



1325 California Avenue  
Windsor, ON N9B 3Y6  
CHAIRPERSON: Barbara Holland  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION: Paul A. Picard  
Telephone: (519) 253-2481 FAX: (519) 253-4819

## State of the Board 2017

Thank you Madame Chair.

As Trustees are aware, the annual State of the Board address would typically be presented at the January board meeting, however due to a variety of circumstances, we were forced to delay the presentation of this year's report.

And while this year's State of the Board address may be a little later than usual, I hope you will agree that it is full of promise, optimism, and hope for the future of this board, and most importantly for the students who have been entrusted to our care.

My remarks tonight, Madame Chair will acknowledge the tremendous progress that this Board has made under our shared vision and direction, but will not be so naïve as to suggest that there are not still a great many challenges we face. This however, is nothing new. We have weathered a great many storms and it's my firm belief, that we will navigate our way through a great many more.

Madame Chair, several years ago this Board was at a crossroads. Faced with the continuing problem of declining enrollment and excess capacity of student spaces in our schools, we had some very tough decisions to make. At the heart of those decisions was this question: how could we consolidate our facilities, optimize the value of our assets, and maintain the financial stability we needed, while reassuring our supporters that our schools would still be the academic destinations of choice, the places in our communities where students could obtain the innovative programming and quality instruction they would require to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive marketplace?

I believe that we have made it through that crossroads and have arrived at an enviable place. And while we have not arrived at our final destination, as ours is a continual journey, I would suggest that our board and our schools are on a consistently upward trend in terms of just about every measurable you may consider: student achievement, innovative program offerings, relative financial health, the quality of our facilities and the teachers and support staff who occupy them.

I have little doubt that what is helping fuel this trend are the academies that we have launched at a number of locations.

In partnership with our friends at Central Park Athletics, we have expanded our sports academies at FJ Brennan and Corpus Christi Middle School, as well as those at Cardinal Carter Secondary and Middle Schools; plans for a new STEM academy at Holy Names Catholic High School are in full swing, and we continue to develop our new agri-business academy at Cardinal Carter. And just last week, we announced the creation of a brand new construction academy at St. Joseph's Catholic High School, another open boundary academy that will incorporate students from FJ Brennan High School's masonry program when it opens next fall, and will ultimately go a long way towards narrowing the skills gap that presently exists in the trades.

In a very short time, these academies have become known in this community as the destination where students can chase their dream and live their passion; where they can focus on a particular area of specialty without sacrificing other academic necessities; where they can learn the foundation of a trade or an intellectual discipline and position themselves for exciting careers and vocations that will allow them to stay in their community if they choose, or travel as far afield as their imaginations will take them.

In terms of staffing our schools, our philosophy is rooted in our firm belief that it's our teachers who drive programming and that we need to have the right teachers in the right places if our academy models are to succeed. We continue to examine the potential for locally developed courses, led by teachers who have recognized curricular needs, have specialized skills and strong passions.

In addition to our academies, our Board has also become the recognized leader in Windsor-Essex for offering International Baccalaureate programs. Besides our well-established diploma program at Assumption, we are now in the candidacy phase of offering expanded middle years IB programs at Assumption Middle School, and at Cardinal Carter Middle School in Leamington. The establishment of these programs will further cement our reputation as the board of choice for IB programs in this region through bringing this world-renowned program to an entirely new cohort of students.

Over the last several years we have continued to expand our French Immersion offerings in response to demonstrated appeals from those parents who want their children to become proficient in both of Canada's official languages. One needn't look any further than St. Joseph's Catholic Elementary School in River Canard, where we have attracted more than 100 new students in the last year since adding a new French Immersion program there.

Besides our recognition in Windsor-Essex, we are quickly making an impression on the global level as well. As you have heard this evening, our international education program continues to grow, and as a result of a recent administrative tour through Japan, Korea, China, and Vietnam, we are expecting an influx of Asian students who we believe will have an educational experience here unrivalled by any other school board in Canada.

We continue to distinguish ourselves through the innovative ways that we help students experience their faith in an ever increasingly secular world. One of our challenges lies in the necessity of ensuring that we continue to make cross-curricular connections to real life experiences so that our students are more fully engaged in their own faith development. One way to do that is by revisiting our curriculum expectations with our religious education teachers, but another is through dispelling the many myths and misconceptions about

Catholicism and Catholic schools. To that end we are working very hard to create atmospheres in our schools where ALL our students feel welcome, supported, included and safe, regardless of their ethnicity, ancestry, creed, colour, sexual orientation or gender identity. And all of this is done within the context of our fundamental belief in the lessons of the Gospels, and the message of love and acceptance that was taught to us by Jesus Christ.

The results of all these efforts, Madame Chair, speak for themselves. Our graduation rates are up, and our student achievement rates continue to improve in most areas, however we are not content to rest on our laurels. We continue to refine our renewed math strategy, with its emphasis on establishing lead math teachers in all of our schools. And while striving to improve our students' mathematical competency, we have not diverted our attention from literacy, which remains an extremely important priority.

As we find ourselves in building mode, one of the most exciting new journeys we are embarking on is the creation of a brand new high school in the city's core to replace Catholic Central. Last year it was announced that we would receive \$26M in capital funding from the Ministry of Education, and this year we will begin community consultations to determine how the school can complement the surrounding neighbourhood, as well as the initial plans that will eventually lead to breaking ground. With the increased post-secondary footprint downtown thanks to our friends at St. Clair College and the University of Windsor, we see tremendous potential for partnerships with both of those institutions that will provide lasting benefits to our students. Given the University's school of visual art, the college's mediaplex and the St. Clair Centre for the Arts, and the numerous cultural activities that currently exist in the core, it only makes sense to consider the creation of an arts-based academy at the new school.

Besides our plans for Catholic Central, we have many other exciting new building plans in the works, including:

- the construction and opening of a brand new elementary school that will be home to those students from the St. Bernard, St. Jules and the former Our Lady of Lourdes school communities
- an addition at Assumption which will include, among other things, a brand new gymnasium there
- A major renovation at Cardinal Carter Secondary which will accommodate the students of Cardinal Carter Middle School and will include the creation of a brand new dance studio
- A brand-new four classroom addition at St. James Catholic Elementary School, solidifying its reputation as one of the top schools on Windsor's west side

None of this happens, of course, without the financial planning, governance and oversight we have established at this Board.

As you have just heard from Executive Superintendent King, our budget outlook is much better than anticipated thanks largely to an additional projection of 144 full time equivalent students, as well as a sharp increase in the number of our international students.

And while the possibility of future declines in enrollment continues to be the number one budget pressure that we face, we are confident that as a board, we are well positioned to face

that challenge. Presently, we are in an excellent situation here in Windsor-Essex. Our unemployment figures are unusually low, the real estate market is on fire, and people are realizing that this is an outstanding area in which to reside. Through our recent travels, we have learned that people around the globe are increasingly becoming aware of Windsor-Essex for its diversity, its safety and its excellent standard of living.

We are, however, very attuned to the cyclical nature of this region's economy and must be well-prepared to withstand the future enrollment decline that may go hand-in-hand with any economic downturn. I would suggest that the best way to manage that would be through the forward thinking, proactive approach this board has taken to date. And that, Madame Chair, is the exact approach we have taken over the last several years, and the same one that got us through the significant challenges which I referred to earlier.

The specifics of how we do that will only be limited by the imaginations of the teams of creative people we have placed in key positions throughout our system. And because of the favourable condition in which we currently find ourselves, these people can devote their collective wisdom to our core mission. Instead of thinking about what we need to consolidate or close, we can turn our attention to building, both literally and figuratively.

So where do we go from here? What do the schools of the future look like? How will education be delivered?

These are the fundamental questions we must answer, keeping in mind of course, that we do not operate in a vacuum. We must be continually assessing the local economic and cultural landscape, to determine not only how we fit in, but also how we can assume a greater leadership role. We must continue to work with our community partners, including our post secondary institutions as well as local employers, to better understand how we can serve their needs by graduating students who can fulfill their own ambitions while at the same time, making Windsor-Essex an even more vibrant and innovative community.

There is a certain amount of comfort that can be found in things staying the same, but as you know Madame Chair, this has never been the way we have operated. It's been said that the comfort zone is the greatest enemy of creativity, and we take great pride in our ability to rely on our intuition and our competency, as well as our willingness to embrace change when it comes to developing new programs for our students.

Constant change is the new normal to us, but not for our students. They are accustomed to living in a world of rapid change and are intuitively aware of the reality that pathways don't open up until you take bold steps towards them.

Coincidentally, Madame Chair, Catholic Education Week is right around the corner, and this year's theme is *Walking Forward Together*.

I can guarantee you that as a Board, we will continue to take those bold steps together, for the good of Catholic Education, and for the students we are proud to serve.

Thank you Madame Chair and I would be happy to answer any questions.