

WATERLOO REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

NOTICE OF SPECIAL MEETING

A **Special Board Meeting** of the Waterloo Region District School Board will be held via video conference, on **Monday, August 31, 2020, at 7:00 p.m.**

AGENDA

Call to Order

O Canada

Approval of Agenda

Consent Agenda**

Receipt/Approval of Minutes:

- Receive Minutes – Board Meeting of June 22, 2020
- Receive Minutes – Special Board Meeting of July 20, 2020
- Approve Minutes – Special Budget Meeting of July 27, 2020
- Receive Minutes – Special Board Meeting of July 27, 2020
- Receive Minutes – Special Board Budget Meeting of August 10, 2020
- Receive Minutes – Special Board Meeting of August 17, 2020

Declarations of Pecuniary Interest

Announcements/Celebrating Board Activities

Delegations

Reports

- School Reopening Plan
- Feasibility of Monitoring Temperatures

J. Bryant / L. Read
J. Bryant

Board Communications

- 27 Halton District School Board to Ministry of Education - Climate Emergency Declaration
- 30 Rainbow District School Board to Ontario Public School Boards' Association
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- 58 Rainbow District School Board to Ministry of Education
- 60 Waterloo Region District School Board to Ministry of Education
- 63 Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board to Ministry of Education
- 65 Rainy River District School Board to Ministry of Education

****All matters listed under the Consent Agenda are considered not to require debate by the Board of Trustees and should be approved in one motion in accordance with the recommendation contained in each report.**

Question Period (10 minutes)

Future Agenda Items (Notices of motion to be referred to Agenda Development Committee)

Adjournment



June 19, 2020

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

To the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education,

On Wednesday, June 3rd, 2020, the Board of Trustees of the Halton District School Board unanimously passed a motion to declare the **first student-led school board Climate Emergency Declaration**.

During the past year, both the Student Senate and students across the Board have indicated their concern about the Climate Change Crisis and how the Board and students are taking action to the Student Trustees. This Climate Emergency Declaration has been drafted by the HDSB Student Trustees, Olivia Lau and Matthew Burnes, and the two Student Senator representatives on the HDSB Environmental Management Team, Luka Simeunovic and Claire Jung, on behalf of the students of the HDSB. It was brought to the Board of Trustees to highlight the concerns of the students and set a direction for both students and the HDSB to move forward in addressing the complex challenge of climate change.

This Climate Declaration comes from HDSB students, on behalf of all students, staff and the HDSB community. All students will see both their place in affecting climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as understand what the Board is doing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase awareness and knowledge of the complexity of climate change. This Climate Declaration is a momentous first step in taking action on all sustainability issues; social, economic and environmental.

The preamble reads as follows:

WE THE STUDENTS of the Halton District School Board (HDSB) declare a climate emergency on behalf of the students, staff and the wider HDSB community.

WE acknowledge that the students of the HDSB can have a significant impact on mitigation and adaptation efforts for climate action.

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THE STUDENT SENATE of the HDSB has expressed their grave concern about the climate crisis and their interest in supporting a climate emergency declaration to safeguard our environment and our way of life while inspiring action to mitigate these threats. The Student Senate, on behalf of everyone in the HDSB, puts forward the following motion.

RECOMMENDATION:

BE IT RESOLVED that the HDSB declare a climate emergency to recognize the challenges that this issue brings to our Board while also aiming to inspire our students, families, and staff to take collective action in combating climate change within their communities through the following actions;

- **LISTEN** to Student Voice using Board-administered surveys to identify actionable and measurable opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with student interaction with buildings, transportation and waste.
- **EMPOWER** students to initiate and take action through support of a network of school-based, student focused groups, connected to the Environmental Management Team, that set their own metrics for measuring and reducing GHG emissions.
- **COMMUNICATE** with students through annual reports to Student Senate on Board level actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **INCLUDE** Student Voice on Sustainability Issues in School and Board Directives, using the Family of Schools structure.
- **RECOGNIZE** student achievements through an Environmental Excellence Award, presented in conjunction with the HDSB Inspire Award to a person who has undertaken or inspired environmental action.

Sincerely,



Andréa Grebenc
Chair of the Board of Trustees
Halton District School Board

Cc: Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Hon. Jeff Yurek, Ontario Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
Hon. Ted Arnott, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario
Stephen Crawford, MPP
Parm Gill, MPP
Jane McKenna, MPP
Effie Triantafilopoulos, MPP

Gary Carr, Regional Chair
Rick Bonnette, Halton Hills Mayor
Rob Burton, Oakville Mayor
Gordon Krantz, Milton Mayor
Marianne Meed Ward, Burlington Mayor
HDSB Board of Trustees
The Canadian School Boards' Association (CSBA)
The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
The Ontario Student Trustee Association (OSTA-AECO)



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July 6, 2020

Cathy Abraham
President
Ontario Public School Boards' Association
439 University Avenue, 18th floor
Toronto, ON M5G 1Y8
President@opsba.org

Dear Cathy Abraham:

On behalf of Rainbow District School Board, I would like to thank the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) for being a strong voice for public education.

We recognize that this past year, OPSBA worked diligently to represent us in negotiations at the provincial table. We appreciate your efforts and are pleased that central settlements were achieved.

The provincial settlements paved the way for us to engage in negotiations at the local level. We reached tentative agreements with our permanent teacher bargaining units prior to the end of the school year which puts us in good stead for the fall.

There is a clause in the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) central agreement, however, that will be, particularly problematic for Rainbow District School Board. We are referring to the default language on class size.

When Trustees ratified the central agreement with OSSTF at the regular meeting of the Board held on May 19, 2020, the following motion was approved:

Motion: 20-R49, D.Morrison/J.Kosmerly

That the Board make OPSBA aware of the impact of central bargaining decisions on local bargaining and student success as recommended by the Labour Relations Committee.

Carried

The inclusion of this default language poses and will continue to pose significant challenges for Rainbow District School Board. The two-week timeline following central ratification was, quite simply, unreasonable.

As a result of the central agreement, the average class size in our secondary schools increases by two students. While this applies to all of our regular classrooms, the default language provides relief for only 10 per cent.


This will result in a reduction in electives, which will have a negative impact on the quality and scope of programs offered to students. There will be a direct effect on student success.

The adverse impact is much more pronounced in small schools and the definition of a small school is extremely different from board to board. A large school in the Rainbow Board may be considered small when compared to many school boards in Southern Ontario.

For these reasons, we are hereby requesting that OPSBA assist us in obtaining additional resources from the Ministry of Education for small schools so all students can have a good selection of course options.

It is also our sincere hope that OPSBA will refrain from including default language in central agreements going forward. While it may seem practical at the time, implementation is easier said than done.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doreen Dewar". The script is cursive and fluid.

Doreen Dewar
Chair

cc: Rusty Hick RHick@opsba.org
School Board Chairs



Chair
Robin Pilkey

Trustee, Ward 7, Parkdale-High Park

July 13, 2020

Hon. Doug Ford, MPP
Premier of Ontario
Room 281, Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Hon. Stephen Lecce, MPP
Minister of Education
315 Front Street, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Lecce:

I am writing to express the Board's concerns with the current back-to-school recovery plan, and the "hybrid" or "adapted" model that the government is currently asking school boards to prepare to implement when school opens this September. The concerns and recommendations to the government were part of a resolution unanimously approved by the Board.

The Board is urging the government to develop a full and measured emergency response to the Covid-19 recovery/reopening of schools plan that will support communities, families, and children, and prioritizes investment in public education.

As you know, a number of Canadian authorities on children's health have raised significant concerns about the risks of keeping children in remote-learning scenarios long-term

The Board is concerned that this "hybrid" or "adapted" model will leave working parents with young children, single-parent households, and low-income families in the precarious position of having to choose between educating their children and their own employment. This model places a tremendous burden on parents and caregivers – and in particular women, families with young children and low-income families – and stands to further jeopardize the economic recovery. The health and safety of students and staff need to be prioritized yet balanced with the needs of families.

The Board is advising the Ontario government to:

- a. develop of a larger and more robust staffing plan to accommodate getting as many students as possible, as soon as possible, back into physical schools/spaces, while respecting public health advice;
- b. provide temporary, emergency funding to ensure that part the above can be accomplished safely and effectively and in the best interest of all families and communities; and,
- c. provide, as previously requested in our Board's letter to the Minister of Education on May 22, 2020, that the necessary funding supports to school boards be in place for all extra Covid-19 costs including PPE, additional staffing, additional transportation, IT devices, mental health and well-being supports, cleaning supplies, repair/maintenance to ventilation systems, touch-free sinks and soap dispensers for handwashing, and water bottle refill stations

The Board will also be writing to the Prime Minister and the Mayor of Toronto to encourage their collaboration with the Ontario government on other funding, policies and programs that will help allow children and families to participate fully in the reopening school. These include new investments that will support a greater number of affordable and accessible childcare spaces and paid parental leave options for parents/guardians whose ability to participate in the workforce is hindered by the lack of complete school/childcare options for their child(ren).

We urge you to act on these recommendations as soon as possible. We would be happy to discuss further at any time

Sincerely,



Robin Pilkey, CPA, CA, ICD.D
Chair, Toronto District School Board

cc: Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Chairs of all Ontario School Boards
All Toronto City Councillors
All Toronto Members of Parliament
All Toronto Members of Provincial Parliament



July 20, 2020

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

To the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education,

At the meeting of July 15, 2020, Trustees of the Halton District School Board unanimously passed the following motion:

“Be it resolved that the Chair of the Board write to the Minister of Education, copying all Boards and OPSBA, on behalf of all HDSB Trustees requesting that a limited term, defined scope multi-stakeholder task force be struck to be critically reflective and develop big picture, innovative opportunities about how the publicly funded school system in Ontario can “build back better” in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Be it further resolved that should the Minister not be able to pursue this, that the Trustees of the Halton District School Board will seek partners and coordinate a forum to develop these opportunities by the end of 2020.”

The term “Building Back Better” was first used in 2006 in the aftermath of the 2004 Asian tsunami. By 2015 the term was widely used by the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) community (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015). It generally refers to the recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction phase after a disaster to increase the resilience of communities through the restoration of physical infrastructure and societal systems. The emphasis is not only on preventative measures to reduce the cost of recovery, but also on incorporating social and environmental improvements for increasing well-being of impacted societies.

The term has been utilized by leaders locally, nationally and globally during the 2019/2020 Covid-19 pandemic as a rallying term for recovery. Not only is this a hopeful basis to start from, but it provides the opportunity to reflect and identify actions that will improve the social, cultural, economic and environmental status quo contexts that have existed, oftentimes for decades, unquestioned and ineffective for some or all community members. This is certainly true in an education context, as the Covid-19 school closure period has highlighted and exacerbated systemic inequities and provided the

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opportunity to try new approaches. The purpose of this request is to seize these opportunities to “build back better” an education system in ways that we would not have imagined in the pre-Covid era. The Trustees of the Halton District School Board believe that this is both timely and imperative.

At present, the Minister hosts short, separate meetings with different stakeholders, largely as information forums. This is a starting point. There have also been a number of recent change related announcements from the Minister that could be further supported by forward-looking, system thinking so that the intended positive impacts are fully and broadly realized.

We’d like to amplify the voices of stakeholders who have made a similar request for a proactive and collaborative approach with all partners, traditional and nontraditional, who together can develop an innovative, forward thinking action plan that will indeed make Ontario’s publicly funded system one that works for all students and is the envy of the world. Since overarching educational direction is within the province’s mandate, the Ministry is most appropriately positioned to coordinate this activity. If this is not possible, the Trustees of the Halton District School Board will seek partners with the intention of implementing such a forum by the end of the 2020 year.

We look forward to working with you and diverse stakeholders on this initiative.

Sincerely,



Andréa Grebenc
Chair of the Board of Trustees, Halton District School Board

Cc: MPP Ted Arnott,
MPP Stephen Crawford,
MPP Parm Gill,
MPP Jane McKenna,
MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos,
Ontario English Public School Board Chairs
President Cathy Abraham, Ontario Public School Board Association

Citation

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, U. (2015), Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 - 2030, https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf (accessed on 4 June 2020).



July 16, 2020

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

To the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education,

The Trustees of the Halton District School Board (HDSB) request that the part-time 15-student hybrid/adaptive model be withdrawn as an option for the 2020-2021 school year for students in kindergarten to grade 6. Instead, Trustees request appropriate funding for a 15-student daily attendance in-person model or, at the very least, the adjustment of the model's cohort size parameters to allow for daily attendance.

The hybrid model that boards have been directed to develop relies heavily on accessible and affordable childcare so that working parents may participate in the workforce. In Halton, that means a childcare need for up to 36,000 students in kindergarten to grade 6. This volume of childcare space does not currently exist in Halton Region and established daytime childcare within the region focuses on preschool aged children. Therefore, temporary, casual, and unlicensed care may make up the majority of a potential new childcare market. This market has no formal obligation to learn about or adhere to strict Public Health protocols to stop the transmission of the virus.

A model that relies on alternating a student's time between the classroom and out-of-school childcare creates opportunities for mixing students from different settings (e.g. classrooms, schools, school boards) and as a result increases their exposures and elevates students' risk of infection. This model, which disrupts the classroom "bubble", will be counterproductive to limiting widespread community infection and poses great challenges to contact tracing efforts.

If childcare is unavailable or unaffordable, parents (mostly women, as noted by a number of experts and advocates) may have to leave the labour force to care for their children on out-of-school days. In some situations, young children may be left home alone or in the care of young siblings.

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Finally, the Trustees of the HDSB find the messaging about who the decision making body is for determining which plan will move forward in September confusing. We respectfully request that you clarify whether the decision is to be made by the Ministry of Education or by local school boards in conjunction with local public health officers.

Additional information to support this letter has been included in the form of appendices:

- A. [Further Hybrid/Adaptive Model Analysis](#)
- B. [Motion M20-0089 from the Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees - July 15, 2020](#)

Minister Lecce, the Trustees of the HDSB, like you, understand how critical it is for students to have the safest environments for in-person learning and well-being. We encourage you to continue to work with internationally recognized healthcare experts, including those at SickKids Hospital and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, to meet the goal of a daily-attendance model for kindergarten to grade 6 students.

Sincerely,



Andréa Grebenc
Chair of the Board of Trustees, Halton District School Board

Enclosure: Further Hybrid/Adaptive Model Analysis
Motion M20-0089 from the Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees - July 15, 2020

Cc: MPP Ted Arnott,
MPP Stephen Crawford,
MPP Parm Gill,
MPP Jane McKenna,
MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos,
Ontario School Board Chairs (English Public, English Catholic, French Public, French Catholic)
President Cathy Abraham, Ontario Public School Board Association

Appendix A

Analysis of the Hybrid/Alternate/Adaptive Model

This information is anecdotal, based upon ideas and concerns shared by families of the Halton District School Board, and observations by its Trustees.

Educational Systems are Childcare Systems

Education is a Human Right. Citizens/taxpayers enter into a social contract with the government for the provision of equitable education for all. In the early years of schooling, the educational system also takes on the role of childcare provider. This obligation can not suddenly vanish without resulting in consequences to parents, their children, the labour force and the economy.

Lack of Childcare Options

The established childcare system is primarily based on care for preschool aged children. There is no care system available during regular working hours for school aged children. Daycares are currently also required to function with limited capacity. Children from kindergarten (K) to grade 6 need to have adult supervision from a childcare perspective. Our board alone has over 36,000 K-6 students, a large portion of which will need out-of-home care during the day in the hybrid model in order for their parents to fulfill their employment obligations. We also have a robust coterminous board and French schools within our region which may add another 10,000 to 15,000 students requiring childcare. That is approximately 50,000 students in Halton alone. Where are all these childcare providers going to come from?

A market of previously employed people from various sectors may come forward seeing an opportunity to make some income and take in a number of students into care during the day within their neighbourhoods. These people will have no training in childcare, not to mention the requirement to adhere to public health protocols or training on such protocols to keep virus transmission at bay. There is no certification, accountability or transparency for pop-up childcare. These casual neighbourhood arrangements could potentially put children in unsafe environments as well as exponentially increase the risk of transmitting the virus and spreading it back to their schools.

Childcare costs money. Adding new childcare costs for families (many with multiple children) could be an unexpected and critical financial burden. Parents may opt to have one parent shoulder the childcare responsibilities versus returning to work. It is not lost on this Board of Trustees, composed entirely of women, that much of the labour force losses and burdens of the hybrid system will disadvantage women. Single mothers may have to make unbearable, life-altering choices. We may find desperate parents who could not secure or afford childcare leaving the workforce or leaving their young children alone at home.

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Hybrid Model Opens Additional Risk to Multiple Schools and Systems

In an urban setting, children that attend daycares mix with students from other classes, other schools and other systems (English Public, English Catholic, French Public, French Catholic). This happens whether parents use formal organizations/businesses or casual, in-home unlicensed care. By removing full-day, every day schooling where there is a dedicated and controlled “bubble” within which the virus could be more easily identified and contained within one school, the government is opening up the student bubble exponentially through the necessity of casual and out-of-the-home care and putting multiple classes, schools and boards at risk.

Hybrid Model is at Odds with Expert Healthcare Advice from SickKids Hospital

SickKids Hospital is an internationally respected healthcare organization that is focused on children. It has released [a report](#) with many recommendations for schools including the model that it views as best for the health and well-being of school-aged children, which is a full-time, in-person model.

Instruction on Out-of-school Days

The vision this government has about the hybrid/alternate model is that on the days that students are not in school, they will be handily working at home on assignments, logging in to synchronous lessons and isolating themselves from other students. If children need to be cared for outside the home, none of this will happen. The government has stated that curriculum expectations will remain intact, but the reality is that these expectations will have to be met over half the previously allocated time. Even if parents are home, they are not trained to be teachers and many will have employment obligations that pull them away from focusing on facilitating their children’s educational objectives during the day. Parents have said over and over again that the March through June period that relied on parental teaching was a struggle and unsuccessful on many levels. Teachers will not be available for students’ out-of-school days as they will be responsible for teaching the alternate cohort. This increases stress throughout the system.

Inequities of the Hybrid Model

Wealthy families who can afford to bring care to their home (nannies/tutors) or currently function within a two-parent-one-income environment may fare reasonably well in a hybrid system with clear expectations and strong teacher support. They may also choose to exit the public system for the private one as private schools can open full-time. Most families do not fall under this category. There will be inequities of access to lessons, to devices and to safe environments for students, and a steady increase in the inequity gap that already exists. This will disproportionately impact racialized, indigenous, socioeconomically disadvantaged families and students with special needs.

Solutions

Funding Smaller Cohorts Appropriately

If the government favours a 15-student cohort, the safest model would also insist on every-day in-person instruction by teachers to preserve the safe student bubbles to avoid spreading the virus. This would necessitate an infusion of appropriate funding to allow the hiring of teachers and acquiring space (community centres, public libraries, empty commercial space, faith spaces, etc.), as well as accounting for increasing transportation and cleaning costs. Slight adjustments to the cohort size would make this easier. Maintaining the Primary class size cap of 20 as the cohort size would allow primary students to attend daily without space issues. This could be extended to the Junior grades.

Being Creative with Education Models

The insistence that all worthy education can only happen within four walls holds our education system back from evolving and being innovative. As outdoor environments have been shown to be lower risk for virus spread than indoor environments, part-time in-school learning could be balanced with outdoor education opportunities from grades 1-8. Kindergarten's play-based program could be adapted to the Forest Schools model that already exists in Scandinavian countries, the UK, Germany, the US and right here in Ontario. Our province, especially in the southern portions, has good weather from May through the end of November. We have provincial parks, conservation areas, municipal parks and even school fields that often sit near vacant during instructional hours.

Resource link within the document:

<http://www.sickkids.ca/PDFs/About-SickKids/81407-COVID19-Recommendations-for-School-Reopening-SickKids.pdf>

Appendix B

Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Halton District School Board Motion M20-0089

- Whereas Trustees are mandated by the Education Act to maintain focus on student achievement and well-being, to assist the board in delivering effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils and to bring concerns of parents, students and supporters of the board to the attention of the board;
- And whereas the people of Halton enter into a social contract with the government to educate and act as childcare providers through paying taxes;
- And whereas current Ministry funding for the hybrid/adaptive 15-student model does not allow for daily, in-person student attendance;
- And whereas the hybrid model forces working parents to seek alternative childcare for younger children;
- And whereas childcare for potentially 36,000 Halton District School Board(HDSB) Kindergarten to grade 6 students does not currently exist in Halton Region;
- And whereas the hybrid model exposes younger students that require childcare during working hours to potentially unsafe and/or unsupervised environments;
- And whereas unregulated, temporary childcare situations do not require inspection to show evidence of adherence to Public Health protocols that limit the spread of the Coronavirus;
- And whereas temporary childcare situations may mix students from various school classes, schools and boards, exponentially exposing the contained classroom “bubble” of students and staff and risking harder-to-trace-and-contain outbreaks in various classes, schools and across boards;
- And whereas childcare costs money, potentially placing families into critical financial situations that may affect student achievement and well-being;
- And whereas the hybrid model increases equity gaps, felt more profoundly by racialized, indigenous, and socioeconomically disadvantaged families, as well as students with special needs;
- And whereas the hybrid model may increase mental health issues and system stress by compressing the time to meet curriculum expectations by half;
- And whereas internationally respected children’s hospitals have indicated that full-time attendance is what is best for children;
- And whereas model constraints and funding does not allow for truly innovative educational solutions to come forward;

- And whereas recent messaging from the provincial government regarding who will decide which of the three models will be implemented in September 2020 has been unclear;

Be it resolved that the Chair write a letter on behalf of the Board of Trustees, copying all Ontario Boards, OPSBA and local MPPs, indicating their concerns with the current part-time hybrid/adaptive model as outlined by the Ministry of Education, requesting the hybrid/adaptive model, under its current funding level, be withdrawn as an option for September 2020 for students in Kindergarten to grade six, requesting appropriate funding for the 15-student model as a daily attendance model or adjusting the model cohort parameters, and

Be it resolved that the Chair ask the Minister of Education for clarification about who the decision maker is for the September school year start up.



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July 14, 2020

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
438 University Ave, 5th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1N3

Chairs of District School Boards

Directors of Education

School Authorities

RE: COVID-19 – Respecting the rights of students with disabilities

I am writing on behalf of the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC).

We hope this letter finds you and your team safe and healthy, and we thank you for your ongoing efforts to provide continuity of learning for students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The OHRC welcomes the June 19 announcement of the government's *School Safety Plan* for the 2020 – 2021 school year, and understands that school boards will develop specific plans by late July based on this direction. In addition to this plan, we know that the Ministry of Education (MOE) has provided guidance to school boards on continuity of learning for students with special education needs.

The unprecedented closure of schools has been difficult for all students. The OHRC has heard from stakeholders that students with special education needs and other vulnerabilities have experienced unique and compounded challenges, that their circumstances have not consistently been considered and addressed, and that as a result, they have fallen even further behind than their peers. It is imperative that the MOE and school boards establish plans and programs to systematically and consistently address the needs of students with disabilities for the 2020 – 2021 school year. Some specific concerns have been raised in the context of the OHRC's current Right to Read public inquiry into human rights issues affecting students with reading disabilities. We have also heard from members of the OHRC's Education Advisory Group, as well as from disability rights organizations.

The OHRC released a [policy statement](#) on maintaining human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a [statement of actions](#) that sets out various steps that governments, and those delivering government services, can take that are broadly consistent with a human rights-based approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic. This letter provides additional and specific guidance from the OHRC on obligations under the Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the *Code*) related to the needs of students with disabilities.

Under the *Code*, students with disabilities have a right to meaningful access to the education that all other students receive. Education providers have a legal duty to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities who are adversely affected by a requirement, rule or standard. Accommodation is necessary to address barriers in education that would otherwise prevent students with disabilities from having equal opportunities, access and benefits.

Drawing from the OHRC's principles and actions documents along with stakeholder feedback, this letter provides additional and specific guidance on obligations under the *Code* for students with disabilities experiencing barriers to at home learning and potential barriers resulting from modified classrooms in the 2020 – 2021 school year.

The OHRC is concerned about:

1. Technology
2. Personal contact
3. Professional services
4. Screening and assessment
5. Instruction
6. Specialized programming
7. IPRCs and IEPs and the duty to accommodate
8. Summer learning programs
9. Shared legal responsibility.

We recognize that you are already aware of many of these issues and that the situation is continually evolving. We acknowledge that the MOE, boards and other partners respond to issues as they arise. However, we are concerned that to date, there has been a lack of a systematic and consistent approach that takes into account the unique needs and vulnerabilities of students with disabilities and other *Code*-protected groups. It is imperative that the MOE and boards systematically and consistently address their needs when preparing plans and programs for vulnerable students for the 2020-2021 school year.

1. Technology

The OHRC strongly supports the Ministry's guidance in the *School Safety Plan* to boards to extend arrangements that provided devices and internet connectivity to students who would otherwise not be able to access remote learning, as well as ensuring platforms are accessible for persons with disabilities.

During school closures, access to and effective use of technology has been a challenge for both educators and students. Students' ability to use technology to learn is impacted by Internet access, availability of a device, their own capacity to use technology, and their family's ability to support its use. Having a disability or other vulnerability, such as living in poverty, exacerbates these challenges, as does the availability of reliable Internet access. Educators' capacity to translate their teaching to online environments also varies. As plans for a return to in-classroom learning or a hybrid of in-classroom and at-home learning in September remain unclear, access to effective technology will be crucial for any potential scenario in September.

The duty to accommodate in these circumstances includes providing support in using technology to staff, students and families both through workshops and one-on-one support where necessary. Schools should clearly communicate with students and families what assistance is available, and provide a single point of contact should there be any difficulties.

Any technology that is used to deliver education services must be fully accessible to students with disabilities. We understand that several different digital platforms are being used and that they may not all be fully accessible. Using platforms that are not fully accessible for students with disabilities could result in a finding of discrimination under the *Code*.

We understand that students have been permitted to bring any Special Equipment Amount (SEA) technology home, and we recommend that this option continue. SEA claims should continue to be processed in a timely fashion. Lack of access to full professional assessments should not be a barrier to obtaining a recommendation for SEA technology. It may be appropriate for the MOE to waive this requirement for the 2020 – 2021 school year and/or for boards to explore ways to ensure the professional recommendations for SEA technology can still be obtained. For example, MOE or boards could facilitate professional consultations related to access to technology for SEA claims.

2. Personal contact

The OHRC has heard that students have experienced little to no personal contact with classroom teachers, special education teachers, educational assistants, speech language pathologists, social workers and other professionals. This has a particularly negative impact on students with disabilities

who rely on this regular contact to support their learning, maintain their engagement with school and preserve their mental health.

Students with disabilities such as learning disabilities are more likely to experience co-morbid conditions such as depression and anxiety. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized that a sense of connectedness, good communication, and perceptions of adult caring have been shown to be related to a wide range of mental health outcomes for students. As well, the relationship between teachers and students has been shown to be associated with student progress and academic achievement.¹

The OHRC is encouraged by and supports the direction in the *School Safety Plan* relating to students with a high level of special education needs, who may find remote learning challenging. Boards will need to consider providing the option of attending school every day, and where schools have smaller classes, such as congregated classrooms for students' special education needs, boards are also encouraged to offer everyday timetabling.

However, to the extent that online learning continues in the 2020-2021 school year and in recognition that many parents with students with special education needs, or physical vulnerabilities to COVID-19, may choose to continue learning at home, it is imperative that students have regular personal contact with their teachers, special education teachers, educational assistants and others. As remote learning continues, there should be regular scheduled check-ins with students and parents/guardians using video conferencing or teleconferencing where technology does not support videoconferencing.

3. Professional services

We understand that many professional services have been suspended as a result of COVID-19. For example, we heard that boards have not been conducting psycho-educational assessments. We also understand that access to other professional staff has been limited or inconsistent. The OHRC is concerned that the *School Safety Plan* does not provide specific guidance to boards in this area.

This raises significant concerns from a human rights perspective. In normal times, there can be significant wait times to access these services. Additional delays mean that some students will not be getting assessed or served in a timely way. We echo the direction provided by the MOE on May 27, 2020 that boards “**must** continue to ensure that mental health workers, para-professionals, and other professional staff remain available to students to support them during

¹ The World Health Organization's Information Series on School Health Document 10, Creating an Environment for Emotional and Social Well-Being, online: www.who.int/school_youth_health/media/en/sch_childfriendly_03.pdf.

this difficult time. Recognizing the importance of privacy and sensitivity of many of these discussions, boards must provide safe and secure options for students to directly engage with these professionals on an as-needed basis. As students face increasing mental health challenges during this pandemic, it is vitally important that mental health professionals continue fulfilling their critical role.”

For the 2020-2021 school year, it is imperative that boards have a plan to not just ensure access to staff on an as needed basis, but to continue to ensure that these staff provide the key services they typically provide including psycho-educational and speech language assessments, mental health supports, etc.

4. Screening and assessment

Early and ongoing screening and assessment for learning difficulties are required by PPM-8. The OHRC has identified early screening as a key requirement to meet the needs of reading disabilities in its Right to Read inquiry.

It is imperative that boards continue to ensure that educators conduct early screening and assessment of students (e.g. phonological awareness screening and reading level assessments), to identify students at risk for difficulties and be able to respond appropriately (for example, with differentiated instruction, additional support, discussion with special education teams, developing IEPs, referral for professional assessments etc.). It is particularly important that students who need access to reading intervention programs and other specialized programs be identified and offered these programs during the 2020-2021 school year (for more on this, see below).

While the *School Safety Plan for 2020 – 2021* suggests that assessment, evaluation and reporting activities should proceed as usual, the *Plan* is lacking on specific detail about screening and assessment for learning difficulties.

5. Instruction

We welcome the MOE’s direction to boards to prioritize synchronous learning for the 2020 – 2021 school year. At the same time, we wish to convey that we have heard concerns from families that synchronous learning is challenging when households do not have enough devices. In this regard, the OHRC strongly urges boards to extend arrangements that provide devices and Internet connectivity to students who would otherwise not be able to access remote learning.

We also heard that differentiated instruction that reflects the needs and learning profiles of all students is not taking place, and that extra support may not be available. This raises concerns for several reasons. Students with learning difficulties need direct instruction from their teachers. Many parents are not equipped or in a position to “teach” their children the curriculum or support them in accessing the materials provided. The OHRC notes that some disability rights

organizations have identified innovative teaching practices for students with disabilities and we encourage you to take a look at them.

A one-size-fits-all approach to teaching does not work for many students with disabilities and is not consistent with Universal Design for Learning.

Plans for the 2020 – 2021 school year must consider needs of students with learning disabilities and students who face barriers to at-home learning, and use scientific evidence-based approaches to help close the learning gap (for example, by providing access to synchronous phonics instruction).

6. Specialized programming

Many students with disabilities rely on specialized programming, classes or supports. One example is reading intervention programs such as Empower Reading. The OHRC has heard that since the school closure in March, these programs have not continued or have continued only on a very limited basis.

While we appreciate that the sudden disruption to the school year presented several challenges, in anticipation of the 2020 – 2021 school year it will be imperative that boards find ways to continue to run these programs for students with disabilities. If children lose the opportunity to take part in these programs, the impact can be significant and life-long.

The OHRC therefore supports the *School Safety Plan* in urging boards to resume the delivery of special programming and to offer regular timetabling for programs like Empower Reading.

7. IPRCs, IEPs and the duty to accommodate

Boards must continue to accommodate students with special education needs (whether or not they have been identified through an IPRC) to the point of undue hardship. The accommodations that students were receiving before the pandemic must continue or be adjusted to reflect the current circumstances. Boards must be attentive to whether new accommodations are necessary and take immediate steps to put these in place.

The process for reaching an accommodation solution is as important as the substance of the accommodation, and should include:

- Meaningful dialogue among all parties that share the responsibility to provide accommodation, with expert assistance as required
- Contingency planning, in consultation with affected families
- Individual assessment of the needs of students, which may include extra one-on-one time with students virtually
- Examining and evaluating less discriminatory alternatives.

The ongoing implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and work of the Identification, Placement and Review Committees (IRPCs) will be fundamental to ensuring students who require special education supports and accommodations are able to thrive in the 2020 – 2021 school year.

The OHRC heard from stakeholders that due to school closures, some parents were asked to waive IEP consultations, or where IEP meetings did happen they were very brief and parents were not given the time to ask questions or raise concerns.

Some stakeholders also informed the OHRC that IEPs were not being implemented at all. IEPs ensure vital supports and accommodations for students with special education needs, and it is unacceptable that they not be implemented. Parents/guardians must be given the opportunity to have proper IEP consultations, and boards must heed the MOE's direction to consider changes in the school environment and/or remote learning needs when reviewing and updating IEPs. Normal waiver scenarios (i.e. where no changes to an IEP are needed) are acceptable.

Similarly, the OHRC strongly recommends that IRPC meetings continue through the 2020 – 2021 school year. The *School Safety Plan* does not provide specific guidance on this.

Given the heightened vulnerabilities of students who require special education support, it will also be important to regularly engage board Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs) to discuss plans and obtain feedback.

8. Summer learning programs

The OHRC supports plans for summer learning programs targeted to vulnerable students, including focused programming for students with special education needs and programming through the Provincial Demonstration schools. However, to be effective, the MOE and boards must ensure that these programs are scientific and evidence-based. For example, any programs to support reading and literacy should be based on the science of reading (e.g., they should emphasize instruction in phonological awareness and phonics in addition to including other foundational skills such as vocabulary, fluency and comprehension).

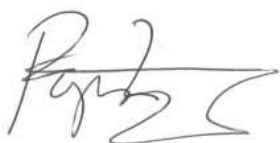
9. Shared legal responsibility

The responsibility for ensuring equal treatment in educational services for students with disabilities and other *Code*-protected groups rests with government, unions and school boards, among others. There is a shared responsibility to ensure that COVID-19 does not result in a denial of equal treatment to students with disabilities or other students who have faced barriers

when accessing education. All persons involved in delivering education services must work to remove barriers that impede access for vulnerable students.

The OHRC appreciates the ever-evolving circumstances surrounding COVID-19, and we know that you are continually working to address the impact of school closures on students. Vulnerable students' rights must be at the forefront of your planning, and their needs must be supported and accommodated to the point of undue hardship.

Sincerely,



Raj Dhira
Executive Director

cc: Président, Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'ontario (ACÉPO)
Présidente, Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)
President, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA)
President, Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
Executive Director, Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)
Directeur général et secrétaire-trésorier, Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO)
General Secretary, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)
General Secretary, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
General Secretary, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)
Chair, Ontario Council of Educational Workers (OCEW)
Chair, Education Workers' Alliance of Ontario (EWAO)
Coordinator, Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario (CUPE-ON)
Hon. Doug Downey, Attorney General
OHRC Commissioners



Alex Johnstone
 Chair of the Board
 Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
 20 Education Court, P.O. Box 2558
 Hamilton, ON L8N 3L1

July 30, 2020

Hon. Doug Ford
 MPP Premier of Ontario
 Room 281, Legislative Building, Queen's Park Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Hon. Stephen Lecce
 MPP Minister of Education
 315 Front Street, 14th Floor Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Lecce:

On behalf of our Board of Trustees, I am writing to strongly highlight the concerns and needs of our Board in order to support a safe reopening of our schools in September.

Hybrid/Adaptive Model

HWDSB parents and guardians have strongly expressed to us that a hybrid model – with in-school and distance learning – places undue hardship on families because they will be unable to work. This model will force many working parents with young children, single-parent households, and low-income families to face an immoral dilemma: Should they focus on their child's education, or their own employment? This is an unjust decision that no parent should have to make. Our Board is extremely concerned that many children may be left alone, or in unsafe situations, without available and affordable childcare options in our community.

In light of these concerns, we implore the government to develop a school reopening plan that is consistent across the province while supporting the needs of communities, families and children. This plan should prioritize our shared commitment and investment in public education and balance the health and safety of students and staff with the needs of Ontario families.

Safe & Effective Return To School

To prioritize the health and safety of our students and staff and close gaps in student learning and achievement, our Board also implores the Ministry to develop of a larger and more robust staffing plan. This is vital if we are to welcome as many students as possible, as soon as possible, into our learning spaces while respecting public health advice.

Financial Commitment Needed

Regardless of the reopening model selected, Ontario school boards need to receive temporary, emergency funding to support a safe and successful return to school.

Remote learning requires additional and ongoing investment in technology, internet, support, maintenance, professional development, as well as mental health and well-being supports for students impacted by school closures and social isolation.



Alex Johnstone
 Chair of the Board
 Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
 20 Education Court, P.O. Box 2558
 Hamilton, ON L8N 3L1

Learning in schools – whether through a hybrid or conventional model – requires adequate funding for personal protective equipment, additional staffing, additional transportation, technological devices, mental health and well-being supports, cleaning supplies, repair/maintenance of ventilation systems, touch-free sinks and soap dispensers for handwashing, and water bottle refill stations.

HWDSB implores the Government of Ontario to make a financial commitment that makes the health, safety and well-being of students and staff the top priority. At a minimum, HWDSB requires \$2,068,000 to fully fund personal protective equipment for a return to school in September. A full and transparent breakdown of costs are included in Appendix G of the Board report presented to Trustees on July 27, 2020. (<https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/meetings/Special-Board-Agenda-1595888044.pdf>)

Like our colleagues in Toronto, our Board will also be writing to the Prime Minister and the Mayor of Hamilton to encourage their collaboration with the Ontario government on other funding, policies and programs, such as increased affordable and accessible childcare spaces and paid parental leave options, that will help allow children and families fully participate in the reopening of our schools.

There remain many unknowns about the 2020-21 school year and how the pandemic will unfold and affect our community. Emergency, temporary funding is needed if we are to implement a responsible and responsive plan for a safe and effective school reopening. Collaboration is needed between all levels of government to support the needs of our community.

We offer these recommendations with respect, but ask that they be considered and implemented as soon as possible. Together, we can ensure the health, safety and well-being of students and staff and offer a school reopening plan that meets the needs of our families and community.

Sincerely,

Alex Johnstone, Chair
 Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

cc: Ontario Public School Boards' Association Chairs of all Ontario School Boards
 All Hamilton City Councilors
 All Hamilton Members of Parliament
 All Hamilton Members of Provincial Parliament



Catherine Fife
MPP Waterloo

Laura Mae Lindo
MPP Kitchener Centre

Hon. Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
900 Bay Street,
Toronto, ON
M7A 1N3

August 5, 2020

RE: Safe Return to Schools

Dear Minister Lecce,

On July 23rd, 2020, we issued a joint statement regarding parents needing a plan for the safe return to schools with emergency funding for COVID19 measures.

The statement can be found here:

<https://www.ontariondp.ca/news/ndp-mpps-parents-need-plan-safe-return-schools-emergency-funding-covid-19-measures>

On the same day, July 23rd, 2020, the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, Jayne Herring, for the Waterloo Region District School Board, also requested a significant increase in funding for the 2020-2021 school year to ensure the health, safety and well being of both students and staff.

The letter can be found here:

https://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/Chairperson-Letter-to-the-Minister-of-Education_-_Funding-for-the-2020-21-School-Year-July-2020.pdf

Parents, students and educators deserve to know if the province will provide the necessary emergency funding to school boards so they can be prepared and put the necessary precautions in place now.

Please provide a response so we may provide our constituents with the assurance that whether they are parents, students or educators, emergency funding will be provided to safeguard them when they return to their respective schools.

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Catherine Fife
MPP Waterloo

Laura Mae Lindo
MPP Kitchener Centre

Sincerely,

Catherine Fife, MPP
Waterloo

Laura Mae Lindo, MPP
Kitchener Centre

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August 21, 2020

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

To the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education,

The Trustees of the Halton District School Board are greatly concerned and seeking clarification regarding a number of items that are critical for back to school planning and ensuring stability and confidence in public education. It is an understatement to note that there is heightened stress among all parties in the education sector and beyond due to the ongoing pressures and concern about COVID-19 and keeping everyone safe and healthy. While the health crisis evolves and demands flexibility, now is a time for collaboration and clarity of vision.

In your August 13 announcement, there were several items that are concerning:

- The well-being of students, staff, families and the community is the highest priority. In your announcement, you noted that the Province's Medical Officer of Health has signed off on the current return to school direction regarding existing class sizes in elementary. You also stated that Boards have the choice to implement greater distancing (finding new spaces) and smaller class sizes than are in that guidance. This is highly confusing and puts our Board in a very difficult position. Elementary class sizes for elementary grades has been a source of broad contention with the Province's return to school direction to Boards. The announcement created an expectation that would be nearly impossible to meet, particularly before September 8. In Halton, over 1200 new teachers would be required to lower elementary class sizes to 15, and additional space would need to be sourced and outfitted, transportation arranged, etc. In addition to a multitude of logistical challenges, and a lack of rental spaces in areas of need, it is anticipated that the cost to do so would be well in excess of the amount our Board could access from reserves.
- Boards are able to utilize a portion of their own financial reserves to implement changes for the upcoming school year. In Halton, reserves have been built over a number of years and earmarked for other high need situations such as upgrading facilities, a home-grown

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solution to a lack of adequate funding sources for aging school and administrative buildings.

- The July 30 direction from the Ministry, included: "Secondary schools in designated school boards will open on an adapted model, with class cohorts of approximately 15 students, attending on alternate schedules that would include in person attendance for at least 50% of instructional days." Boards (consistently) interpreted this to mean at least 2.5 days of the week, and models had been circulated to families reflecting this. While answering a press conference question, you stated that in person instruction is to be 50% of the time, causing much confusion and impacting the expectations of families and students across the province. Prior to the announcement, HDSB staff had gone through the Ministry presentation process receiving positive feedback and no red flags on a model which reflected 50% of days, with mornings for face to face learning, and afternoons for synchronous and asynchronous learning while the schools are cleaned. HDSB staff had begun the process of surveying staff and families about their intent to return. Following your comment about the expectation of in-person instruction at 50% of the time, Board staff immediately paused the process to revise the plan, diverting valuable energy and undermining the community confidence.
- In the same announcement, you noted a \$50M investment to upgrade/address HVAC systems across the province. While additional investment is appreciated, with 72 Boards in Ontario of varying sizes and needs, it is difficult to say how much would flow to each board. For context, to retrofit an older secondary school with a partial air conditioning system has cost in excess of \$1M in the HDSB. Facilities staff have been working tirelessly during the summer months to upgrade and update these systems, and inference of lack of safety is not helpful.

Minister, you have spoken many times about working together. It is very challenging when these announcements come with no advance notice, and Boards hear about them at the same time as thousands of concerned citizens of Ontario who, in turn, expect school boards to have answers. These announcements may trigger complex revision processes that often require additional direction from the Ministry which may or may not come in short order. You have also mentioned "scaling up" a number of times, inferring that other announcements could be coming. Systems and people are under great pressure. At this time, staff need to focus on implementing plans for return to school in just over two weeks.

Staff and students of Ontario school boards should be focussing on a safe return to school, and establishing the new learning and health and safety protocols that the COVID-19 pandemic requires. Overlaying this with new curricula (such as elementary math) complicates these processes and draws energy from where it is needed most. As such, the Trustees of the Halton District School Board are adding our voice to the many letters you've received requesting that full

implementation of the new math curriculum be delayed, in favour of a measured transition with adequate preparation time for staff.

Minister, words matter. This is not a time for finger pointing. All Boards, and the communities they serve are different, and plans have been developed to reflect those unique restraints and needs. We are asking for consistency and clarity of vision so that all resources can be focussed on implementing back to school plans. The Trustees of the Halton District School Board look forward to actively collaborating with the Ministry of Education to help make the school year safe for students and staff so that students can learn, grow and succeed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andréa Grebenc', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Andréa Grebenc

Chair of the Board of Trustees, Halton District School

Cc: MPP Ted Arnott,
MPP Stephen Crawford,
MPP Parm Gill,
MPP Jane McKenna,
MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos,
OPSBA Member Board Chairs
President Cathy Abraham, Ontario Public School Board Association



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August 24, 2020

Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
Mowat Block,
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Lecce:

At its regular meeting on August 18, 2020, Rainbow District School Board trustees approved the following motions regarding the Ministry's plan for reopening schools:

Motion 20-R78 Margaret Stringer/Judy Kosmerly

That the Board write a letter to the Minister of Education to advise of our deep concern that its plan for the reopening of schools in September has placed challenging expectations on boards in regards to optimal physical distancing in classrooms and on buses. Carried unanimously

Motion 20-R80 Judy Kosmerly/Judy Hunda

That the Board write to the Ministry of Education to express its grave concern that boards use reserve funds to enhance physical distancing and improve air quality. Carried unanimously

The health, safety and well-being of our students and staff remains the first and foremost priority as Rainbow District School Board prepares to welcome students back to class for the 2020-2021 school year.

We want our parents/guardians to send their children to school with confidence, knowing that they will be learning in a safe and caring environment. We also want our educators and support staff to return to school with confidence, knowing that they will be working in a safe and caring environment.

To achieve this goal, we have implemented a number of health and safety protocols that, together, provide layers of protection to limit the spread of COVID-19. Physical distancing will be difficult to achieve given that we have been directed to reopen schools with full in class instruction, 300 minutes per day, five days a week. In most Rainbow District School Board schools, ensuring physical distancing would require double the number of classrooms and double the number of teachers.

On August 13, 2020, you announced that you were allowing school boards to use their reserves to enhance physical distancing and improve air quality. At first glance, the "unlocking" of \$500 million in funds province-wide seemed like a good news story. Using reserves to respond to COVID-19, however, is not only imprudent, it provides a false sense of hope in a time of great uncertainty.

Boards have accumulated reserves through careful budget management. These funds are set aside to cover unanticipated expenses and shortfalls at year end. They are also earmarked for high priority initiatives, at the local level, with a focus on student achievement and well-being. These local priority initiatives are not funded by the province.

Over the past decade, Rainbow District School Board has experienced significant funding reductions due to declining enrolment. We have also been impacted by the Ministry's School Board Efficiencies and Modernization Strategy which resulted in a cumulative loss of revenue. In order to balance its

budget, Rainbow District School Board was forced to draw from its modest reserves over multiple years.

As we prepare for the 2020-2021 school year, we face a number of uncertainties. We don't have actual enrolment, which drives the Grants for Student Needs or GSNs. We don't know if the extra funds made available by the Province to date to support the safe reopening of schools will be sufficient to cover the costs for the duration of the pandemic. We don't know if we will have unexpected expenditures mid-year.

As you have said many times, Minister Lecce, we are living in unprecedented times. There is just so much that we don't know about the coming school year because we have never experienced this before. With this uncertainty, the financial risk on our board is greater than ever. What we do know is that we will still be expected to balance our budget at year end.

By announcing the "unlocking" of school board reserves, the Province of Ontario has essentially downloaded its financial obligations for health and safety to school boards. While it may have made for good news headlines at the time, it was a clear abdication of responsibility.

Doing this has put all boards in an untenable position. If a board uses its reserves, less funds will be available in the short and long term to manage financial risk or support board initiatives. If a board doesn't use its reserves, it may be perceived by the public as not doing enough to support the health and safety of students and staff.

Rainbow District School Board, and indeed all school boards in Ontario, must push responsibility back to the Province to provide equitable funding for health and safety, including enhanced physical distancing in classrooms and on school buses, and improved air quality.

Rainbow District School Board applauds the Ontario Public School Boards' Association for voicing its concerns on behalf of school boards. It's now our turn to speak up and respectfully request that the Province provide additional new funding to school boards to respond to the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Doreen Dewar
Chair

cc: Jamie West, MPP Sudbury JWest-QP@ndp.on.ca
 France Gélinas, MPP Nickel Belt fgelinas-qp@ndp.on.ca
 Michael Mantha, MPP Algoma-Manitoulin mmantha-qp@ndp.on.ca
 Cathy Abraham, OPSBA president President@opsba.org
 School Board Chairs
 Rainbow DSB Trustees

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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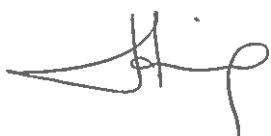
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Minister, you and Premier Ford have stated on many occasions ‘that no expense will be spared when it comes to our kids’. We are asking you to follow through on this commitment and provide funding that will allow the WRDSB to reopen schools in as safe 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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August 27, 2020

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

Dear Minister Lecce,

Trustees:

Diane Lloyd
(Chairperson)

Sarah Bobka
(Vice-chairperson)

Cathy Abraham
Terry Brown
Cyndi Dickson
Kailee Dupuis
Rose Kitney
Jaine Klassen Jeninga
Angela Lloyd
Emilio Ojeda
Steve Russell

Roan Haggerty-Goede
Justine MacKay
(Student Trustees)

Dr. Jennifer Leclerc
Director of Education

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1 (877) 741-4577
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Website: www.kprschools.ca

On behalf of the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, I would like to begin by acknowledging the complexities and many considerations currently being balanced as part of back to school planning in the province of Ontario.

School boards and their administrative teams are working tirelessly, with positive intention and thoughtfulness, to make complex and far-reaching decisions every day. Throughout all, our back to school planning is governed by a singular purpose: to safeguard the health and welfare of our students, staff and community.

To that end, we have recently approved the use of an additional \$5.5 million from our reserves to reinforce the safety of our planning efforts.

These uncommon times call for measures that we would not normally consider. At this time, our Board believes strongly that rededicating these funds from reserves was an additional step that we had no choice but to make as part of our commitment to the safety and health of our students and staff.

Having said that, we take seriously our obligations to be responsible planners and stewards of public funds. Our reserves have been set aside with careful planning to support needs that we know are real because we have planned for them. This has significant impact on our ability to invest in critical student needs in a number of areas, including:

- essential, long-term supports in the area of Special Education, such as potential staffing augmentation, the purchasing of learning equipment for students, or funding innovative projects such as our self-regulation or early intervention reading programs
- capital maintenance for our heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, as well as structural, mechanical and electrical repairs to keep our schools safe for students and staff
- digital infrastructure investments in networks and computer technologies that ensure modern and inclusive learning environments

- maintenance and investments in school grounds and fields that support not only school use, but serve as community centres of activity and connection.

All of these priorities now face possible delay, postponement or incompleteness.

At this time, however, the Board believes that ensuring safe schools for our students and staff is the greatest need and we have acted accordingly to support that belief.

We are writing today to request that your government provide further, immediate funding that reflects the on-the-ground costs incurred by school boards as part of their back to school planning.

Additionally, the short-term use of our reserves in this way is simply not sustainable over time. As we prepare globally to continue an adapted lifestyle for the unforeseeable future, we urge your government to put in place the resources necessary for safe learning environments for students and staff, which can be maintained for the long-term.

Ontario students deserve no less.

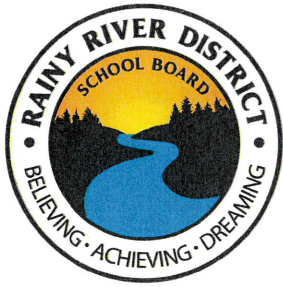
We look forward to the opportunity for further dialogue and joint action in fully funding a safe school system for our students and staff now, and into the future.

Sincerely,



Diane Lloyd
Chairperson of the Board

C: MPPs of Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board
Ontario School Boards
Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)



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DIRECTOR

Heather Campbell

Rainy River

DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

File Code: DIR GOV

Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Attn: The Honorable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I am writing to express our concerns over the use of accumulated surplus funds to support the reopening of our schools this fall.

The health, safety and well-being of our students, our staff, and our communities remain our priority as the Rainy River District School Board prepares to reopen its schools. With the need to provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other safety modifications within our schools, to support remote learning including costs associated with access to reliable Internet for students, and to ensure that our facilities have enhanced cleaning and disinfection, we anticipate that our five month additional operating costs for reopening will be approximately \$1.9 million dollars.

We appreciate the support of the government and the Ministry of Education in providing additional funding totaling \$302,537 to offset these costs. However, we are disappointed to not have received any funding to support remote learning, especially in a region of the province that is underserved in infrastructure to support regular synchronous student learning.

In the Rainy River District School Board, our accumulated surplus funds have been built through careful budget management and have been earmarked for other Board priorities and high need situations, including updating playground equipment, supporting the purchase of technological education equipment for our secondary schools, and other special pilot projects, not funded by the province, which support student achievement and well-being.

The ability to draw an additional one percent from accumulated surplus does little to offset the costs associated with safely reopening our schools this fall. Rather, this announcement only serves to create a false sense of hope for our school communities and ultimately, a perception that we are not doing enough to support the safety and well-being of students and staff.

In the preparation of the 2020-21 budget, the Rainy River District School Board has already requested a draw from accumulated surplus funds to account for previously established commitments: the amortization of Board-funded capital projects and for our Retirement Gratuity obligations. As such, the total amount remaining to draw from is a mere \$188,000.

As we prepare for the 2020-2021 school year, we face several uncertainties: the stability of our enrolment during COVID-19, the sustainability of our current funding to cover the costs associated with operating in a pandemic, and the unknown needs and expenditures. Thus, the extraordinary costs associated with safely reopening our schools should be fully covered by the provincial government, not the school board's accumulated surplus funds. We therefore respectfully request that the Province provide additional, new funding to school boards to respond to the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Campbell for R. Roy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Raymond Roy, Chair,
Rainy River District School Board

c. RRDSB Trustees

Cathy Abraham, OPSBA President president@opsba.org

School Board Chairs

Greg Rickford, MPP Kenora-Rainy River District greg.rickford@pc.ola.org

Judith Monteith- Farrell, MPP Thunder Bay-Atikokan

JMonteith-Farrell-QP@ndp.on.ca