



June 16, 2023

The Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Ministry of Education  
438 University Ave., 5th Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Lecce,

On April 24, 2023, the Toronto Youth Cabinet, supported and endorsed by 9 other provincial organizations, shared a letter with Minister Lecce which highlighted the importance of continued investments in mental health supports and initiatives in Ontario schools to address the rising mental health crisis facing Ontario students.

The recommendations shared by this group, which have been researched, tested, and used in other jurisdictions with proven positive student mental health outcomes, are as follows:

- Mandatory mental health literacy, K-12, to be embedded within the curriculum
- Designation of Mental Health Days, for mental health or behavioral reasons, as a legally excused student absenteeism reason, without the requirement of a doctor's note
- Additional mental health staff, at every category, to establish lower student-to-mental health staff ratios and increase culturally-appropriate access across all Ontario schools
- Provincial data collection system to track mental health supports and services in schools along with mental health outcomes for students, and
- Culturally-appropriate socio-emotional screening of students in all grades and conducted throughout a student's education

At our **Jun 1, 2023** , the following motion was passed:

Be it resolved that the Chair correspond with the Minister of Education to highlight HDSB's continued commitment to mental health and well-being of students and to indicate full support of the HDSB Board of Trustees for the student-led advocacy which aims to address the rising mental health crisis facing Ontario students.

Although Student Trustees do not have the authority to move and second motions, our board recognizes the importance of hearing their voices in matters concerning student health and well being.

Halton District School Board's (HDSB) Student Trustee Ethan Ruggiero stated, "From speaking with students across the region, it is clear that students feel the impact on their mental health in the

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post-COVID world. From visiting schools across the system students are articulating their concern about accessing mental health resources due to the backlog of requests for social workers, being negatively affected by the stigma present within the classroom and feeling intimidated by the process to access support within the community and the school board. Although the school board is working diligently to respond to the demand of mental health support we could do better with more support from the Ministry of Education through increased funding for mental health workers, adding mental health literacy in the curriculum and mental health days for students.”

Student Trustee Cindy Wang added, “Schools, as the place where youth go to gain knowledge and form some of their most special memories, must do more to enable them to learn more about mental health and support them in taking care of their well-being. Students have been demanding action like incorporating Mental Health Days, bringing in culturally appropriate mental health screening, and increasing mental health literacy for a long time, because we know that there's no way around destigmatizing mental health without these changes being made. It's time that we start seeing these changes because every student has mental health, every student deserves it, and every student will thrive from it.”

We encourage the Ministry to consider the voice of the HDSB students in recognizing that mental health and well-being should be considered a top priority, as good mental health is fundamental to a student’s ability to learn and to succeed at school and in life.

Sincerely,

Margo Shuttleworth  
Chair

Joanna Oliver  
Trustee, Oakville Ward 4  
Student Trustee Mentor

Ethan Ruggiero  
Student Trustee

Cindy Wang  
Student Trustee

CC: Effie Triantafilopoulos, MPP  
Natalie Pierre, MPP  
Parm Gill, MPP  
Stephen Crawford, MPP  
Ted Arnott, MPP  
Cathy Abraham, President, Ontario Public School Boards’ Association  
OPSBA Member Board Chairs