

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

January 9, 2007

Chair praises DSBN staff

At the Inaugural Board Meeting on Tuesday, January 9, the Chair of the District School Board of Niagara, Kevin Maves, reflected on the success of the past year while looking to the opportunities of the coming year.

"I realize how difficult it is to operate such a complex organization as a school board," said Maves, "As most people working in Education can attest, priorities change, demographics change, and governments change. The only thing that never changes is the fundamental purpose of a school board – to educate our children."

Maves praised staff for collectively creating the DSBN Strategic Plan that distills the vision for the District School Board of Niagara into "Achieving Success Together" and outlines the core values of respect, responsibility, and relationships. He cited successes such as the addition of coaching teachers to help improve student achievement in literacy and numeracy, reducing primary class sizes well ahead of the provincial average, and outstanding staff development that includes leadership training, mentoring and professional development for every staff member.

Maves, a Trustee for Niagara Falls was acclaimed at the Organizational Meeting of the DSBN on December 5, 2006. Maves has been with the DSBN since his election in 2000 and has served two terms as the Vice Chair and one term as Chair. Liz Fulford, Trustee for West Lincoln/Wainfleet, was acclaimed Vice Chair. Fulford is a former Chair of the Lincoln County Board of Education and the first Chair of the DSBN. She has served as Trustee since her election in 1988 and this is her second consecutive term as Vice Chair.

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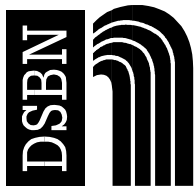
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District School Board of Niagara

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Warren Hoshizaki, Director of Education and Secretary



BACKGROUND

Inaugural Address delivered by Kevin Maves January 9, 2007

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, invited guests, senior staff and fellow board members. It is both an honour and a privilege to be addressing you this evening as chair of this fine board. On behalf of the board of trustees, I would like to welcome you all to this evening's inaugural meeting. To begin with, let me say that I am no less nervous than I was last year! I believe one reason I am nervous is that I worry I will not be able to adequately express in words how rare and special this board is.

When I speak of the board and its accomplishments it is with nothing but the utmost respect. I mention respect because I realize how difficult it is to operate such a complex organization as a school board. As most people working in education can attest, priorities change, demographics change and governments change. The one thing that never changes is the fundamental purpose of a school board - to educate our children. Although this sounds like a simple enough mission, it is anything but.

The logistics alone, of operating a school board are daunting. The DSBN has 119 schools operating in every municipality in the region with over 42,000 full time students enrolled in the elementary and secondary panels. A staffing complement of almost 4000 employees is required to meet the needs of our diverse student population. Our employees include teachers, education assistants, secretaries, custodians and administrators. These are the people working on the front lines in the schools. They are supported by a host of other staff, including personnel in maintenance, plant services, transportation, curriculum consultants, special education services, human resources, business services, community education services and senior staff. All of these people are responsible in some part for the success of our students.

I wanted to mention the composition of our board employees, because it relates directly to our strategic plan. Our current strategic plan, which was created in 2005/2006, was truly a team effort. Contributions from all of our stakeholder groups were embodied in this document. The mission statement of the strategic plan was distilled into "achieving success together". The document itself speaks to our core values which include responsibility, respect and relationships. The strategic plan will form the basis of how we will continue to grow as system.

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The past 12 months have been very busy and productive for the dsbn. In order to improve student achievement, a number of initiatives and strategies were employed throughout the system. Coaching teachers were placed in a number of elementary and secondary schools to help improve student literacy and numeracy, with a team of central literacy teachers and a literacy consultant in place to support these teachers.

Great strides were also made in reducing primary class sizes. The dsbn is well ahead of provincial averages for this government initiative. Currently, our board has 23 or fewer students in 97% of JK to grade 3 classes. 76% of these same classes have 20 or fewer students. Reductions in kindergarten class sizes were also impressive with 218 of our 258 kindergarten classes sitting at 20 or fewer students. These decreases in primary class sizes have been achieved without negatively impacting grade 4-8 class sizes, which decreased slightly.

In order to provide leading edge practices and programs in the educational field, staff development is essential. As always, the dsbn continues to provide some of the most complete staff development in the province. Leadership programs for new and aspiring principals and mentoring programs for new teachers are two initiatives in place.

Professional development is also available for teachers to find ways to enhance student achievement through professional learning communities and professional development for administrators is available for the purpose of gathering and analyzing data. In addition, a hugely successful professional development day was held last year for all employee groups featuring such noted speakers as Steven Lewis, Craig Keilburger and Dr. Randy Sprick.

Our curriculum staff and consultants are to be commended for continuing to develop new and exciting programs. The Honourable Sandra Pupatello, the former minister of education, visited our board this summer to acknowledge some of these DSBN programs which were developed to support student success in secondary schools. The Minister cited the habitat for humanity home in Welland, built by our secondary students, and the rural co-op lighthouse project in the Beamsville area. In addition, the DSBN had five locally developed courses in refrigeration, electrical, auto body repair, horticulture and welding approved by the Ministry.

The past year was a very successful year for our unrivalled technology program. In the last school year, 372 DSBN students signed up for apprenticeship opportunities. Of this number 28% were female students, which represented a 125% increase over the previous year. Female students were also responsible for 30% of the credits achieved by technology students. 3500 of our technology students competed in local skills challenges, with 67 going on to provincial competitions and 7 students going to the nationals. Our robotics teams from Governor Simcoe,

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Westlane, Grimsby and Fort Erie Secondary School also achieved great success in both national and international competitions. Our board continues to attract inquiries from other school boards, including international visitors, who look with great interest at our tech programs.

Last year was a very fruitful year for the DSBN in terms of forging new partnerships and building on existing ones. A new partnership was developed with Phelps Homes Inc. and Beamsville and South Lincoln high schools to build a new home involving those students. All of our secondary schools partnered with Habitat for Humanity to build a second home in Welland last year and plans are being formulated to carry on this partnership with a new build in Fort Erie next semester. The DSBN also has partnerships with a number of businesses throughout the region to facilitate our co-op programs. Other valued partners in the technology sector include General Motors of Canada, Skills Canada, Aerosafe Industry and the Canadian Welding Association.

Students in our academic and arts programs also distinguished themselves in many areas. The students at the DSBN earned an impressive number of scholarships into a variety of universities in both Canada and the United States. DSBN students from 13 of our 22 high schools earned scholarships in board sponsored examinations. Our students participated in a variety of competitions held at Brock University throughout the year including the Spoken Word Festival, Think Bowl, Historica Fair and the Sears Drama Festival. Many of these participants were introduced to the board through the showcase segment of our board meetings. The educational showcases conducted throughout the year were an opportunity to witness the outstanding talents and achievements of hundreds of our students.

The last 12 months was an extremely busy time for our plant department, with over 32 million dollars spent on facility improvements. You could not drive by one of our schools during the year without seeing some work being completed. Some of the larger projects included the renovations and updating of the venerable St. Catharines Collegiate and work being completed in the Grimsby area schools. Park school received a major renovation and renovations and additions were added at Nelles and Grand Avenue schools. These two schools also received the addition of new best start daycare facilities to benefit our youngest students.

While I have chosen to focus on the positive aspects of the previous 12 months, many challenges still lie ahead. In what I am sure is being repeated in many boards throughout Ontario, declining enrolment remains the largest challenge facing us. All of our decisions regarding future operations must bear in mind that our student base will continue to decrease in the coming years. This requires realistic long range planning in order to maximize resources

and deliver the highest quality of education possible. I have no doubt we will meet this challenge with the same enthusiasm and positive results as previous challenges we have faced.

Bearing declining enrolment in mind, the board has many initiatives it wishes to pursue in the coming year. We will continue to be vigilant in increasing literacy and numeracy levels for our students. This could involve additional support for after school tutoring programs in the elementary panel and continued support for literacy coaches in schools also remains a priority. In the secondary panel, we will continue to focus on student success programs for students at risk of not graduating. We will build on our existing skills programs including apprenticeships and school to work programs, and explore new partnerships with Brock University and Niagara College to benefit our students.

Other board priorities include promoting healthy schools across our system. We will encourage students, teachers, administrators and community partners to find ways of making our schools healthier environments in which to learn. We will increase our efforts to encourage more parental involvement in school councils in order to increase their effectiveness. The DSBN will also seek additional government funding to help our adult learners reach their full potential.

Finally, as a new year dawns we say goodbye to some of our colleagues while welcoming new ones. Our organization is invigorated by the promotion of new people to positions of responsibility throughout the system. We know they have been taught well by their mentors and we have every confidence in their abilities. I would also like to thank those employees who retired from our board this year for their many contributions towards public education.

The new year has also brought some change to the board of trustees, as we say goodbye to three trustees including the long serving Helen Hall, Robert Lewis and Corey Fitzgerald. I am delighted to welcome back our very experienced and dedicated board comprised of Dalton Clark, Lora Campbell, Marcy Heit, Barb Ness, Don Love, Gary Atamanyk and our very well respected Vice Chair, Liz Fulford. I extend a warm welcome to the newest members to our board Lynn Campbell, Gregg Dame and Larry Lemelin.

As I said earlier in my remarks, it is both an honour and a privilege to be chair of the District School board of Niagara. We are led by our very capable director, Warren Hoshizaki, who commands what is, in my opinion, one of the strongest senior staffs in the province. The strength of our system has always been evident in the dedication and quality of all our employee groups, which is why I believe we will continue to achieve success together.

Thank you for your attention. Have a great evening.