



January 7, 2021

The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education

To the Honourable Doug Ford and the Honourable Stephen Lecce,

On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, the Halton District School Board unanimously approved the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the Board of Trustees direct the Chair to write a letter asking the Minister of Education and Premier of Ontario to consider adding educators to the Provincial COVID-19 Command Table, and to provide school boards and the general public significant notice of extension of virtual learning or change of regional or provincial learning modes.

As the Province of Ontario continues to battle COVID-19, it has become clear that key decision making bodies, such as the Command Table, could benefit from direct and timely input from representatives of the education sector. Though the weekly 30-minute conference calls with the 72 School Board Chairs and Minister have been a useful method by which the Minister provides information to Board Chairs and Directors, this information is often shared after these major decisions have already been made and communicated to the public through other forums.

On December 21, 2020, the Province announced the shift to virtual learning starting the week of January 4, 2021. If an “in-the-field education expert” had been included in the Command Table discussions, there may have been a better understanding of the ramifications of making the announcement after the school holiday break had begun.

Exhausted educators were called upon again to put in many hours over the break to plan for, communicate and implement a system for a full, virtual start on January 4. While school systems have been prepared to quickly change models, greater precision, efficiency and community collaboration could have taken place at the local level with additional notice when school was still in session. Students would have had access to devices and internet connectivity could have

Street Address: J.W. Singleton Education Centre • 2050 Guelph Line, Burlington, Ontario L7P 5A8

Mailing Address: J.W. Singleton Education Centre • P.O. Box 5005, Stn. LCD 1, Burlington, Ontario L7R 3Z2

Phone: 905-335-3663 | 1-877-618-3456 Fax: 905-335-9802

www.hdsb.ca


been set up for rural families to start virtual learning in the new year. The delay has resulted in inequitable access to virtual education for many rural students, a situation which unfortunately they have experienced previously at the beginning of the pandemic.

There is a concern in the community and among staff that there will be weekly last-minute announcements from the Province through the winter, leaving students, families and staff in a constant, inequitable and unhealthy state of flux. Planning child-minding, managing the availability and overseeing of multiple home electronic devices, and co-ordinating parental work-situations take significant time and effort for families and staff who need as much consistency as possible in the learning environment to provide engaging and effective lessons.

Trustees of the Halton District School Board recognize that this is an evolving situation, and that difficult decisions need to be made in an ongoing and timely way. We also recognize that there are expectations and a need for students to be provided with stable and meaningful education opportunities. We have two requests that we believe will support collaborative decision making and will benefit all students, staff and families in the province, namely:

- Add a representative(s) of the education sector to the COVID-19 Command Table and enhance processes for meaningful consultation prior to making major decisions.
- Move to a system which builds in time for Boards to pivot, during regular work hours, so that we can ensure equitable opportunities for all students (including connectivity and device distribution), respectfully manage staff resources in this marathon scenario, and give staff and families a chance to make plans to support both learning and health.

Sincerely,



Andréa Grebenc

Chair of the Board of Trustees, Halton District School Board

Cc: MPP Ted Arnott,
MPP Stephen Crawford,
MPP Parm Gill,
MPP Jane McKenna,
MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos,
Ontario School Board Chairs (English Public, English Catholic, French Public,
French Catholic)
President Cathy Abraham, Ontario Public School Board Association