



## Mark Fisher, Director of Education and Secretary

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March 6, 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:

As Board Chair, I am deeply grateful for the close working relationship our Board has developed with Ministry officials and our local MPPs to the betterment of student achievement and wellness, and to help us realize our capital improvements goals across our growing school district.

We respect the bargaining process and recognize that the Ontario Public School Boards Association is the bargaining agent for all Trustees. We also support your efforts to negotiate contracts that are in the best interests of our students through lower class sizes, 100 per cent investment in special education and protecting full-day kindergarten.

Thames Valley Trustees believe the dedication and professionalism of teachers and education workers is vital to creating and maintaining a positive, productive and well-functioning learning environment for all students.

As OPSBA has stated on several occasions, school boards are observing with great interest the recent proposals that may impact class sizes, mandatory e-learning requirements, as well as the potential for decreases in funding for crucial Indigenous and mental health supports for our students.

At Thames Valley, we have found it necessary each year to provide additional secondary teaching resources through the budget for our small and rural schools. These schools currently struggle to meet the 22.5:1 ratio, and increases to the teacher ratios further impact our small schools and rural communities.

On the issue of e-learning, OPSBA has expressed clearly our thoughts regarding implications of mandatory e-learning for our secondary students. While e-learning can increase access to a broad variety of programs for students in some boards, OPSBA has identified a wide range of potential risks that have yet to be addressed. We look forward to being your collaborative partner with this initiative.

Special Education continues to be an area where student needs exceed the funding envelope. Given the complexities of these needs, we echo OPSBA's call for additional funding within the special education envelope. This is especially true for students with autism.

The October 2019 announcement of funding of \$25 million for 180 mental health workers in secondary schools was very much appreciated. We note that Bill 116 explicitly states that your Government "recognizes that mental health is an essential element of health" and that a successful strategy to meet the needs of Ontarians "depends on the sustained commitment of all sectors and levels of government."

At its regular meeting of February 25, 2020, Trustees adopted the following motion intended to represent the concerns expressed by their constituents:

*That the Chair write a letter on behalf of the Board of Trustees to the Minister of Education to draw attention to our ongoing concerns with proposed education changes. Specifically, the letter will address our ongoing concerns with proposed class size ratios and impacts on pathways and programs and mandatory e-learning. Specifically, that the TVDSB Trustees prefer a 22:1 class size ratio, expect unfunded liabilities to be fully funded including special education, mental health, absenteeism, student transportation and capital projects. The TVDSB Trustees oppose mandatory online learning as a broad-based policy and recognize that teachers are our most valuable asset in student success. Our letter will also highlight the need for all parties to use positive dispute resolution means and to return to the bargaining table for ongoing dialogue in the best interest of students in our Board and across the province.*

In addition, Student Trustee, Sarah Chun, expressed the following statement, adding voice to the concerns of students:

*On behalf of myself, Student Trustee Erica Butler and Indigenous Student Trustee Chiara Kennedy, we fully support this letter to the Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, with regard to the recent cuts to education. Increased class sizes will negatively affect student supports to TVDSB's most vulnerable students. Having fewer caring adults in schools will decrease student mental health supports in schools. Mandatory e-learning courses present obvious equity issues, such as lack of access to the internet and necessary technology. This will critically decrease the quality of our world-class education system and hurt students who feel these impacts the most. Our priorities as Student Trustees is to advocate for TVDSB students and we feel it is our duty and responsibility to reflect these local concerns at the provincial level.*

Thank you for considering this information, as I am certain you will agree that successfully negotiated collective agreements are key to the peace and stability that all sides are seeking at the bargaining table.

We look forward to an expedient conclusion to negotiations so that we may resume our continued positive efforts to support the needs of students and families across Thames Valley.

Sincerely,



Arlene Morell, Chair  
Thames Valley District School Board

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c: Thames Valley District School Board of Trustees  
M. Fisher, Director of Education, Thames Valley District School Board  
Thames Valley District School Board Local Employee Groups  
President, Ontario Public School Board Association  
Local Members of Provincial Parliament