



BRANT HALDIMAND NORFOLK
Catholic District School Board

Chair Petrella's Full Annual Address

Good evening everyone,

I'd like to begin by saying this year is monumentally unusual, and normally I'd be welcoming many of our union partners, school administrators, and staff members to this event in person. Due to these challenging times we are adhering to the guidance provided by our public health officials so attendance this evening is limited. As you know, the Board considers the health and safety of our children, staff, and community as our number one priority in every decision we make. Having said that, I'm happy to provide my Annual Address to the system electronically for staff, families and community members to read.

To my fellow Trustees, I am honoured that you have, once again, chosen me as Chair of the Board. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Norfolk County Trustee Carol Luciani on being selected as Vice-chair for a second term.

We have accomplished so much together in the past year; transforming our Board into the great place it is. I cannot understate the significance of our Strategic Plan's vision "For all". This is the perfect definition of what the Board has transformed into. We have done this together, as a united board of Trustees, and in a fully collaborative way with our Director of Education and Senior Administration team.

This has been a unique year and we have had to navigate the unknown. The fact that our District remains strong, our students continue to excel, and our schools can remain open and safe in light of a pandemic, speaks to the commitment of this Board and of our staff. I am incredibly proud of everyone's ability to demonstrate perseverance, strength, and resiliency and am happy to continue to lead this district into 2021.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work, perseverance and adaptability of our administration, staff, students and families over the past nine months. It is your commitment to Catholic Education, hard work, and ability to adapt to the ever-changing situation that makes this Board a true leader in the Province.

Early in 2020, our Board made a commitment to do whatever was necessary to mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19. I wanted to reaffirm our Board's commitment to transparent communication and share that we are doing everything we possibly can to mitigate the risks in our schools as we navigate through this pandemic.

Early on, the Board made a strategic decision to contribute additional resources to the system including placing additional staff in schools to improve safety and enhance the educational experience.

- We hired close to 50 teachers and related staff to assist in reducing class sizes and strengthen our online learning platform where appropriate.
- We hired 14 custodians to support enhanced cleaning protocols.
- We continue to offer additional teaching positions available with our Board.
- We initiated enhanced cleaning measures with the support of Facilities Services.
- Our heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are some of the most modern in the Province and meet or exceed the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRE) standards for ventilation and filtration.
- We have increased the frequency and filtration ratings of the Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) to our HVAC filter renewal program.
- We have placed many stand-alone high-efficiencies particulate air (HEPA) units where appropriate in classrooms, to enhance ventilation and airflow.
- We have provided masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) for all staff and for our Grades 4-12 students in our schools and we have seen a huge uptake in voluntary face-covering/mask wearing by our JK-3 students.

We are continuing to work very closely with our local and Provincial Medical Officers of Health and following their guidance and direction.

I want to reassure everyone that the Board is committed to doing everything possible to ensure that we are providing the safest environment for students, families, educators, and staff.

Our staff have done an amazing job and continue to work hard, including modifying existing plans and protocols in response to public health directives. Please know that we are doing everything we can, following guidance from our public health experts, to keep our schools as safe as possible for all.

It is hard to believe that we have been navigating this pandemic for many months and still have a long road ahead of us, but we're doing it; and we're doing it together. I believe that our strong, united Catholic community is the foundation that supports not only our great work, but our mental and physical health and I am so glad that I am a part of it.

Looking back over the year, I am filled with admiration at the great work that was achieved. The year began with continued negotiations with our union partners which, through collaboration and open communication, moved us forward to resolution.

Although the pandemic placed increased financial strains on the district, through our commitment to ensure our resources are used efficiently and effectively, we were once again in a surplus position that enabled us to invest in required items as well as plan for the next school year. This surplus continues to support essential health and safety

initiatives and I am proud to be able to, once again, rely on our strong fiscal position to support both students and staff.

As has been the case since the pandemic began, the health and safety of our staff and students is our priority. To this end, as a Board, we have already committed our budget surplus from last year be used solely for the purpose of COVID-19 related health and safety expenditures such as staffing, PPE and cleaning supplies.

In the spring of 2020, the district was scheduled to release the new 2020-2023 Strategic Plan that focuses on Belonging, Teaching and Learning, and Wellness for All. Due to the pandemic, the decision to postpone the release of the plan was made. I am happy that the 2020-21 school year started with providing this new plan to families and staff and look forward to seeing our commitments, highlighted in the plan, executed throughout the next three years.

Moving to the end of the 2019-20 school year showcased the resilience of our students when, due to the pandemic, monumental moments like graduations and award ceremonies were postponed. Thanks to all of you who put the health of others ahead of these milestones that are normally celebrated in community and moved them to successfully being offered in a variety of creative ways. This was selfless and is a testament to your commitment to those around you.

I'd like to thank all staff and union partners for taking journey with us. Our Board is committed to an inclusive and collaborative environment; working together with our union partners to achieve success for all students. Together with our staff, we have achieved great things and I know we will continue to do so.

The support for Catholic education is evident in our strong home-school-parish partnership. With everyone taking on a role in the education of our children, our system is strengthened, and we all contribute to the betterment of society. Parishes, families and staff, your support in our leaders of tomorrow is a blessing and for that I thank you.

Thank you once again for demonstrating your trust by selecting me as your Chair. I will continue to do my best everyday and to help lead the District, regardless of what the next year brings, and can't wait to see the great work of our staff and students over the coming months.

May the Advent season be one of joyful hope.

Thank you and God bless.

~ Chair of the Board, Rick Petrella