



Chair's Inaugural Address

December 12, 2016

Good evening fellow trustees, members of the Senior Administration, members of staff and guests:

I am deeply honoured by your collective decision to elect me as your Chair for the upcoming year.

I want to begin by expressing my thanks for the support you have given to me over the last twelve months. This support has come in several different ways: compliments; suggestions and constructive criticism. All these have helped me to learn about this challenging role.

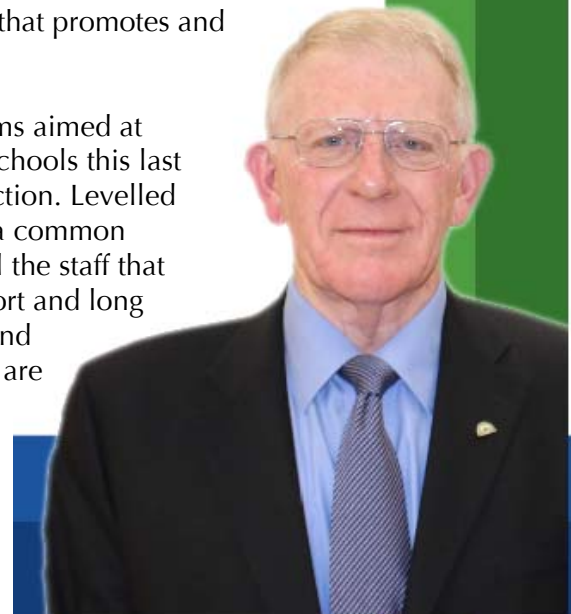
It is in this context that I would like to thank Brian Doyle, our past Vice-Chair, who is stepping down from the role that he has fulfilled over the last year. Thank you Brian for your unwavering support and helpful advice as we have worked together these last twelve months. And I want to say to you, Trustee Greg Anderson, that I look forward to working closely with you during the year ahead.

As I look back over the last year it must be said that our most important achievement as a Board has been the development and early implementation of our new multi-year plan. We followed a collaborative process that was open and debated vigorously along the way. Success for every student and a culture of high expectations defines our collective focus for students and staff. It is in keeping with our theme of inclusiveness and it encourages all of us to up our game in terms of what we expect of others and especially of ourselves.

And as I look forward to 2017, I see many reasons for optimism and excitement in Grand Erie. Let me mention a few for you.

In the field of educational technology the Board is allocating significant funding to bring our aging infrastructure up to date. This will help to re-emphasize the use of technology as a versatile and motivating enhancement to learning and teaching. Students and staff alike will reap the benefits stemming from strong and committed leadership that promotes and facilitates the use of technology as an instrument for learning.

I see reason for optimism as I watch the implementation of programs aimed at developing reading skills in the early years. I have visited several schools this last year where my primary purpose was to witness two programs in action. Levelled Language Intervention and Empower are two programs that share a common purpose for supporting our students in their early reading years. All the staff that I spoke with gave extremely positive reviews with regard to the short and long term results from these highly structured programs. Practice, drill and immediate feedback in a warm and supportive small-group setting are key features of both programs.



Over the last few years we have witnessed a long overdue commitment by our Board to the education and welfare of our First Nation students. We are steadily building a base for data that helps to better support them. We see encouraging statistics with regard to credit accumulation and the corresponding potential for graduation. Moreover, principals from Six Nations elementary schools share learning opportunities with their Grand Erie counterparts to develop on-going strategies which encourage success for our indigenous students. There will be a gradual infusion of indigenous history and culture into the Ontario curriculum over the next few years. This will promote understanding for and among our indigenous learners.

One of the most telling contributors to student well-being, and hence to student achievement and success in any school system, is that made by a veritable army of volunteers for both curricular and extra-curricular activities. And in Grand Erie, we are truly blessed with a huge range of such activities, planned and implemented by enthusiastic people including teachers, support staff and members of the community. I want to express our sincere thanks to all those who support our students in this way.

Finally, I want to point out a couple of areas of concern that I think we need to address. The first of these is our graduation rates. Graduation from high school is in some ways a minimum qualification for entry into the job market. It is also a ticket to post-secondary education either immediately or in the future. Monitoring credit accumulation and counselling for those at risk are useful tools but they are not enough. We need to develop other specific strategies to improve our graduation rates.

Secondly, every school board in Ontario is struggling with behavioural issues especially in the early grades. There is no question in my mind that this impacts on student well-being and student achievement. We need to review our current practices for dealing with this recent trend and work towards solutions that are consistent and fair to all students. This will not be an easy fix. There will be many conflicting viewpoints in this conversation and they should all be considered. But student well-being must be at the top of that list.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to our fine and capable Director of Education and the team that you have built. You work hard to give us the background information that we need and your leadership extends far into the schools for which you are responsible. Thank you! And on behalf of all trustees I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of our employees. Thank you for the support you provide for our system in so many ways. May you all enjoy a wonderful Christmas holiday with families and friends.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Dean', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David Dean

Chair of the Board