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February 13, 2020

The Honorable Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education  
Ministry of Education  
22<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Mowat Block  
900 Bay Street  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Lecce,

York Region District School Board is proud to provide safe, caring and inclusive learning environments that enable our students to be successful. We acknowledge that obtaining credits online is a part of some students' learning decisions and understand that your government has identified the need for students to acquire technological skills and fluency. Most recently, the government announced that students will be required to complete two online courses as part of Ontario's secondary school graduation requirements. However, we want to ensure that this latest condition is supportive of students without negatively affecting learners based on a variety of conditions such as accessibility and learner profiles.

Our Board of Trustees have received a technical briefing from staff members, which included an initial review of research associated with the effectiveness and challenges of online learning. Several themes surfaced, including scalability, learning conditions, accessibility, learner profiles, class size, and student perspective. In reviewing our own district, scaling up to be able to successfully implement the online requirement of two courses for students graduating in 2023-2024 would result in significant human resource and financial costs. To promote student success, it is our understanding from the research that online class sizes must have small in-person ratios. Further, most courses would need to be synchronous in nature, with teacher-supported real-time learning. However, it is apparent from the findings that not all students thrive in an online learning environment. Those who are successful in online learning environments often demonstrate high performance in face-to-face environments due to strong self-regulation skills and motivation. These findings suggest that students at risk of not graduating may further be adversely affected by these online requirements. It is therefore critical to consider the effects of this policy on students with language and accessibility barriers, and students who face historic and systemic barriers, such as Indigenous and racialized youth and youth in care.

As a Board of Trustees, we strongly believe that strategic next steps that reflect the above noted concerns are required prior to the implementation of the government's current plan. With this in mind, we would ask you, as Education Minister, report on your commitment to conduct a transparent in-depth review, which includes broadband requirements, access to technology, professional learning opportunities, accessibility requirements, budgetary requirements and proposed timelines. To inform this review, the stakeholder consultations previously referenced by Deputy Minister Naylor should be extensive and take place prior to large-scale enactment. Stakeholders should include students representing diverse demographics, educators, system leaders, families, and community members. In moving forward, pilots should also be implemented to allow for further research and information gathering. The consultations, pilots, and research can inform the potential success of a future implementation.

As elected trustees mandated to promote student achievement and well-being, we felt it necessary to share our concerns. We are hopeful that you will answer the following questions. As the potential implications of online learning are currently unknown, will you, as Minister of Education, commit to reporting on a transparent and robust consultation process to inform the implementation plan? As Minister of Education, you have stated that, based on research, nearly all students can be successful in an online learning environment as long as they have access to the right supports. Will you share the literature review that provided the basis for this premise? In addition, will you share the detailed plan of the "right supports" required for success and how these will be implemented and funded?

The York Region District School Board of Trustees is dedicated to the delivery of effective and appropriate education programs to promote the achievement of all students. The implementation of an online strategy, as currently described, presents significant concerns for the achievement and well-being of students. We are committed to continue conversations and investigations regarding the enactment of this mandate. The Board offers an open invitation to you as Minister of Education and your staff to meet with YRDSB to discuss the current plan to enhance online learning, as well as any aspects of this letter.

Sincerely,



Juanita Nathan  
Chair of the York Region District School Board

cc. York Region District School Board Trustees  
Director of Education of the York Region District School Board  
Members' of Provincial Parliament from York Region  
Chairs of Public School Boards in Ontario