

Acclaimed Peel Board chair wants province to 'fix the formula'

At their annual meeting Dec. 2, trustees of the Peel District School Board acclaimed Janet McDougald, trustee for Mississauga Wards 1 and 7, as chair.

McDougald has been a trustee for 25 years, has served as chair for 16 years and was previously vice-chair for three. Suzanne Nurse, trustee for Brampton Wards 2 and 6, was acclaimed as vice-chair. Nurse is starting her eighth year in public office.

After detailing how Peel board students are last of all Ontario school boards in special education high needs funding, the board chair launched a Fix The Formula campaign.

'I'm pleased to join my trustee colleagues in our priority for the province to fix the special education formula and fund Peel students fairly now,' McDougald commented. 'And this begins with the ideas of equity and fairness. We talk a lot about these ideas in terms of inclusion, access and opportunities.'

'But there's another way to look at fairness and equity - how we're funded as a board,' she added. 'Specifically, how we are funded - or not funded - for special education. Based on the reported needs, the High Needs Amount (HNA) grants range from a high of \$1,700 per student at the top to a low of \$339 at the very bottom. The unfortunate news - that very bottom amount is the Peel board funding.'

'The HNA grant is a vital source of funding, and we are at the bottom,' McDougald observed. 'It is pretty clear that the process to calculate it is flawed. It's not scientifically based. It's out-of-date. It's not equitable or fair. Due to this flawed funding formula, we in the Peel board face a serious shortfall in special education funding. We need to fix the formula and fund Peel students fairly.'

But McDougald did say there was some good news.

'The provincial government realizes that many school boards, not just Peel, find the special education funding formula unfair and there is a newer, more accurate statistical model,' she said. 'If we were just somewhere in the middle of pack, we estimate that we would receive an additional \$14 to \$16 million in funding. We think that using the prediction model would put us right about there.' She pointed out that another \$14 to \$16 million per year would get rid of the board's \$14 million shortfall. Spending would be inside the funding envelope, and that would eliminate the pressure trustees feel to cut away at other budgets.

'All of this is possible,' McDougald said. 'The province can fund Peel students fairly. The fix to the broken funding formula is there. The province just has to use it.'