

Marguerite Jackson
Speaking Notes
Canadian Club
Monday, 9 November 1998

I am honoured to address this distinguished group particularly on behalf of the young people you have just seen in the video.

It is a good sign that leaders in education are joining the ranks of business, government and community leaders to speak about issues of importance to our community.

There is a very good reason why public education deserves a prominent place on the business and policy agendas of this province. When we talk about public education,

We are talking about our collective future.

We are talking about young people who will fill our shoes tomorrow, and

We are talking about the institutions that determine what kind of people our next generation of leaders will be.

It behooves all of us, no matter what our perspective, to think hard about how we create conditions in which the economy, governments and a civil society all flourish. Think of it, if you will, as a three-legged stool. Each leg of the stool represents a component of a healthy and prosperous society. The first leg represents the innovative, and entrepreneurial business sector that generates wealth, jobs and higher living standards.

The second leg represents effective and competent governments.

The third leg represents the components of a civil society; such as, family, community, education, arts, culture and volunteerism.

We are not stable if we are only on one leg,

- no matter how strong the economy might be,
- no matter how strong a government might be.

- Nor, are we stable if we rest merely on two legs of the stool.

It is the third leg – the civil society and the contribution of public education to that society that I want to talk about today.

Given the rhetoric that surrounds public education today, you must wonder how public education is contributing to the strength of the 3-legged stool. You must wonder if public education in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is contributing to knowledgeable, well-educated and well-prepared citizens.

When you leave today, you will believe, as I do, that a strong public education system contributes to a healthy, prosperous society, where every citizen can participate, contribute and enjoy its benefits. You will understand that the TDSB is a strong public education system for the next generation of Canadians growing up in Toronto neighbourhoods.

To address this conviction, I am going to speak to 3 themes:

- Our current situation in the TDSB
- Our intentions in the Toronto District School Board
- Our accountability for student success.

First, our current situation.

In the last year, major changes have been thrust upon school boards across this province. The provincial government took complete control of the funding of education, and reduced the number of school boards.

For Toronto, let me put the complexity of this in perspective for you. Many of you are business people with experience in mergers and acquisitions, and you know first hand the difficulties that can arise.

Until January 1 of this year, there were seven public school boards in Metropolitan Toronto, each a corporation onto itself.

On January 1, these seven entities were combined to create the Toronto District School Board, an act that paralleled the creation of the new city of Toronto. Later in the year, in March, the government announced the New Funding Model for school boards. The New Funding Model will be phased in over 4 years. For the Toronto District School Board, the new budgets mean a cut of 15% in overall expenditures, a cut of and over 30% in Ministry defined non-classroom expenditures and a cut of 54% in central administrative costs....this, at the same time as the student population increases by 25,000 students.

If you have ever lived through the disruption of a merger between just two companies, or even two families, you can imagine the work that needs to be done to merge seven boards at the same time, particularly when the principal reason for the merger is to cut costs.

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You also know that it takes more than 10 months:

- to complete due diligence,
- to develop an integration plan and
- to implement that integration plan.

Yet, the TDSB has met the expectation of efficiencies head on.

- We have implemented a new administrative structure that reduced the senior management by 50%
- We have reduced administrative support to management by over 50%
- We have worked with unions to consolidate from 62 bargaining units to 5
- We have negotiated collective agreements with 2 of the 5 bargaining units
- We have reduced the training and development support for teachers by 13%, and laid plans for an overall reduction of 55%
- We have reduced our vice-principal complement by 20%
- We have restructured our delivery of programs for adult students who wish to return to school for upgrading and graduation diplomas
- We have selected technologies for integrating the 7 information management systems that track employees, budgets, students and documents. Within 12 months, we will be working with one financial system to manage our \$2 billion budget; teachers will be able to look up the record of any one of our 300,000 students; and one payroll system with common pay dates will be in place for our 27,000 employees.

In fact, already in our first 10 months as a Board, we have implemented efficiencies that will result in streamlining our services and in savings of 127 million dollars on an on-going annual basis. We are going to do more streamlining.

But we will not streamline our children.

The parents of 300,000 children are depending on us to provide excellent education in their local communities. They know that schools are central locations in city neighbourhoods.

Our schools reflect our city.

I think it is obvious to everyone in this room today that we are living and working in a wonderful city - A city that has vibrant communities - A city that is safe - a city with some flaws - a city that welcomes families from around the world- a city with world class public schools - a city with wonderful diversity.

Our response to this diversity is and must be clarity of goals and fluidity of means. One size will not fit all.

Our parents are like you and I. In fact some of you in this room are parents or grandparents of children in our schools. We are all filled with hope for our children.

Our parents will not accept public institutions that are like sand dunes in the desert – shaped more by the wind than by structure, shaped more by influence than by purpose. Nor should they.

Our parents deserve public schools that work for their children.

Our parents deserve teachers who care deeply that each child every day learns and grows and feels like a real human being.

Our parents deserve public schools that are shaped by purpose.

The TDSB is determined to meet those expectations. The TDSB has clear purposes.

Our mission is twofold:

- First: High levels of achievement for every student
- Second: Graduating students who have the knowledge, skills, and values they need to become responsible members of a democratic society

Education has always been important. Today more than ever before, every student must have access to the education they need to unlock their full potential in today's knowledge based society.

There were times, not that long ago, when there were lots of jobs for young people who didn't finish school. I remember when I was growing up there were jobs in factories and plants in Oshawa, Toronto, Oakville and Montreal. There were jobs on the oilrigs in Alberta. There were jobs in the mines in northern Ontario. There were even some jobs in the banks for students who didn't finish high school. There were all kinds of jobs where you didn't need a whole lot of formal education, where a strong back and a willingness to work would get you there. But all that has changed.

There aren't enough of those jobs left for good, hard working, decent people who are willing to get up at the crack of dawn and work, 8, 10, 12 hours a day. There just aren't going to be those jobs.

We have to have political decision-makers, citizens, teachers and parents reach a consensus on the importance of education and success in education for all students.

We don't need vouchers.

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Our response to this diversity is and must be clarity of goals and fluidity of means. One size will not fit all.

We don't need charter schools.

We need a public education system that works for every single child.

The Toronto District School Board will be accountable for the achievement of every student.

What does this mean and where do we go from here?

We will not be able to do things as we did yesterday. Marshall McLuhan has said that our age of anxiety is, in great part, the result of trying to do today's job with yesterday's tools – with yesterday's concepts.

Just as the nature of work has changed in each of your fields...so too the nature of work has changed for teachers.

When I began teaching, not that many years ago, it was acceptable, in fact expected, that less than 30% of the students beginning school would graduate. That will not work for today's children.

We cannot expect a civil society if only 30%, or even 60% of the populace has access to the benefits of employment and participating in that society with pride.

Therefore, where it was once okay that the teacher was responsible for teaching the lesson and the student was responsible for learning it, that is no longer the case. Teachers are accountable for results. Teachers are accountable for evidence that all students in this diverse city have access to achievement and success in school.

I'm sure you have heard that you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. We used to look upon teaching like that.

Now we realize that it is our responsibility, along with parents and you, as community leaders, to create the thirst.

We must engage children and young people to be active, participants in their learning. To do that we must fully utilize the understandings about learning that we have garnered over the past decades.

Activities that were once optional, or extra, or available to a select few are essential to creating a thirst for learning.

We know, for example, that we can allow our children to form gangs on the street.

Or

We can form choirs in our schools and let them be in a gang of singers.

Or

We can form athletic teams and let them be in a gang of athletes.

These are not extra activities. These are integral to our success with young people and we must change our school and community structures to open these avenues of success for all children.

Our children must have exposure to literature, to arts, to activities that engage them as participants and contributors. This is the stuff that will give them the tools to manipulate information, to think, to synthesize ideas as they learn new things, and add to their academic accomplishments.

A study a few years ago called "**Coming Up Taller**" offered compelling advice that the arts provide young people, particularly those from homes and neighborhoods where there is little exposure to the arts, with creative alternatives to destructive behaviour.

As a school principal and as a Director of Education, I have seen with my own eyes what a difference these programs can make.

Albert Einstein once said, "The gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing knowledge." It is this imagination, that we have to trigger in all students, for them to feel that they have a real claim on their own future.

If you talk to companies like MDS, ATI or Bombardier, they are encouraging their employees to be exposed to the visual and performing arts, because they want people to be creative and come up with new ideas and think about how to do things differently.

We must remember, it is possible to store the mind with a million facts and still be entirely uneducated.

We want children to use their knowledge and translate it into practical circumstance.

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Programs, such as **Learning Through the Arts**, that operate in our schools demand the discipline, the focus, the problem solving, the memory and the interpretation required to master artistic projects. These are the same skills required to be successful in academic subjects. These are the same skills required to be successful in life.

Art is not a luxury; it's a necessity.

At this point some of you are thinking - all very well and good, but what about the basics? What about learning to read, to write, to compute?

These are skills that are very much at the top of our priority list because we know they are foundation skills that allow all children to access knowledge and to solve problems.

That is why this Board has already approved for all schools, policies for Accountability, Literacy, Mathematics and Science and Technology.

That is why, as Director of Education, I expect our schools to track the success of children in their first years in school and provide for early intervention when required.

That is why I support training programs for our teachers to improve their approaches to teaching literacy in every subject area.

That is why I support institutes to train teachers in how to create intriguing math, science and technology programs for their students and how to engage parents in the programs with their children.

That is why we will be using the assessments of our students to assure ourselves that our students are mastering these foundation skills.

We provide children with the means to reach standards.

We are accountable for our students' results.

As a board, we are accountable to our teachers to assist them in adjusting to changing expectations.

We are accountable to you, our public, and to our parents. That is why we will publicly report to parents and taxpayers results from mathematics and literacy tests on a school by school basis.

That is why, in these same reports we will describe the arts programs that are provided in our schools.

Every one of our schools has a myriad of examples of students thriving in their growth as young people. We want our parents and our public to have a clear understanding of what we are doing in our schools and of the achievements of our young people.

As our nation moves toward the end of one century--and the beginning of a new millennium—it's time for us to decide about the legacies we want to leave for future generations. We must be clear in our goals and definite in our purposes. We must seek improvements, recognizing as Bill Gates said in his autobiography, "Even if you are on the right track, if you just stand there, you will still be run over."

As we make these improvements, we will remember that there is no perfect human institution. There is no perfect market except in the abstract theories of economists. There is no perfect government except in the dreams of political leaders. There is no perfect society.

We have to work with human beings as we find them.

Our parents are sending us the best they have; they are not keeping the bright, well-behaved ones at home. They expect them to thrive in our schools.

We have learned a lot about what works to allow the economy, governments and a civil society to thrive.

Those who ignore the lessons we have learned about how a civil society contributes to effective, functioning markets and to governmental leadership will pay a steep price.

As we go into the 21st Century, the graduates of the TDSB will be knowledgeable, well-educated and well-prepared citizens. I call on each one of you to help create the conditions in which the economy, the government and a civil society all flourish. If we can keep a balance among these three spheres that affect all of our lives, our country will have the stability it needs and our children will have a bright future.

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