



BRANT HALDIMAND NORFOLK
CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Chair Petrella's Full Annual Address

Good evening,

I started last year's address by speaking to a year of challenges and sacrifices within our Catholic community and didn't think I would need to do the same this year, but unfortunately, I do.

In these challenging times we must continue to adhere to the guidance provided by our public health officials, and as a result, once again, I am not able to welcome many of our union partners, school administrators, and staff members to this event.

As we continue through this pandemic, the board continues to take the health and safety of our children, staff, and community as our number one priority in every decision we make and therefore am happy to provide this annual address to the system online for staff, families, and community members to read. I recognize things have not been easy and there have been bumps and adjustments along the way, but I know, as a Catholic community, there is nothing that we cannot overcome together.

My fellow trustees, I am once again honoured that you have once again shown the confidence in me to have chosen me as Chair of the Board. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Norfolk County Trustee, Carol Luciani, on being chosen as Vice-Chair for another term.

We have accomplished so much together in the past year; we have succeeded in continuing to transform the board into an engaging Catholic learning community. I cannot understate the significance of our strategic plan vision "For all". This is the perfect definition of what the board has transformed into and we have done this together, as a united board of trustees, and in a collaboration with our Director of Education and Senior Administration Team.

We have achieved this in the context of another unique year as we navigate through the pandemic together. We have made every effort to work with all our partners in navigating all the complexities presented and worked quickly to rectify any challenges that emerged. The fact that our district remains strong, our students continue to excel, and our schools, for the most part, have been able to remain open during the pandemic, speaks to the commitment of this Board and our outstanding staff. I am incredibly proud of everyone's ability to demonstrate

perseverance, strength, faith, and resiliency and am happy to continue to lead this district into 2022.

Early on in 2020, our board made a commitment to do whatever was necessary to mitigate the risks of COVID-19, and I wanted to reaffirm our Board's commitment to this, and to listening to the voice of our community to help inform our decisions. It was partially due to this feedback that we made the decision to not use the hybrid teaching model in our Board, when so many other boards in the province did. Despite the additional costs this decision created we went ahead with a full virtual elementary and secondary school, because it was the right thing to do for students.

We continue to work closely with the Ministry of Health and Education, as well as our two public health units, to ensure we are meeting all safety guidelines and protocols. As a board we also committed to many additional safety measures which included:

- Increased staffing in our schools including teachers, EAs, custodians and secretaries
- Enhanced cleaning measures with the incredible support of facility services
- Updated heating and ventilation, and air conditioning systems in the Board which meet or exceeded standards for ventilation and filtration as well as many standalone high-efficiencies particulate air (HEPA) units where appropriate in classrooms, to enhance ventilation and airflow.
- We continue to provide masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) for all children in our schools including our earliest learners in kindergarten.
- We continue to cooperate with public health around student vaccination and testing.

This speaks to the fact that the Board is committed to doing everything possible to ensure that we are providing the safest environment for our children, families, and all staff. As a board, we have done this while ensuring the fiscal responsibility which has been the hallmark of this Board and were able to not only balance the budget last year, but realize a surplus, which allows us to re-invest in our students. This surplus continues to support essential health and safety initiatives into the future, and I am proud to be able to, once again, rely on our strong fiscal position to support both students and staff.

This has not been easy, and I would like to acknowledge the hard work, perseverance, and adaptability of our administration, our educators, custodians, staff, students, and families over the past year. It is your commitment to Catholic education, hard work, patience, and ability to adapt to the ever-changing situations, which makes this board a true leader in the province.

It is hard to believe that we have been navigating this pandemic for close to two years and we may still have a long road ahead of us, but we are doing it; and we are 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 to be a part of it.

Looking back over the year, I am filled with admiration at the great work that has been achieved. The year began with continued negotiations with our union partners which, through

collaboration and open communication, moved us forward in the process. As we progressed through the year, all members of the school communities showcased their resilience, as due to the pandemic, monumental moments like graduations and award ceremonies were postponed. Thanks to all who put the health of others ahead of these milestones that we typically celebrate together as a Catholic community. 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 this journey with us. Our Board is committed to an inclusive and collaborative environment; working together with all 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.

As a person of faith, I know that we will soon be able to move forward together once the challenges of this pandemic subside. We continue to welcome more and more students into our schools which presents more opportunities for all. I look forward to the 2022 school year where we have many great things planned to further improve our Board. These include:

- Continued progress in operationalizing our 2020-2023 strategic plan ensuring that, "Our faith-based communities inspire life-long learning and service to others"
- Bringing to life our spiritual theme "Rebuild, Restore, Renew Together"
- Planning and beginning construction of our new joint elementary school in Caledonia
- Working through exciting new capital projects which include: a new childcare center at Holy Trinity Catholic High School among many other school renewal projects

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.

In closing, I would like to *thank* the trustees once again for demonstrating their trust in me by selecting me as your Chair. I will continue to do my best, every day, to help lead the district, regardless of what the next year brings, and I cannot wait to see the great work of our staff and students over the coming months. As always, I encourage our Catholic community to reach out to me as I truly appreciate your input, comments, and opinions which help drive our decisions and make our board a true leader in the province.

Thank you.

God Bless
Rick Petrella