



June 24, 2019

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON
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To the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education,

The Trustees of the Halton District School Board congratulate you on your new appointment. As Minister of Education, you have the opportunity to enhance Ontario's future by investing in students today. Your decisions will impact generations to come and affect Ontario's economic outlook and the opportunities, health and well-being of thousands of Ontarians. The Conference Board of Canada has stated that "each dollar of public education spending generates \$1.30 in total economic benefits to Ontario. At the same time, the inverse holds true for each dollar taken from public education." Further, in their recent report, People for Education indicated that "while change and evolution in public education are vital, careful planning and adequate resources are critical to ensure successful implementation of that change." We hope you lead this investment in the Province.

Minister Lecce, the Trustees of the Halton District School Board are writing you to ask that you open submissions for Capital Priorities. As the fastest growing board in the Province, we are in dire need of new facilities to accommodate students. At the June 19, 2019, Halton District School Board staff presented a list of capital priorities to Trustees citing the intense pressure on our current school infrastructure, particularly in North Oakville and Milton. The Board is in critical need of one elementary school in Milton and an elementary and secondary school in North Oakville. The Board has received unwavering support from our Municipal and Regional partners in calling for Provincial focus on this matter. As these areas in the Region of Halton are mandated to grow by the Province, providing necessary educational infrastructure is of utmost importance.

Schools in these areas are over capacity. Students are currently being accommodated in multiple portable classrooms at several holding schools. Accommodation costs are becoming increasingly unsustainable as each portable costs between \$25-40K to install and transportation costs associated with bussing students outside of their communities place a burden on board finances.

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The Halton District School Board is facing a crisis situation as schools are taking 3-5 years to be built because of the long and arduous Ministry approval process. As an example, the board is currently awaiting final approval to proceed from the Ministry to break ground on a much needed high school in Southwest Milton that was supposed to be open September 2019. School construction takes two years. The project submission to the Ministry was in June 2017 and funding for the project was approved February 2018. Constituents are rightfully upset and frustrated at the delay in moving construction forward.

As you are new to the position of Minister of Education, the Trustees feel that it is also important to update you on other matters.

Ontario Autism Program Changes: Impact on Schools

Minister Lecce, as you are aware, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has changed the implementation plan and funding model for children with Autism. The Halton District School Board is concerned about the impacts these changes will have on these children and the public school system. No extra funding has been allocated for the students coming into our system, some for the first time and having high needs. The Halton District School Board annually overspends in the order of \$20M on Special Education so the additional students with high needs is anticipated to cause more pressure on our budgets, and more importantly spread already thin resources between more students. The Trustees wrote a letter to Minister Thompson dated February 26, 2019. It has been attached for your convenience. The Trustees have yet to receive a response to this letter and would appreciate your comments and direction.

Ministry Consultation on Class size and E-learning

As you are aware, the Ministry of Education made announcements in March related to class size average changes at the elementary and secondary level as well as the introduction of mandatory e-learning at the secondary level, among other modernization initiatives. The announcements were followed by a Ministry consultation on these topics which ended May 31, 2019. As a response to this Ministry consultation, the Trustees of the Halton District School Board conducted a regional consultation that included an online survey. Almost 7000 parents, community members and students participated. 95% of respondents had concerns about the increasing class size average and less than 4% were in favour of mandatory e-learning. The Trustees wrote letters to Minister Thompson concerning the original announcements and the Trustees' consultation results. The letters, dated April 9 and May 29, 2019, and associated report, have been attached for your convenience. The Trustees have yet to receive a response regarding the concerns raised in either letter from Minister Thompson. We await your response as the new Minister and we expect that our efforts to convey the opinions of many Ontarians will be helpful in reconsidering some of the proposals put forward that are having real, tangible and negative impacts today.

Budget Cuts and Impacts

The Trustees of the Halton District School Board have a growing concern about decreasing educational funding. Within the next year, we are expecting growth of over 800 students and yet the Halton District School Board has incurred a \$25M budget cut. Beneficial programs, positions and supports were lost in those cuts. As an example, as of September, even though we are experiencing growth, 189 valuable

positions will no longer exist in our board and 82 teachers at the secondary level will have no permanent job or a reduced position. Secondary school class sizes are increasing at an alarming rate as the average rises. As an example, we have a secondary school in the board that currently has 7 classes with 36-37 student enrollment. Next year, the same school will have 52 courses that will have 35-41 students. The ratio for the Halton District School Board climbs to 24.85:1 next year. The Board is mandated to reach 28:1. Minister Lecce, these statistics will only worsen as will the negative effects they have on student achievement.

Lastly, we'd like to request that in future, consultation on changes to education take place prior to those changes being announced. That way, the Ministry can benefit from the insights of education sector stakeholders and Ontario students can benefit from measured, collaborative and efficient change.

Trustees are mandated by the Education Act to focus on student achievement and well-being. The Trustees of the Halton District School Board look forward to working and collaborating with you as an education partner. We invite you to visit some of our schools to gain further context and insight. We welcome your timely response and would value an opportunity to speak with you directly.

Sincerely,



Andréa Grebenc
Chair of the Board of Trustees
Halton District School Board

Cc: Ted Arnott, MPP
Stephen Crawford, MPP
Parm Gill, MPP
Jane McKenna, MPP
Effie, Triantafilopoulos, MPP
Gary Carr, Halton Regional Chair
Rick Bonnette, Mayor, Halton Hills
Rob Burton, Mayor, Oakville
Gord Krantz, Mayor, Milton
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