

Chair Petrella – Annual Address

Good evening,

I'd like to begin by welcoming everyone to the Annual Meeting of the Board. It is wonderful to see our dedicated staff, including administrators, with us this evening and I would like to extend a special thank you to Bishop Lobsinger, Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Hamilton, for joining us tonight and celebrating mass with us together as a Catholic community.

I would like to start by congratulating Carol Luciani on being re-elected Vice-Chair. Her perspectives, input, passion, and advocacy for the residents of Norfolk County over the years are truly valued and I look forward to continuing to work with her.

I would also like to formally recognize and welcome our new Superintendent of Education John Della Fortuna to our Board; he is an outstanding addition to our current Senior Administration team. Our Board truly recognizes and appreciates the dedication, hard work, and countless hours our Senior team puts in, and their commitment to our Board. It is through your hard work that you drive excellence and make us true leaders in the province.

I am so humbled and honoured to continue to serve as Chair of our esteemed Catholic School Board and thank all my fellow trustees for their continued trust and support. We have done such great things together as a Board and will continue to do so together as a united Catholic Board of Trustees.

When I reflect on when I first became Chair in 2014, our population was at about 9600 students, and approximately 1000 employees, and our Board budget was 120 million dollars. Now in 2023, our student population is at 12,500 (30% growth), our employee population is at 1300 (30% growth), and our Board budget has grown to over 160 million (34% growth). That's real, tangible, continuous, year-over-year growth for our system of over 30%.

We have seen an explosion of new housing and population growth in all the regions that our Board serves and we as a Board, have taken the right steps to capitalize on that growth. Our Board is always looking to the future, and we are

projecting that we will grow even more as the communities of Brantford, Brant, Haldimand, and Norfolk grow.

We are excited to commence building St. Padre Pio Catholic Secondary School and Child Care Centre in the north end of Brantford which will open in 2026, and Pope Francis Elementary Catholic School in Caledonia, scheduled to open in September 2025. This is the first new Catholic secondary school serving Brantford and surrounding area built in over 30 years.

This translates to more options for students and the community, more teaching positions, more support staff positions, and contributes to growth in the area. Our Board is growing. We welcome that growth and are prepared for it. I am extremely excited about the future.

Our Board is creating modern and future-focused teaching and learning environments that provide students from all backgrounds with the opportunity to learn at new state-of-the-art schools. We will work with our industry and community partners to ensure students will be taught and trained in a way that prepares them for the jobs of tomorrow.

Often with rapid growth and expansion, comes challenges. We have a plan and are actively working with our provincial and municipal partners to address the capacity issues in southwest Brantford, and in Paris. We are truly grateful for the strong relationships that we have with our federal, provincial, and municipal government partners who have repeatedly demonstrated their support for publicly funded Catholic education.

It is through partnerships, and the strong support from our government partners, that we have received over 60 million dollars in capital funding from the Ministry of Education in the past year to build new schools, enhance infrastructure, and build child care facilities; all on an accelerated construction timeline. To put this in perspective, the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board received the largest share of the allocated capital funding among the 76 Boards in the Province in the last round of capital funding.

As a Board, we recognize that there has been unprecedented growth in the southwest Brantford and Paris areas. We further understand that the long-term solution for our capacity issues in southwest Brantford and Paris will only be

resolved with the construction of new schools in those areas. Having said that, we are working hard with our provincial partners to secure the capital funding for these additional elementary schools in southwest Brantford and Paris to address these issues and bring new Catholic learning spaces to those communities.

As a Catholic school board, we are called to reflect on the love and teachings of Christ in our day-to-day actions. Our mission is not just to educate, but to inspire, and instill values of compassion, integrity, and respect - in all our students. I encourage everyone to reflect on the words of St. Padre Pio, *“Joy, with peace, is the sister of charity. Serve the Lord with laughter.”* and *“Pray, hope, and don’t worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer.”*

In the coming year, one of our key objectives will be to enhance the educational experience for our students while staying true to our Catholic roots and remaining fiscally responsible. Our position has always been, and will always be, one of being fiscally responsible and making sure we are always in a strong financial position as a Board. This financial stability enables us to prosper, grow, embrace, and execute opportunities when they are presented. We will strive for state-of-the-art advanced technologies in the classrooms and academic excellence while ensuring that we nurture the holistic development of our students fostering their spiritual, moral, and social growth.

To address the highly skilled staff required to support our growth, we are investing in the development of our people. We are actively taking steps to grow the future leaders in our Board by building the capacity of our internal staff to fill these new positions. In addition, we are being noticed by others in the province and are attracting new administrators, teachers, and support staff to our system, ensuring we are getting the very best for our system and our students.

Catholic education is strong, and our exponential growth in student population demonstrates our reputation for excellence in learning and innovation while holding Catholic values at the core of everything we do. I would like to thank our clergy, parish communities, and families for working with our excellent staff to educate students. It is the school-home-parish partnership that supports the journey of our students and grows the leaders of tomorrow.

I am committed to fostering an inclusive environment in our schools. This includes ensuring every student, regardless of their background, or beliefs feels welcomed, valued, respected, and has an equal opportunity to succeed.

It also includes a renewed commitment to our local police forces and all first responders. Our Board truly values the strong collaborative relationships we have built with emergency services. To be clear, our local police and first responders are integral partners with our Board, and you are always welcome in our school communities and have an open invitation to visit our schools.

As a parent with a child in our system, I know that labour uncertainty is on the mind of everyone. This year, we will continue negotiations with our union partners, and through collaboration and open communication, we will move forward in the process. Historically, our Board and our union partners have worked well together and hold a fundamental respect for each other. I believe that collaboration is key to our success and look forward to working closely with our union partners, staff, parents, and students to create an environment that encourages learning, promotes critical thinking, and cultivates virtues.

Great things continue to be on the horizon for the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board and with your support, there is no limit to what we can achieve together.

In closing, I want to encourage each of you to reach out with any questions, thoughts, ideas, and/or concerns that you may have. It is through open dialogue and collaboration that we can truly succeed, and we truly value the input you provide. Let us work together to create a brighter future for our students and continue to grow together as a Catholic community.

I look forward to continuing to serve our community and leading our Catholic school district toward a prosperous future together.

Thank you and God bless.