

York boards not 'dysfunctional,' but still need more cash

BY MITCHELL BROWN
Staff Writer

Ask Bill Crothers and he'll tell you why he's glad someone else is in charge of the Toronto District School Board.

"They're totally dysfunctional and they have been since they created the board," the chair of the York District School Board of Trustees said a few days before the start of the new school year. "I thank my lucky stars that I'm in York Region and not in Toronto."

Mr. Crothers said while York public trustees spent the past five years working to adapt to a new funding formula, the amalgamated Toronto board failed to tackle the challenge.

It's a sentiment echoed by his counterpart at the York Catholic District School Board headquarters.

"They (the members of the Toronto school board) seem to all agree on no cuts, but they don't even seem to agree on their position on the whole thing," board chair Elizabeth Crowe said.

In separate interviews, both board chairs spoke candidly of the situation in Toronto and the pressures facing York Region schools in the coming year.

While both are proud their boards are heading into September with balanced budgets, they also point to several issues that must be addressed. Not surprisingly, the big issue is funding.

This year, school board trustees in Toronto, Ottawa and Hamilton have refused to pass balanced budgets to protest what they say is the provincial government's inadequate support of public education.

In response, Education Minister Elizabeth Witmer appointed supervisors to take over all three boards and identify areas to cut.

In York Region, the Catholic board managed to pass a balanced budget this summer, but it also sent a letter to the ministry warning it won't be able to do the same next year if current funding levels continue.

"The amount of money principals get per student to run their schools has been the same since I started as a trustee in 1994," Ms Crowe said.

"My son is in Grade 9. It took him three days to find a computer that could handle a Powerpoint presentation. He gets very frustrated by that."

She said it is unacceptable schools are relying on fundraising more than ever to make up the difference.

"A lot of trustees are concerned about how some richer communities can fundraise \$30,000 like that and put the most up-to-date computers in their schools," she said.

"Other communities could probably raise \$3,000. We shouldn't be relying on that. Why are our school councils fundraising for computers and basketballs?" Mr. Crothers said growth continues to be an issue, which shouldn't surprise parents who have seen York Region change dramatically over the past decade.

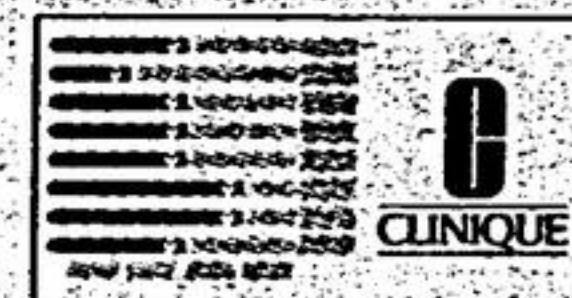
In 1971, York Region was home to almost 170,000 people. Today, that figure is closer to 800,000, a population that is expected to double by 2026.

Both boards are responding by opening new schools — the public board alone is opening eight new schools this year and 11 next year.



BILL CROTHERS
Growth continues to be an issue, says chairperson.

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