



Waterloo Region District School Board

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November 7, 2022

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Floor, 438 University Ave
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5
Via email: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Lecce:

I am writing this letter on behalf of the WRDSB Board of Trustees in support of the Thames Valley District School Board's letter dated August 25, 2022.

The Waterloo Region District School Board spans over 1,350 square km and is the 9th largest school board in Ontario, with approximately 65,000 students. Our school board continues to grow at a considerable rate due to the rapid migration of families to Waterloo Region.

As we strive to accommodate escalating student enrolment with quality learning spaces, we are faced with funding and timeline challenges, and we are hopeful that these challenges can be addressed with your support.

The first of these challenges is the limitations of current capital benchmark funding. According to findings from the Operations, Maintenance & Construction Committee (OMC) of the Ontario Association of School Business Officials (OASBO), there is an average gap of approximately 18% between cost estimates and tender prices for new schools tendered from 2015 to 2018.

We currently have 3 capital priority projects (2 elementary schools and 1 elementary addition) in advanced design phase with 3 different architects that are each experiencing cost estimates that far exceed benchmark funding grants in some cases greater than 50%. We also have a 4th school in the process of seeking an architect and expect this project too will experience similar challenges. Increased capital benchmark funding would allow for more realistic budgets for new capital projects moving forward.

Another difficulty we face as a board is a substantial capital backlog of \$445,479,038, projected to reach \$759,399,801 over the next five years. Increased funding for the School Condition Improvement (SCI) and School Renewal Allocation (SRA) grants would assist in alleviating this significant backlog so that we can ensure students are learning in well maintained environments.

Approval timelines also present a challenge for our board as enrollment growth outpaces the speed at which we can secure approvals for new schools and build much-needed student accommodations.

On behalf of the Trustees of the Waterloo Region District School Board, I ask that you please consider the following actions to ensure the timely, cost-effective construction of quality schools for our students:

1. Increase capital benchmark funding for building of new schools and additions to meet current needs.
2. Increase funding to the School Condition Improvement (SCI) and School Renewal Allocation (SRA) grants to reduce WRDSB's capital backlog which presently is at \$445,479,038 and is forecasted to increase to \$759,399,801 over the next five years.
3. Shorten approval timelines for business cases submitted through the Capital Priorities Program and the construction approval process for new schools.

As Trustees this would assist our communities by ensuring our students have the facilities they need for an optional learning environment as enrolment increases and improve overall confidence in public education. Thank you for your consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Scott Piatkowski
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees

cc: Director of Education
Ontario Public School Boards' Association Member Board Chairs