



May 27, 2005

Mr. Paul Tate
Chair of the Board
Halton District School Board
2050 Guelph Line
P. O. Box 5005
Burlington, ON L7R 3Z2

Dear Mr. Tate:

The Burlington Chamber of Commerce takes this opportunity to express our profound concerns over the events leading up to last week's resignation of Dr. Dusty Papke, Director of Education, and the Board's public comments to the effect that Trustees plan to take a more direct involvement in operations. We believe these steps run the risk of significant detriment to the students of the Region.

In the late 1990s, the Board of Trustees then in office did not enjoy a strong reputation, either within the education community or the local community. Following an audit of the Board's procedures, processes and practices, the Education Improvement Commission recommended the Board adopt a policy governance model of operation.

We note that the EIC, at the time, was Co-Chaired by Dave Cooke, a former Ontario Minister of Education, and Ann Vanstone, a former Chair of both the Metropolitan Toronto and City of Toronto Boards of Education. That is, both Co-Chairs had extensive and intensive experience within Ontario's education system. Their Commission's examination of the Halton Board's activities was thorough, and proceeded from a perspective well versed in best practices in public education. Consequently, their recommendations were worthy of serious consideration, and indeed, were adopted by the Board.

Last week's decision by the current Board to abandon the policy governance model in favour of a more interventionist approach demonstrates a lack of understanding of the proper role of a board in an organization like a school board, and represents an unfortunate regression.

The distinction between governance and management is well understood in both business and institutions. Boards (regardless of their names, and whether their members are called directors, governors or trustees) are responsible for governance – an oversight function; staff is responsible for management of the business or operations.

A board's job is to create the future of the organization, to provide a vision, to establish the strategic direction for the organization, and to set objectives that will achieve the strategic direction. Management's job is then to implement plans to achieve the objectives, so the strategic direction can be met and the vision realized. This is the essence of policy governance. It depends on a distinction in roles and an understanding of that distinction.

A board can only hold management and staff accountable for the success, or lack of, in the implementation of plans if management and staff have been responsible for that implementation. By inserting itself into operations, as the Halton Board now proposes to do, it will forego its ability to hold management

accountable. It will have effectively delegated twice; firstly, to staff, then again to itself. And it is a reality of organizational assessment that if two groups are accountable for the same thing, no one is accountable. It will be inevitable that results within the Board will decline.

A not insignificant by-product of the Board's decision will be the impact on the attractiveness of senior staff positions within the Ontario education community. A successor must now be found for Dr. Papke. While we don't want to be seen as prejudging that successor, it is clear that a position with a Board that understands and respects the proper role of the Trustees will be preferable to one where Trustees openly aspire to intervene in operational matters.

The Burlington Chamber of Commerce is very concerned about the impact the Trustees' decision will have over the next period of years. We strongly encourage Trustees to renew their deliberations, review their decision, and dedicate themselves to their proper oversight function on behalf of all students within the Halton public education system.

The future of our communities is in the hands of those students. They deserve no less than effective and proper oversight from Trustees.

Yours truly,

Richard E. Burgess,
Chair

cc: Peggy Russell, Vice-Chair, Halton District School Board
Kelly Amos, Trustee, Halton District School Board
Mary Chapin, Trustee, Halton District School Board
Debbie Downs, Trustee, Halton District School Board
Ethel Gardiner, Trustee, Halton District School Board
Janie Hames, Trustee, Halton District School Board
Jennifer Hlusko, Trustee, Halton District School Board
Bruce Jones, Trustee, Halton District School Board
Wes Pulling, Trustee, Halton District School Board
Susan Sheppard, Trustee, Halton District School Board
Alyssa Andres, Student Trustee, Halton District School Board
Heather Maxwell, Student Trustee, Halton District School Board
The Honourable Gerard Kennedy, Minister of Education
Cam Jackson, MPP Burlington
Ted McMeekin, MPP Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot
Ted Chudleigh, MPP Halton
Kevin Flynn, MPP Oakville
Mayor Rob MacIsaac, City of Burlington
Editor, Hamilton Spectator
Editor, Burlington Post