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November 22, 2023

Hon. Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Flr, 438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8
Via email: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Lecce,

I'm writing today on behalf of my fellow Trustees at Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB).

As representatives of the community, we wish to express our deep concern regarding the pressure on TVDSB to address student mental health challenges, while resources for community organizations have simultaneously decreased.

We appreciate that the Ministry of Education has identified mental health literacy as a key priority for students.

This priority aligns with what TVDSB heard from students as part of the district-wide School Climate Survey in 2022-23, which reflected over 28,000 student voices. Survey responses highlighted a need to strengthen healthy relationships between and among students, improve students' abilities to identify and manage emotions as well as cope with stress, and address the topics of vaping, alcohol, and drug-use.

Using the survey results, Ministry curriculum and more, TVDSB continues to commit significant resources to supporting mental health among students and families. Over and above implementing the mental health literacy curriculum, we continue to increase supports in elementary and secondary schools, provide learning opportunities for students, staff, and families in a variety of formats, and partner with community organizations such as Western University, local health units, co-terminus boards and numerous service providers to deliver innovative, topical programs.

A theme that continues to arise out of these initiatives and partnerships is the need for more resources spread out across the community.

The Board of Trustees has been informed that school staff are often first-responders or the first points of contact for child and youth mental health concerns. They care deeply about students and work hard to support them. Unfortunately, many students require ongoing support above and beyond what their school can provide. As community resource case loads rise and delays occur, students continue to struggle in school.

TVDSB's Board of Trustees hopes this letter will spark a greater conversation about how all levels of government can work together to better balance and fund community-based mental health support services, so that all the organizations, including school boards, can work together for the benefit of children, youth and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Pizzolato". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lori-Ann Pizzolato
Chair of the Board
Thames Valley District School Board

cc: Mark Fisher, Director Fisher
Trustees
Student Trustees