



February 21, 2020

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

To the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education,

On Wednesday, February 19, 2020, the Board of Trustees of the Halton District School Board unanimously directed the Chair to write a letter to the Minister of Education.

The resolution was as follows:

Be it resolved that the Chair write a letter on behalf of the Board of Trustees to the Minister of Education to draw attention to the impacts and implications of announced education reforms on the Halton District School Board, and ongoing anticipated pressures in the budgeting process for the 2020/2021 school year. The letter will also include a request to refrain from using confusing and divisive rhetoric in the media and to return to the bargaining table in the hopes of focusing on a respectful process and positive outcomes for students that lead to investment in education and to return the education sector to stability.

Minister Lecce, the Halton District School Board is the fastest growing public board in Ontario. Last year we welcomed just over one thousand additional students to our classrooms. Our secondary student-to-teacher average jumped from 22:1 in the 2018/2019 school year to 24.85:1 in the 2019/2020 school year. This resulted in the loss of over 500 classes in our secondary schools. During the same time period, the number of classes with 35 or more students almost quadrupled. It has been reported by both you and Premier Ford that the class size average increase is moving from 28 to 25. Our board is very close to the 25:1 ratio right now due to the changes last year and it has the potential to surge well beyond 25 for the 2020/2021 school year.

Budget planning for next year has started under a cloud of uncertainty. Trustees were made aware that, while you have said the ratio would be 25:1, there has been no new directive from the Ministry to change the existing 28:1 ratio. Recently, we participated in a budget consultation on cutting red tape and securing efficiencies. Providing this kind of key information BEFORE we invest a great deal of time into budget planning would be a welcome efficiency measure.

Due to the increased average class size ratio and the reduction of other provincial funding, our board has lost 189 positions, most of which were secondary teaching positions. At a time when mental health issues are a rising concern in our schools, overfilling classrooms with more students, removing course choices for students, and removing caring adults from our buildings (the same caring adults that run extracurriculars in our schools) seems like an illogical plan to combat the problem. Additionally, many of our classrooms cannot physically accommodate the large loads that a 28:1 ratio requires. Many air circulation systems found in schools were not designed for sustained student loads of over 30 students and upgrading these systems is cost-prohibitive.

As a growth board, the higher class size average ratio is devastating and will continue to have harsh implications within our system. Minister Lecce, I invite you to visit our schools and talk with our students. We would be happy to host you and show you what our current class size average of 24.85:1 ratio looks like in our classrooms and feels like for students. This can serve as a glimpse at what is to come for the rest of the province.

As you are aware, the Trustees of the Halton District School Board conducted a consultation in May 2019 following the education reform announcements. The 6853 Halton residents (92% of which were parents) provided their opinions on class size averages and mandatory e-learning. The results were clear:

- 76% of respondents stated that the 22:1 secondary class size ratio was appropriate
- 88% of respondents stated that the 28:1 secondary class size ratio was too high
- 75% of respondents stated that elementary class size change to 24.5:1 was too high
- 1% indicated that e-learning is the best method of learning for all students

The full report is available at <http://HaltonEducationAction.ca>.

OPSBA, in association with Nanos Research, also conducted a poll released in November 2019 that included these results:

- Ontarians are twice as likely to say spending money on public education is more important than eliminating the deficit.
- A majority of Ontarians agree that spending on public education is an investment in the future

The full report is available at <https://www.opsba.org/strong-support-for-public-education-in-ontario>.

The Conference Board of Canada 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.” It seems education has an excellent return on investment and the taxpayers of Ontario would expect the Province to take full advantage of this to benefit the economy and the people of the province.

The Trustees have noted the disparaging and confusing rhetoric in the media during the negotiation process. The comments are divisive and unhelpful in achieving a timely resolution to central bargaining processes. We respectfully request that you lead by example in setting a positive and collaborative tone.

The Trustees of the Halton District School Board appreciate our employees and the work they perform every day for our students to “Learn, Grow and Succeed”, and we value the positive relationships that we have

worked hard to nurture locally. Trustees have noted that central bargaining has been in abeyance with OSSTF for two months and negotiations have stopped with ETFO. Future bargaining dates have not been established for either union. These contracts expired nearly six months ago. We ask that the Province work with the mediator to bring all parties back to the negotiations table as soon as possible. It is time to bring stability back to our schools.

Finally, the Trustees have sent two letters focused on the March 2019 announcements on [May 29, 2019](#) and [June 24, 2019](#) and have yet to receive a response. We are committed to working with you and education partners around the province to support students in our world-class education system. Our focus is on students and as such, I will end this letter with a statement our Student Trustee, Olivia Lau, made during the February 19, 2020 Board Meeting:

On behalf of myself, Trustee Burnes and Student Senate, we stand behind this letter 100%. This is because even a marginal increase in class sizes can mean reduced pathway choices for students, fewer caring adults to support students' mental health, and less meaningful face to face time with teachers. This will critically decrease the quality of our current world-class education system. Students need everyone at the table to truly treat this education system as an investment in the future of Ontario and we need to see all parties at the bargaining table focus on the students who are feeling the impacts the most.

We welcome your timely response.

Sincerely,



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

Cc: Stuart Miller, Director of Education, HDSB
Ted Arnott, MPP
Stephen Crawford, MPP
Parm Gill, MPP
Jane McKenna, MPP
Effie, Triantafilopoulos, MPP
Ontario Public School Board Association
Ontario Student Trustees' Association
HDSB Board of Trustees
HDSB School Councils