



Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy on Bill 177, The Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act, 2009

Introduction

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation is pleased to present its views on Bill 177 Provincial Interest Regulation to the Ministry of Education.

OSSTF/FEESO is a trade union which represents 60,000 members across the province of Ontario. The union works to protect our diverse membership which is represented in 140 bargaining units across the province. OSSTF/FEESO bargaining units represent both English and French members in public and separate elementary and secondary school workplaces, private schools and consortia, offering support services to school boards and universities.

The intent of Bill 177 to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Boards of Education and elected trustees is a laudable one. But what the Bill and regulations should not do is remove any semblance of decision-making power at the local level. Directors of Education, all school board staff and trustees play an essential role in determining the priorities and needs of their students, and identifying what resources and assistance are required to support student success. Not all decisions affecting students can be successfully made centrally by the Ministry of Education. Elected trustees represent the parents and communities in which they live and reflect their concerns and opinions on items such as transportation, fund-raising, school closures and others. To minimize their input and roles would be a mistake and detrimentally affect the operations of school boards. Bill 177 and any regulations associated with it need to preserve and not undermine the role of elected school board trustees and ensure that the duties and reporting mechanisms set out for school boards are achievable and lead to supporting student success.

If the goal of the legislation is to turn boards and trustees into the buffer between the government decision-makers and the local parents and communities without any real decision-making capability, then make that clear. If the goal of the legislation is to work together with boards and trustees and guarantee they have decision-making ability to ensure that all students receive the best possible education, then make that clear.

Bill 177 embeds student achievement in the day to day operations of a school board but does not define it or provide descriptors of it. The Bill also does not specifically identify the supports that may be offered to boards and what actual consequences will result for boards if they do meet government standards around student achievement. These are large questions to leave unanswered if the potential result is the Ministry of Education intervening to supervise a board.

This raises grave concerns for OSSTF/FEESO and the answer cannot be that this will all become clear with the development of the regulations to accompany the Bill. The public has the opportunity to scrutinize and give input on legislation but not the drafting of regulations. There needs to be broad consultation on the drafting of regulations as well. However, the regulations cannot be rushed for early implementation; their impact needs to be carefully considered and reflect the public's input.

OSSTF/FEESO has consistently stated, in numerous recommendations to the Ministry on a variety of achievement-related issues, that standardized test scores, graduation rates and credit accumulation rates alone are not the measure of student success. They should also not be the sole indicators that trigger the need for intervention by the Minister of Education.

Bill 177, as proposed, not only does not support the efforts of education employees and trustees working with and on behalf of students, it undermines their efforts. The legislation does not recognize special circumstances that boards may face in effectively serving special needs or at risk students that may not translate into appropriate test scores, success rates or graduation rates. It does not even support real student achievement. Instead, it promotes a system where statistical excellence is the goal and not quality education. Unfortunately, this legislation will not increase public confidence in education; it will diminish that confidence by creating an education system where authentic learning and assessment and evaluation are replaced by the fear of not measuring up to a benchmark, and by actions designed to avoid triggering intervention by the Ministry of Education.

OSSTF/FEESO wants to ensure that students graduate from high school with the requisite skills and knowledge to prepare them for their next destination in the future.

OSSTF/FEESO's viewpoint is shared by parents and school boards consulted in the governance review. A school board stated that... "accountability implies some sort of measurement of our 'product', the young people we serve. While testing and other tools used to measure student achievement are useful, they can never tell the whole story. Student success is more than graduation rates and test scores." The Committee's report also stated that "parents are particularly adamant that student success should not be defined exclusively by provincial assessment scores."

Academic achievement is the ultimate goal, but OSSTF/FEESO believes that student achievement without credit integrity is a false promise to students, parents and the public.

Conclusion

A student's/school's/board's success cannot be measured by test scores, credit accumulation or graduation alone. Ensuring that school boards are able to provide the necessary staff, resources, programs and supports to enable students to achieve their goals and be prepared for their futures is an important task entrusted to the Ministry of Education. Balancing the need for support and the necessity of intervention is difficult, but the Ministry must always ensure that any actions it takes truly puts students first and everything else second. OSSTF/FEESO does not support Bill 177 as proposed, as this is clearly not the case. OSSTF/FEESO calls upon the government to ensure this legislation and accompanying regulations and their impact upon school board governance, student achievement, authentic assessment and evaluation and credit integrity are positive.

OSSTF/FEESO will continue to work with the government on education-related initiatives to protect and enhance public education.

Recommendation

OSSTF/FEESO recommends that final passage of Bill 177 be delayed until a consultation group is created, including the appropriate education partners, with the mandate to attempt to develop a definition of student achievement.

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Protecting and Enhancing Public Education
Protéger et faire avancer l'éducation publique

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