

February 17, 2021

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

Dear Minister Lecce,

It was the will of the Waterloo Region District School Board, at its Board meeting on January 25, 2021, to express our support for the letter you received from the Halton District School Board dated January 11, 2021, asking you to expedite facilitating high speed internet connectivity to increase equitable access in rural and remote areas.

The Region of Waterloo is 1369 km<sup>2</sup> in area and the four townships in the region are predominantly rural. Many families in these areas, North Dumfries, Wilmot, Wellesley, and Woolwich, have little or no access to reliable high-speed internet service or when it is available it is cost prohibitive to acquire and maintain. This has produced a growing and concerning inequity in access to education across the Waterloo Region District School Board. Many students have been unable to access synchronous virtual learning as mandated by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry's Support for Learners one-time payment provision will help with families' additional costs during the 2020-2021 school year; however, it is not enough to support disadvantaged families incurring significant internet costs when schools are closed or students are isolating at home. The Covid-19 pandemic has deepened the struggles of many families for whom an already-precarious financial situation has been exacerbated by illness and reduction or loss of employment.

Access to affordable high-speed internet is an equity issue that must be immediately addressed by the government. As our colleagues in Halton noted, "during the press conference on January 8, it was suggested that the province could be in a crisis situation until at least April 2021. We cannot leave families with limited or no access to synchronous learning as we "pivot" in and out of in-person and virtual learning during that time."

We support the Halton District School Board and other Boards across the province in asking you and your government to urgently raise the priority of providing reliable and affordable high-speed internet access to rural and remote regions of Ontario.



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Sincerely,



Joanne Weston  
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees  
Waterloo Region District School Board

CC:  
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Ontario Public School Boards  
Regional Chair of Waterloo Region, Karen Redman  
Mayor of Cambridge, Kathryn McGarry  
Mayor of Kitchener, Berry Vrbanovic  
Mayor of Waterloo, Dave Jaworsky  
Mayor of Township of North Dumfries, Sue Foxton  
Mayor of Township of Wellesley, Joe Nowak  
Mayor of Township of Wilmot, Les Armstrong  
Mayor of Township of Woolwich, Sandy Shantz

Sent by email: [minister.edu@ontario.ca](mailto:minister.edu@ontario.ca)



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