



Mark Fisher, Director of Education and Secretary

2021 June 22

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Floor
438 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 2K8

Subject: Advocating for all students across Ontario to learn the Signal for Help

Dear Minister Lecce:

On behalf of the Thames Valley District School Board of Trustees, I am writing to you to advocate for all students and educators to be taught the ***Signal for Help*** in the coming School year.

On May 11, 2021, Trustees passed the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Chair write a letter to the Minister of Education (with copy to OPSBA, OPSBA member boards, local MPPs, MPs etc.) requesting all students, educators and staff in Ontario to be taught the signal for help (palm forward and tuck thumb, trap thumb).

In 2020, the Canadian Women's Foundation, launched an online initiative to assist those experiencing gender-based violence as a result of home isolation during the pandemic. The ***Signal for Help*** is a simple hand gesture that can be visually and silently displayed during video calls to discretely alert teachers, school staff, family, friends, or colleagues that an individual needs help and that they would like someone to check in safely with them. The gesture involves facing one's palm towards the camera, tucking in one's thumb, and then folding the other fingers down to trap the thumb.

As you know, there has been a shift towards virtual learning, where video calls are relied upon to help students learn safely and stay connected. While these measures help protect individuals from COVID-19, they also present significant dangers for those living in abusive situations – particularly girls, women, and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, all of whom have experienced a rise in violence throughout the pandemic. It is extremely difficult for those experiencing abuse to seek help in "normal" times. This difficulty has been exacerbated by the pandemic as abusers can closely monitor their whereabouts, devices, and digital communications.

Thames Valley District School Board - Office of the Chairperson

1250 Dundas Street, London, Ontario N5W 5P2 Tel: 519-452-2000 Ext. 20219 Fax: 519-452-2396 website: www.tvdsb.co

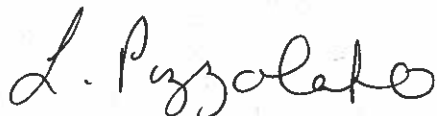
We build each student's tomorrow, every day.

We welcome recent financial commitments and efforts from the province to combat gender-based violence, as well as educate students about this important issue as well as consent, cyberbullying, and where to get help as part of the updated curriculum. Building on these initiatives, we strongly urge the Ministry of Education to support this important campaign by ensuring the **Signal for Help** is taught to both students and staff and incorporated into the curriculum. We would also strongly urge the province to ensure all staff receive education and training on gender-based violence in collaboration with local non-profit organizations who are doing valuable work in this space.

Educating staff and students about the **Signal for Help** at this critical time will go a long way to supporting those who have no other means of seeking help online.

We are happy to provide additional information if needed and would welcome the opportunity to work with you towards implementing **Signal for Help** across the province.

Sincerely,



Lori-Ann Pizzolato
Chair

LAP/sh

c: Mark Fisher, Director of Education
Trustees
Student Trustees
OPSBA and Member Boards
MPPs
MPs