



2019 April 24

Honorable Lisa Thompson
Minister of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Thompson:

At the April 23, 2019 meeting of the Thames Valley District School Board, Trustees passed a motion directing the Chair to write to the Minister of Education to express the Board's concern with recent announcements by your ministry.

Our staff continues to analyze the impact on our students related to the announcements made to date as we await the release of Grants for Student Needs. We continue to look forward to modernizing education in a manner that is responsive to our urban and rural students across our 7,000km² district.

Within the Ontario Government's *New Vision for Education*, we were pleased to see, and are supportive of, a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), skilled trades, First Nations, Metis and Inuit programming and financial literacy.

In addition, we acknowledge our collective responsibility as stewards of taxpayer dollars and share the goal of safeguarding public education. As Trustees, we have intimate knowledge of the education portfolio and we welcome the opportunity to work alongside our MPPs in seeking the right solutions for our schools and their communities.

While we do not anticipate the need for any teaching position layoffs at this time, we have significant concerns regarding the implications of the proposed changes for our students.

Impact on Elementary Schools

The loss of funding in elementary school staffing – specifically with reduced funding for Early Childhood Educators in our Full Day Kindergarten program, and increased class size in Grades 4-8 – will impact the delivery of programming to our students. Additionally, with the proposed changes in funding to community-based supports for students with autism, we remain concerned about the impact of these changes on our schools and the students that they serve. We know that our most vulnerable students require additional supports to achieve success.

Programming and Pathways

Simply put, proposed changes to class sizes will significantly impact our programming and pathways for our secondary students, narrowing the scope of what schools can offer and providing fewer opportunities for students at each level of their secondary education. In

addition to areas of core curriculum, the changes will impact courses in technology, trades, family studies, locally developed, Native Languages and specialized programming.

This problem is only exacerbated in smaller schools, where there is less enrollment and flexibility than in our larger schools. Among the most vulnerable are our rural schools that will have even greater difficulty providing resources required by our students.

Furthermore, the recently announced changes will inevitably result in increases to empty pupil places, adversely impacting small and rural schools and, respectively, their communities. However, this is not solely a rural issue. Any subject area, in all of our schools, that is driven by smaller class sizes will be significantly challenged and will create significant inequities in programming for our students.

Implementing the proposed changes to class size in our secondary schools will reduce our base teacher funding by approximately \$17M, once fully implemented in four years. As all Boards have an obligation and requirement to honour collective agreements, the attrition funding provided by the Ministry of Education over the four-year period does not address the significant funding shortfall.

eLearning

As leaders in the implementation of full-credit eLearning courses to hundreds of our secondary school students, we recognize the immense challenge of engaging students in this method of program delivery. While some students thrive in using technology in their learning, there are many others who do not respond positively to this style of learning. It will be important for Ministry staff to seek advice from boards that have learned first-hand, the challenges and opportunities of eLearning program implementation.

Safety and Well-Being

We propose deeper consideration of larger class sizes and its impact on our students, not only in the area of teaching and learning, but also as it relates to mental health, well-being and student safety. More than 50 percent of our secondary students responded to our most recent School Climate Survey and noted that of most concern to them was substance abuse, physical environment, mental health and safety overall. The relationships that our teachers have with students is critical in providing guidance, support, mentorship, and coaching, and significantly impacts personal development. Larger classes will impact the management of student behaviour, and connections with their teachers as caring adults.

We respectfully ask the Ministry to take the issues described above into consideration when moving forward with changes in class sizes in our elementary and secondary schools.

A four-year phase-in allows school boards and Trustees the critical time needed to plan for the execution of proposed changes; however, it is also important to make clear that the changes will deeply impact our ability to provide the highest quality of education to ALL students. Furthermore, Boards are required to respect and adhere to their local collective agreement language with regards to Elementary and Secondary class cap maximums.



Without any funding adjustments introduced, it further exacerbates the financial impact at the local Board level.

Again, we welcome the opportunity to work with our partners in Ontario Government and the Ministry of Education to develop equitable solutions that meet the needs of our students, staff and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arlene Morell". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Arlene Morell
Chair of the Board

AM/tl

c: Trustees
Laura Elliott, Director of Education
TVDSB Local Employee Groups
OPSBA
Local MPPs