



Waterloo Region District School Board

51 Ardel Avenue
Kitchener, ON N2C 2R5
T: 519-570-0003
F: 519-742-1364
wrdsb.ca

February 2, 2022

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

Dear Minister Lecce,

At its meeting on January 17, 2022, the Board of Trustees for the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), agreed to write to you to urge the Ministry of Education (Ministry) to pause the EQAO testing for this school year.

Many students are experiencing increased anxiety, depression and/or mental health concerns due to the impact of the pandemic and the methods of delivery in education over the last two years. These mental health issues are felt deeply by our WRDSB families, all of whom are coping with the stresses of the pandemic as best they can.

The administration of the EQAO tests in 2022 is a responsibility for teachers and administrators at a time when education staff are already burdened with adjusting to the impact of the pandemic on their mental and physical health as well as tailoring their professional teaching and administrative methods to address learning loss and being responsive to shifts in modes of learning.

It is known that the pandemic has disproportionately affected marginalized students and families. As noted by research, "since EQAO testing was introduced in Ontario schools, the achievement gap has not been drastically reduced and instead has intensified for certain identities particularly impacting Indigenous, racialized, English Language Learners, recent immigrants, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds" (Eizadirad, 2020, p. 27). Additionally, EQAO testing pre-pandemic created misconceptions about the 'quality' of schools and had contributed to a cycle where "schools often located in higher socio-economic communities maintain a valued status being labelled as offering 'high quality' education" (Eizadirad, 2020, p. 27). Any data collected in 2022 through EQAO, will be skewed due to the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic.

Several teachers and principals in research note that, "Kids feel a lot of stress about [EQAO tests]. Even though they're not going to be punished for it, they feel a lot of stress and anxiety about writing it" (Hargreaves, 2020, p. 413). Standardized testing has been found to "perpetuate *ill-being*", and can "undermine innovation and curriculum personalization" (Hargreaves, 2020, p. 415).

At this time, schools continue to evaluate students using a variety of methods and report this information through communications with families, ongoing assessment and formal report cards. These represent sufficient forms of data to understand learners and their needs.

While EQAO is only done in specific grades, it can also impact staff across the school and board by, for example, occupying EA support at a time when we are facing critical shortages, adding work to



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Administration and Administrative Assistants and adding to the workload of mental health support staff such as CYWs, Guidance Counsellors and Social Workers.

The Ministry of Education has supported boards in adopting a trauma informed approach with the understanding that this supports student achievement and well-being. Holding EQAO for Elementary students right now is not trauma informed and adds a layer of stress on top of what many students, families and staff have to address with the multiple waves of Covid. A pause on EQAO testing will support student and staff well-being, provide a sense of relief and provide some burden reduction during these unstable times.

Minister Lecce, we ask for your consideration of this request, as it will provide an additional level of safety, protect the health and safety of students, staff and their families in the WRDSB and throughout Ontario. This will provide an additional layer of support to staff and students and meet the province's goal of ensuring students are being supported with in-person learning through a very challenging time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Piatkowski".

Scott Piatkowski
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees
Waterloo Region District School Board

CC:
Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Chairs, Ontario Public School Boards
MPP Amy Fee
MPP Catherine Fife
MPP Michael Harris
MPP Belinda Karahalios
MPP Laura Mae Lindo