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April 25, 2019

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

Dear Minister Thompson,

We write to you respectfully on behalf of York Region District School Board regarding the proposals announced on March 15, 2019. Following receipt of the 2019: B08 *New Vision for Education* memo, our Board has been conducting analyses to determine how these changes will affect our students, their families, and our school communities. Following this preliminary analysis, we would like to share some concerns that have significant implications for our students.

OAP Funding Change

On March 6, 2019, our Board wrote to you with concerns regarding the changes to the Ontario Autism Program funding, to date we have not received a response. While we recognize that the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services has delayed the implementation of the changes, some of our concerns have not yet been addressed. Our staff members have been working to determine how many students will be increasing their time at school and how many will be enrolling at school for the first time. Since the original announcement, over 30 families have indicated they have a child who has never been to school and will now be attending as a result of funding changes. Almost every one of these students has been described as having high needs related to their diagnosis of Autism. In addition, approximately 50 families have indicated their child will be increasing to full-time attendance at school. We have not yet heard back from the families of over 300 children currently receiving services from other agencies. The need to hire staff members to support these students as they arrive will result in an unknown additional financial pressure and a potential in-year deficit for our Board.

Class Size Changes

Our Board has conducted a preliminary analysis of the implications of changing class size averages in secondary school from a ratio of 22:1 to 28:1. Once fully implemented, York Region District School Board will lose approximately 300 teaching positions in our secondary schools.

This change will have a direct effect on students and their ability to take courses required for their appropriate pathway. Under our current model to serve students, we already have college and university level courses at a maximum of 30 students. Moving forward, under the 28:1 average, we will have to increase many courses to over 30 students per class in order to maintain sustainable and safe environments in other classes, such as technology, auto mechanic shop, etc. For example, academic courses will rise to 36, college and university courses to 36, open courses to 32, physical education to 30, science to 32.

The average secondary school in York Region District School Board has an enrolment of 1,400 students. Timetabling for students and staff allocation is currently underway, and under the 28:1 average ratio, as an example in a school this size, a full 625 students, or 45 per cent, will not have a full timetable to complete their secondary school education. Even more alarming, 78, or six per cent, of students will have no timetable. Under our previous class size model, this school offered a total of 482 classes across all grades, under the 28:1 average 379 classes will be offered, a loss of 103 classes. This means losing 17 teaching positions in one school alone. It is important to note that the co-curricular activities, coaching opportunities, and the caring relationships with students formed by these 17 teachers will be lost.

The increase in class size ratios will be more dramatic in smaller schools. For example, in a secondary school of 600 students, there would be only one music class, eight applied courses, and two locally developed courses available for the entire school of Grade 9-12 students. Electives will be extremely limited, and as teachers retire, the inability to replace them will result in a loss of specialized courses, particularly affecting Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) classes. Given how this affects larger schools, we can no longer use staffing from larger schools to accommodate smaller schools.

This will significantly affect our students, their access to both mandatory and elective credits, and potentially their future. The proposed changes to secondary schools will disadvantage students looking to enter skilled trades the most.

e-Learning Classes

Students in Ontario require a minimum of 30 credits to obtain an OSSD. The proposal to mandate one e-learning course per year per student means that students will now be required to complete 13.3 per cent of their secondary school online. This poses challenges logistically and may have a detrimental effect on graduation rates in York Region and across the province. We are aware of some alarming statistics related to e-learning courses that raise concern for future mandatory e-learning. Last year, our Board saw an overall dropout rate of 25 per cent in our day school e-learning program. This is in sharp contrast to our dropout rate for in-class courses of six per cent.

In addition, rural areas in our Board do not have access to widespread high speed bandwidth, and some students do not have access to technology at home to complete the courses. Given that staffing levels in secondary schools are being reduced, it will be difficult to provide appropriate supports to students who may require help or access. As with class sizes, this proposal will have a more detrimental effect in smaller schools and rural areas.

As mentioned in our March 6, 2019 letter, we appreciate the need to balance a high-quality public education system with financial sustainability. We ask that you reconsider some of

the policies most detrimental to students and consult directly with school boards, who can assist you in meeting our mutual goals of supporting students' achievement and well-being needs.

Sincerely,



Corrie McBain
Chair of the York Region District School Board

cc. Honourable Caroline Mulroney, MPP, York-Simcoe
Honourable Michael A. Tibollo, MPP, Vaughan-Woodbridge
Honourable Gila Martow, MPP, Thornhill
Honourable Christine Elliott, MPP, Newmarket-Aurora
Daisy Wai, MPP, Richmond Hill
Billy Pang, MPP, Markham-Unionville
Logan Kanapathi, MPP, Markham-Thornhill
Paul Calandra, MPP, Markham-Stouffville
Stephen Lecce, MPP, King-Vaughan
Michael Parsa, MPP, Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill
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