

June 24, 2019

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Floor
438 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2A5

Dear Minister Lecce,

I would like to start by congratulating you on your appointment as Minister of Education.

Trustees are mandated by the Education Act to enhance student achievement and well-being, and close gaps in student achievement. With this focus, Trustees with the Waterloo Region District School Board have directed me to voice our significant concerns regarding the proposed changes to classroom operations and funding the Government of Ontario has proposed to public education.

Changes to the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) has created challenges for our staff as they work diligently to prepare a balanced budget for the 2019-2020 school year. The WRDSB is facing an estimated loss of \$12 million as a result of changes to the GSN. Per-pupil funding has reduced by \$2 million from the 2017-18 budget year, which means each and every one of our students will receive \$110.44 less in funding. Our staff will continue to provide exemplary support for our students despite these changes; however, funding is essential to ensure our students have the necessary resources in place to support their academic achievement and their well-being.

The change that is causing the most concern for both my fellow trustees and staff, especially as we look beyond the current school year, are the proposed changes to class sizes. Moving from an average of 22 to 28 students in a classroom in secondary school might not seem like it will have much of an impact on student achievement and well-being, but I can assure you that this change will drastically alter the experiences our students have at school. We are anticipating that this change will affect the courses schools can offer students. Specialized courses and electives with lower enrollment numbers, such as technology courses and the arts may be limited, which will impact our students' optional areas of study and pathways opportunities. We also anticipate that an average class size of 28 students may result in some mandatory courses having a reduced number of sections available. Reduced sections may lead to students on wait lists to receive the course they require to graduate, and class sizes that may stretch the capacity of our classroom facilities. Furthermore, the increase in the average class size will result in fewer caring adults in our schools - caring adults who play an important role in the lives of students, who have an impact on the well-being of students in classrooms, and who supervise extra-curricular activities that keep students engaged.



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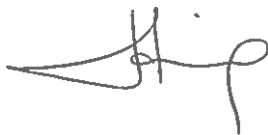
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The four mandatory online learning courses that secondary students will be required to complete starting in 2020 as a requirement of graduation are also of concern. All students learn in different ways. For some, online learning is a clear choice and an effective way to accumulate credits. For others, online learning does not suit their needs. Some students need one-on-one interactions with educators and peers to stay engaged and focused on their work. This new requirement also has an equity component that currently, has not been addressed. Not all students and their families have access to the internet or have limited access and not all students have access to computers after school hours. Research has shown that e-learning is not an effective platform for all students to learn. This proposal is a one-size fits all approach to education that does not address the learning needs of all students. We believe that enacting a mandatory four online courses for secondary students will lead to a rise in disengaged learners and hinder graduation rates.

We urge you to reconsider the decrease in per pupil funding, the increase in secondary class sizes and the mandatory four e-learning credits, and to consider the impact these changes will have on our students' achievement and well-being. We ask you to affirm your support for public education. An investment in public education is an investment in our youth, our communities and the future of Ontario.

Trustees of the Waterloo Region District School Board look forward to your response and would welcome a meeting at your convenience to discuss our concerns.

Sincerely,



Jayne Herring
Chairperson of the Board

cc: The Honorable Doug Ford
MPP Belinda Karahalios
MPP Laura Mae Lindo
MPP Amy Fee
MPP Mike Harris
MPP Catherine Fife
Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
Chairs of all District School Boards



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