



July 23, 2020

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

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees for the Waterloo Region District School Board, I am writing to request a significant increase in funding for the 2020-2021 school year. As you have stated repeatedly, ensuring the health, safety and well-being of both students and staff is our top priority.

With the need to provide personal protective equipment (PPE), adequate mental health support, transportation and enhanced cleaning, the costs associated with these priorities are greatly increased this year when compared to an average school year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, funding that reflects the true costs of reopening our schools in a safe manner is required immediately in order to keep our students and staff safe while also maintaining financial sustainability.

Procuring adequate PPE to provide both students and staff will be a vital part of our plan to ensure their health and safety. As I am sure you are aware, shortages in the supply chain for PPE and increasing prices continue to present a significant challenge, and this will impact both our budget and the ability of staff to maintain the safe operation of our facilities.

Our initial estimates of costs directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic are \$7.9M. This amount includes \$3.12M for PPE for students and staff, \$1M for additional cleaning supplies and staff, and \$0.6M for additional transportation costs for **just the first three months of this school year**. These costs cannot be carried by our Board beyond the first three months without incurring a deficit beyond 1% of the Board's annual budget, or by making cuts to other areas of a budget that has barely kept pace with the evolving costs of student needs since 2018-19.

As we look towards providing transportation for our students this year, we are presented with significant restrictions. Students will be limited to 24 per large school bus, roughly one third the usual number, to ensure adequate physical distancing. Additionally, both students and drivers (many of whom are in a high-risk demographic) will require masks while riding the bus, resulting in significant additional financial costs. More frequent cleanings of the buses further add to the increased budgetary pressures of providing transportation for our students as we look ahead to this unprecedented school year.

Our schools and facilities will require more frequent and thorough cleaning. In addition, there is the need to install wayfinding and physical distancing signage as well as other retrofits to ensure our spaces meet the recommendations of our partners in public health. New cleaning protocols will increase the frequency with which our learning environments are required to be disinfected. New staffing models, including an expected increase in overtime and the hiring of additional temporary custodial staff, will be required to ensure we have the staff needed to complete these additional tasks. These are all the necessary, but costly steps we must take at the advice of our public health partners, in order to protect our students and staff from the risks associated with COVID-19.

While we appreciate receiving the additional funds for supply staff costs, the amount provided by the Province offsets costs for a 'normal' year, and we certainly do not anticipate the 2020-21 school year to be business as usual. We need funding to ensure that we can hire replacements for staff who will be advised to remain at home if they become ill. We estimate this cost to be at least \$2M in the first three months.

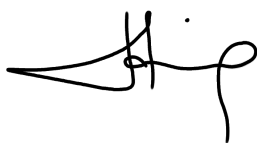
We respectfully request that you consider the above factors and others as outlined in the attached appendices, as an indication of the funding pressures the WRDSB and other boards across the province are facing, as you allocate funding for the 2020-2021 school year.

In the Waterloo Region District School Board, our students are first - each and every one. Like you, we understand how critical it is for students and staff to have the safest environments for in-person learning and to ensure well-being. Our school communities are relying on us to provide a safe return to school for all in September and we need you to help us achieve these goals by providing adequate funding.

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

- [Financial Sustainability Projection | WRDSB \(July 2020\)](#)
- [Nanos Poll: Support for Increased Funding | OPSBA \(July 2020\)](#)

Sincerely,



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

CC:

- OPSBA
- Ontario Public School Boards
- Local MPPs



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