



July 3, 2026

The Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
315 Front Street West, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON, M7A 0B8

RE: Waterloo Region District School Board Approved Budget for 2026-2027 and Urgent Structural Budget Pressures

Dear Minister Calandra,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees for the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), I am writing to formally share with you that WRDSB's Budget for the upcoming school year has been approved. While we have passed a budget that continues to make targeted investments in math, literacy, classroom safety and technology, we are concerned that our ability to continue making investments in our shared priorities is at risk due to structural underfunding by the Province. We must share our urgent concerns regarding the severe budget pressures that threaten our ability to maintain the high standard of education and support our students deserve.

1. Chronic Underfunding of Special Education

The gap between the actual needs of our students and the funding allocated through the Special Education Grant continues to widen. The complexity of student needs in our classrooms is rising, yet the funding model fails to reflect these realities. To ensure the safety, well-being, and academic progression of our most vulnerable learners, the WRDSB has been forced to subsidize Special Education by depleting our Special Education reserves over the past few years, diverting funds from other areas of the boards budget, and we find ourselves in a position where we may need to consider reductions in special education services as part of an overall deficit elimination plan in future years.

2. Operational and Structural Budget Pressures

There are immediate, unavoidable cost increases across several key operational areas that are not adequately covered by current provincial funding allocations:



- **Short-Term Supply Costs:** The escalating costs associated with short-term staff absences and supply coverage continue to outpace the funding provided by the Ministry. In 2026-27 alone, we anticipate having to divert \$17.7 million from other areas of our budget to cover short-term supply costs.
- **Statutory Benefits:** The Canada Pension Plan (CPP) enhancement was phased-in over the past number of years, and there is no evidence that Ministry funding benchmarks have increased to reflect the higher employer contributions that are required. For the 2026-27 school year, staff estimate the incremental impact to the WRDSB is \$728,000 in unfunded employer contributions for CPP.
- **Commodities and Services:** Inflationary pressures have sharply increased the baseline cost of running our facilities, utilities, and procuring essential educational services and technologies.

3. The Elimination of Responsive Education Programs (REPs)

We are profoundly disappointed by the lack of announcements regarding certain Responsive Education Programs (REPs) for 2026-27. In previous years, these targeted investments were instrumental in supporting student mental health and equity. The absence of this funding means that the long-term viability of some programs may be at risk, and has resulted in a loss of revenue for the WRDSB of roughly \$800,000. Some of the key programs not being funded in 2026-27 include:

- Graduation Coaches for Black students, who have successfully closed achievement gaps and fostered belonging.
- Human Rights and Equity Advisor, essential for maintaining safe, inclusive, and legally compliant school environments.
- Student bursaries that alleviate financial barriers for lower-income families.

In total, the WRDSB has been forced to allocate significant funds simply to cover these unfunded and underfunded areas.

To put this structural funding issue into perspective, if the Ministry were to fully fund short-term supply costs (as an example) those redirected funds could instead be used to directly support students and staff in our schools. Specifically, this funding shortfall represents the equivalent of:

- 130 Math and Literacy Intervention Specialists, who work shoulder-to-shoulder with teachers to improve their teaching practice and work directly with students to leverage high yield instructional strategies to improve their literacy and math.
- 252 Educational Assistants (EAs) to support classroom integration and safety.



- 32 behaviour support teams to build staff capacity to deal with ongoing behaviour issues and help foster a safe and welcoming environment for all students.

We urgently request the Ministry of Education address these concerns and develop a sustainable funding model that fully funds the equity, mental health, and special education needs of Waterloo Region students and accurately reflects the operational realities of modern school boards.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued partnership in education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maedith Radlein', is written over a horizontal line.

Maedith Radlein
Chair, Board of Trustees
Waterloo Region District School Board

cc: WRDSB Trustees
Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) and Member Board Chairs
and CEOs
Premier of Ontario
Local Members of Provincial Parliament
WRDSB Labour Partners
WRDSB Statutory Committees