

First, my priorities for the District are as follows:

1. Boards of Education must be seen as partners in our public education enterprise. Currently, the Ministry does not respect Boards and constantly changes the rules to suit the short-term political needs of government. For example, the discussion regarding all-day kindergarten is taking place in a vacuum of consultation. Likely, it will serve as an election issue, with no calculations of the space, funding and staffing needs for Boards. This is unacceptable.
2. Stable, adequate funding for all education services and programs is essential to provide some predictability and improved quality of public education. Our Board has had to cut programs every year due to underfunding. We are unable to meet class size and class composition guidelines as a result. We spend more than \$8 million dollars per year than we receive from the Ministry for Special Education. Our transportation budget has been frozen for the past 6 years, resulting in the Board having to spend more than \$400,000 per year to maintain transportation services for eligible students. While the Minister regularly inserts herself into the community conversations, saying her budget is larger than ever before, she needs to realize it is still not enough. Finally, the Minister needs to see herself as the Minister of public education, and eliminate responsibility for private education from her portfolio. She is in a conflict of interest with that responsibility.
3. The Board needs move forward on its Facilities Renewal program. The construction of a new 1100-seat secondary school will send a message to families and students that we are preparing them well for the 21st century. Also, the upgrading of all of our elementary schools so that they are safe and well-resourced will enable us to compete with the challenges presented by the private schools. While we continue to work with community partners to make better use of our facilities, the Ministry must recognize such joint-use as a bona fide use of that space. Currently, before and after school day care, Strong Start Centres and other community use does not add to our capacity utilization. It is ridiculous that the Ministry begins a "Neighbourhood of Learning" program and yet does not see that use as full use of empty classrooms.

When South Wellington became the District's highest priority school for seismic upgrading, we were required to conduct a feasibility study to prove to the Ministry that the school was needed for educational programs and that there was not space in neighbouring schools. That report is now public and it recommends that South Wellington be closed. I encourage citizens to read the report on the District web site. The Board has referred that report to staff to be brought back to the new Board in January with some recommendations. If the recommendation is to consider closure, then the Board will engage the school community in a consultation. I know the South Wellington school community is all too familiar with that process.

I will do what I think is in the best interests of the students in the District. We have scarce resources, and the decision to spend nearly \$3 million to upgrade the South Wellington facility will face tough competition from other, worthy projects.

I hope you have a successful meeting. Again, I am sorry I am unable to attend.

Regards

Jamie Brennan