

August 27, 2020

The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
5th Floor
438 University Ave
Toronto, ON
M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Lecce,

On July 23rd, I wrote to you on behalf of the Board of Trustees for the Waterloo Region District School Board, identifying the need for a significant increase in provincial funding for the 2020-2021 school year to fund school reopening expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am writing to you again today at the request of the Board, which on August 17th passed the following motion:

That the Chair write an open letter to the Minister of Education (copied to the five MPPs representing Waterloo Region) calling for the following:

- *Providing additional Provincial funding to school boards to cover the full amount of the anticipated budget shortfall caused by COVID-19, rather than requiring them to repurpose their reserves;*
- *Providing additional Provincial funding to school boards to allow them to cap elementary class at 20, to hire additional teachers and support staff, and to rent and outfit community space as necessary.*

Given that your government has said that it would “pull out all the stops” and “not spare a penny” to ensure that the return to school is safe for everyone, our board believes that the province should be fully covering these costs – estimated by our staff to total \$17.8 million for PPE, cleaning supplies and transportation alone. While we acknowledge that your government



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has passed on some of the newly announced Federal money, we are still concerned that your government has still largely downloaded the responsibility to pay for the reopening of schools to local school boards like ours. Suggesting that we use our own reserve funds instead of receiving appropriate funding is unacceptable to our Board of Trustees.

Our reserves have been built up over many years of prudent financial management. They exist so that money is available to cover maintenance emergencies and other unexpected expenses, as well as to cover local priorities and initiatives that are not funded by the province. In this year of uncertainties, our reserves could also be needed to cover unanticipated expenses later in the 2020-21 school year. To require us to spend more than 44 percent of our unallocated accumulated surplus in one year could leave our board and the students we serve vulnerable to future crises.

Like other school boards across Ontario, we are willing to do our part to ensure that the return to school is safe and healthy. We are urging you to provide the additional Provincial dollars to fund the extraordinary expenses associated with the pandemic, rather than requiring boards like ours to deplete the reserves that we have accumulated to cover other expenses.

We also urge you to follow the guidance of the Sick Kids report which highlights the importance of small class sizes to allow for physical distancing in schools. As a growing Board, we do not have surplus space in our schools, nor do we have sufficient reserves to create smaller class sizes. We require funding from the Province to hire more teachers and support staff, to investigate renting space in the community and to outfit those spaces. During this pandemic, smaller class sizes will provide an important layer of protection to elementary students. It will also ease the stress and anxiety of many of our families and staff knowing that every safety precaution possible is being implemented to help protect our students.

We also cannot underscore enough how important a safe school reopening will be to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

Even though the purpose of this letter was to appeal for additional funding, I would be remiss if I did not also use this opportunity to express concern by our Board of Trustees in regard to the impact of the frequent changes in direction and announcements from your Ministry on our parents/caregivers and the increase in workload this has caused for our staff. At a time when our parents are anxious about the decision to send their children back to school this September, we have been told these changes were confusing to our parents/caregivers and only added to their level of anxiety.



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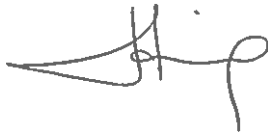
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Minister, you and Premier Ford have stated on many occasions ‘that no expense will be spared when it comes to our kids’. We are asking you to follow through on this commitment and provide funding that will allow the WRDSB to reopen schools in as safe a manner as possible.

Sincerely,



Jayne Herring
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees
Waterloo Region District School Board

CC:
OPSBA
Ontario Public School Boards
Waterloo Region Catholic District School Board
Conseil scolaire Viamonde
Conseil Scolaire Mon Avenir
Local MPPs



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