

February 14, 2020

The Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education  
13th floor, Mowat Block  
900 Bay Street  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I am writing to you in order to emphasize our position that the province's world-renowned, publicly funded education system must be maintained and even enhanced.

As public school trustees, our primary responsibility is to advocate for the needs of our students, staff and school communities. In fact, our oath of office compels us to commit to working diligently and faithfully in the pursuit of a strong, inclusive education system for all.

While we pledge to build a public education system that is responsive to the needs of all students, we realize that it cannot come at the expense of unchecked fiscal management. As elected officials, we know that our role, both in fiduciary and governance aspects, is to be judicious in our decision making. We do this because we know it will move us closer to a system that is equitable for all of our students, regardless of their particular learning styles and educational needs.

However, this aspect must not be the sole consideration in deliberations regarding the future of public education. We believe that an adequate, thoughtful and sustained funding model is essential. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) recently commissioned a public opinion poll on the issue of funding for public education. It revealed that 94 percent of Ontarians agree that spending on public education is an investment in the future. We concur wholeheartedly.

As we have outlined in our correspondence to your predecessor (April 11, 2019 and June 3, 2019), the proposed increase to class size ratios remains a serious concern for our Board. A move toward a higher class size average will impair our ability to provide a full array of course sections in order to serve the program pathways of all students - apprenticeship, college, university and the workforce – which will affect their future post-secondary and career ambitions.

In Renfrew County, we recently increased our average class size ratio of 22:1 to 22.9:1 and this has already proven disadvantageous for our students by limiting course selection options. This average,

of course, includes the staffing of teachers in areas that do not have traditionally-assigned classes such as Guidance, Special Education, and Student Success. Any further increase to this ratio would further limit course selection options for our students.

Our position on e-learning is just as firm. It is not an ideal teaching and learning environment for all students, especially those who may need additional help in a face-to-face setting. The unintended consequence of making it mandatory will make it difficult for certain types of learners to succeed. We believe that students should decide whether or not they wish to participate in an e-learning course.

In rural districts such as ours, many students neither have the technology nor access to reliable internet to take on-line courses. In addition, the success rate for credit accumulation in these courses is not as high as the rate of success in face-to-face classes. Not all secondary students are prepared academically or emotionally to deal with the independent work or potential isolation that may accompany this type of learning.

You have spoken about being an “unabashed, unapologetic defender of public education.” We share this commitment. We urge you to direct your negotiating team to return to the bargaining table and engage in meaningful dialogue with the federation leadership. It’s time to put an end to the disruptions that are affecting education across our province.

As a member of OPSBA, we will continue to advocate for a well-funded and world-renowned, publicly funded education system. The needs of all of our students, staff and school communities are at the centre of everything we do.

Yours sincerely,



Susan Humphries  
Chairperson  
Renfrew County District School Board

Cc:

Renfrew County District School Board Trustees  
John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources, MPP, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke  
Cheryl Gallant, MP, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke  
Renfrew County District School Board Parent Involvement Committee  
Renfrew County District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee  
OSSTF District 28 and ETFO Local  
Chairs of all Ontario Public and Catholic School Boards  
Ontario Public School Boards' Association