental health needs system-wide. We'll establish and enhance local partnerships with mental health agencies to provide service for children and their families. This will integrate programs in the Student Success Leadership Initiative, Safe and Caring Schools, and contracted Services and Partnership Development Department.

... Mind ...

If a healthy body provides a strong foundation for learning, an engaged mind is the superstructure. And literacy and numeracy are its most basic building blocks. The annual EQAO testing of Reading, Writing and Mathematics for Grades 3, 6 and 9 provides one measure of how successful our schools are in laying these blocks.

TDSB EQAO scores have been trending quietly upward in recent years, reflecting our intense and active focus on improvement. And I'm very pleased to be able to say that this year's results, for the first time in TDSB history, show improvement in **all** subject areas and at **all** grade levels.

We will use this encouraging data, along with other achievement and engagement indicators, to continue strengthening our focus on teaching and learning, specifically targeting areas that need additional support and intervention.

With that in mind, I'd like to announce a dynamic initiative designed to bring the whole TDSB community together like a kind of giant on-line book club. On September 28th, we're launching *Just Read It* – a campaign to encourage staff, students, families and, yes Trustees too, to spread the joy of reading.

I encourage all of you to visit the TDSB *Just Read It* website to share your own reading experiences, find great recommendations from other staff and students, and pick up ideas and promotional materials for the classroom. We'll be tracking how many books all of us together can read over the course of the school year, with monthly prizes to motivate and mobilize everyone. My hope is that, through *Just Read It*, every member of the TDSB community will discover a special book that ignites their passion for reading and learning.

... and Spirit

This brings me to the third, and maybe most important, facet of education. That is engaging the **spirit** of our students and communities. If body and mind are like the foundation and structure of learning, then spirit is the power that brings learning to life and gives it meaning.

Some activities, like sports for example, feed both the body and the spirit. And once in a while, maybe not often enough, we the educators get a chance to support our students by putting not just our minds and spirits, but also our own bodies to work. That's the focus of an initiative I'm really excited about.

Hoops4Hope is an idea that began in Hamilton and I believe it will be equally successful here in the TDSB. Its goal is to raise awareness about child poverty, reinforcing the idea that poverty does not equal failure, while raising funds for the Toronto Foundation for Student Success. Here's the cool part: I'm recruiting a basketball team, not just any basketball team, but an All-Star team made up of TDSB leadership staff.

We'll be hitting the road throughout the year to play charity exhibition games against staff teams in a dozen schools across the city. Money raised by the hosting schools through ticket sales will be presented to TFSS at the end of the season. The TDSB All Stars recruiting drive is in full swing. I think it's a great way for all of us to set an example for young people by getting involved and getting active for a good cause. So if anyone among the Trustees has a hidden talent as point guard, please come and speak to me after the meeting.

Keeping to this same theme, I'd like to tell you about another initiative in the works. You know, they say that virtue is its own reward and there's nothing like the satisfaction of a job well done. That's certainly true, but I believe that recognition for a job well done is important too. It's a motivating factor in the work place and excellence can be contagious. I believe there are hundreds if not thousands of bright lights sparkling brilliantly in schools and workplaces around our system. But maybe only their own communities know about them, so that light isn't reaching beyond their walls, where the rest of us can benefit and learn from it.

That's why in the coming weeks you'll be hearing more about the **Profiling Excellence Initiative**. Its purpose will be to seek out and recognize exceptional work and exemplary students, staff, schools, programs and practices all across the TDSB.

I'm always telling students how important it is for them to believe in themselves. Well, this initiative is about the TDSB believing in itself and celebrating our strengths, encouraging replication, and building public confidence in public education.

Putting it All Together

These are just a few examples of the things in store for the coming year. There's a lot of work ahead, and much of it will be both more difficult and less enjoyable than reading great books and shooting hoops.

We'll begin this work with a comprehensive Operational Review of the TDSB. The review will identify opportunities for improvement in four functional areas: Governance and School Board Administration; Human Resource Management and School Staffing Allocation; Financial Management; and School Operations and Facilities.

I am also launching the **Full Service School Task Force**. The goal of the task force is to develop a full service school vision for the TDSB and to have a full service school in 15 communities that may include but not be limited to the 13 priority neighborhoods by the spring of 2010.

The full-service school integrates services for families under one roof. This approach supports the teaching and learning mission of the school, while making services such as health screening, mental health, recreation, after-school programs, group counselling, cultural events, parent education, and welfare readily available for families.

It is consistent with the wraparound model, where services are fitted to the needs of children rather than children fitted into programs. In fact this undertaking will be building on some of the great work that is already happening throughout the system.

Thank you. I look forward to seeing you on the basketball court and comparing reading lists.