



Mark Fisher, Director of Education and Secretary

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Lori-Ann Pizzolato  
Thames Valley District School Board  
1250 Dundas Street  
London, ON N5W 5P2

November 14, 2022

Hon. Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education  
5th Flr, 438 University Ave  
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Via email : [minister.edu@ontario.ca](mailto:minister.edu@ontario.ca)

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of the Trustees of Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Capital Priorities Program. TVDSB is appreciative of the investments the Ministry of Education has made in our region with regards to construction projects.

Still, our work is far from done. The communities our school board serves are experiencing rapid growth, and will continue to do so, especially under *Bill 23, More Homes, Built Faster Act, 2022*. The need for school boards and the Ministry to work together to streamline the process for building new schools has never been greater.

I ask that you please consider the following recommendations for changes to the Capital Priorities Program:

1. **Provide clear criteria and defined turnaround timelines to schoolboards.** It is difficult to create a project plan when approval timelines are unclear.
2. **Reduce approval timelines and required approvals.** While school boards wait for approvals, consulting teams may start working on other assignments. This causes construction delays. Please consider providing clearly articulated submission criteria to school boards, instead of requiring us to receive numerous approvals from the Ministry.
3. **Following approvals, include flexibility, and design amendment options.** From land negotiations, to rezoning, site plan approval, design, and tendering – the approval process often takes so long that the newly opened school no longer meets the needs of the community. School boards experiencing continuous growth like Thames Valley need more flexibility on design amendments to avoid capacity issues at new schools.

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**Thames Valley District School Board - Office of the Chairperson**

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*We build each student's tomorrow, every day.*

4. **Review and revise Ministry benchmark funding to keep up with inflation.** Due to inadequate benchmark funding, school boards like Thames Valley spend significant resources attempting to provide the highest value to our communities for the lowest cost. Often, we have no choice but to submit tender requests that are over budget. This results in lengthy approval delays. By the time we receive approval, market conditions may not be favourable for tendering.
5. **Review land priorities funding, provide alternative funding sources and implement firm approval timelines.** Waiting until the Ministry can approve a capital priorities business case before acquiring land can cause significant construction delays, or worse, the loss of potential real estate for a new school.
6. **Provide more flexibility and autonomy with proceeds of Disposition Funding.**
7. **Review the Approval to Proceed (ATP) to tender phase.** Our staff feel that Class 'A' cost estimates are inconsistent with final tender values and represent an unnecessary additional step to the process. We ask that you either remove this requirement or, if these estimates add value for the Ministry, use them as a budget number to provide funding.
8. **Revise the irrevocable bid period.** The Ministry has been recommending at least a 90-day irrevocable bid period to allow for sufficient time to review tenders if they come in over budget. Currently, contractors are not able to hold pricing for this long without having to cover their risk, increasing the project costs. Our Planning team recommends a fast-track approach to ensure a desirable and competitive process.

Thank you once again for your time and consideration. Thames Valley District School Board looks forward to working with you to meet the needs of our rapidly changing and growing communities. Sincerely,



Lori-Ann Pizzolato  
Chair, Thames Valley District School Board