



THE EDUCATION CENTRE - AURORA

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March 6, 2019

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

The Honourable Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Children, Community and
Social Services
Hepburn Block, 6th Floor
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9

Dear Minister Thompson and Minister MacLeod,

York Region District School Board is proud to provide high-quality public education to all students. We acknowledge your efforts in working to reduce the province's deficit and understand that your government must make difficult decisions. However, we also want to ensure that such decisions are made in the best interests of children and their families.

Recent changes to the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) funding will result in families with children and youth currently receiving services or funding within the OAP likely experiencing a reduction in service. As a result, families will choose to register their children in our schools - some of whom will be attending school for the first time. Students with an ASD identification in our schools may also experience different funding levels on April 1, which may change their attendance and required support in school. All children coming to our schools for the first time will be welcomed. Our front line staff members are caring, dedicated and want to provide the appropriate supports for a transition that takes into account the complex needs of each child.

York Region District School Board already spends more on special education than it receives from the province for this purpose. Unfortunately, on February 28, 2019, school boards received a memo from the Ministry of Education regarding budget planning for 2019-2020, which included a suggestion to implement a hiring freeze. This, coupled with the changes to the OAP funding, presents some obvious and consequential challenges in providing essential services for children about to undertake a significant transition.

In addition, information between the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Education regarding the number of children receiving service is currently not being shared. It is difficult to prepare for the increases in enrolment and attendance and ensure we have the resources in place to support our students with special education needs without access to this information.

In light of these difficulties, we are requesting that the government reconsider its implementation plan to ensure that children are not adversely affected by these changes.

We believe dialogue between the government, school boards through the Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA) and service providers is essential to arriving at a solution that can meet the government's goals and provide adequate care and support for children. Ultimately, we share a similar goal of ensuring that Ontario's publicly funded education system is sustainable and meets the needs of the province's children.

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
Ontario Public School Boards Association
York Region District School Board Trustees

Appendix 1: March 5, 2019, Board Report: Supporting Students in the Context of Changes to the Ontario Autism Program

YORK REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Supporting Students in the Context of Changes to the Ontario Autism Program

Purpose:

This report is for information and will provide trustees with background related to the recently announced changes to the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) and how the changes may affect students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at the York Region District School Board (YRDSB). It outlines steps that are being taken to support students, families and staff.

Background:

The Ontario government, under the leadership of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) recently announced changes to the OAP. Effective April 1, 2019, annual and lifetime funding limits will be in place that consider the age of the child/youth and family income. Children/youth currently receiving service/funding within the OAP will likely experience a dramatic reduction in service/funding. Children/youth on the waiting list for funding/service of the OAP are expected to receive funding within 18 months.

The government reports that there are 23,000 children/youth in Ontario on the waiting list for funding. In YRDSB, there are 2,900 students who have an identification of ASD.

Rationale:

Changes to the OAP will affect the YRDSB. Some children/youth who receive intensive service/funding of the OAP may not currently be students of YRDSB and upon funding reduction, those families may choose to register their children in our schools. Some of the existing 2,900 students with ASD may receive funding for the first time, or experience changes in funding levels on April 1. Parents choices for outside service may affect the student's attendance at school. Parents may also request outside service providers enter schools/classrooms to support their children, which is not our current practice.

Due to consent limitations, data is not available through the Ministries on the specific impact of the OAP changes to YRDSB.

Financial Information:

To support students with ASD in the context of changes to the OAP, additional congregated classes, teachers and educational assistants may be needed.

At this time, specific funding for school boards related to the OAP changes has not been announced by the Ministry of Education.

Next Steps:

Communication has been sent to all administrators asking for data to be shared with the Student Services department so analysis of needs can be determined in conjunction with Director's Council.

Outreach to the Ministry of Education has been made by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) outlining concerns and requesting information.

Outreach to all union leaders has been made by the Superintendent of Student Services to discuss changes to the OAP.

Risks:

Without specific and dedicated funding from the Ministry of Education, YRDSB will need to use current-year surplus to hire additional staff and consider the annualized increase in costs for staffing.

Due to the rapid rate of change of this initiative, hiring timelines and unknown information, planning for transitions for students with high levels of need may require gradual entry of some students.

Alignment to Board Priorities:

Staff actions uphold the Board's direction to:

Champion Equity and Inclusivity. We develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to remove barriers in support of all learners;

Empower Ethical Leadership. We lead ethically by focusing on students and upholding our values.

Respectfully submitted,

Director of Education, L. Sirisko
Superintendent of Education, Student Services K. Diakiw

March 5, 2019

For further information, please contact Superintendent of Education, Student Services K. Diakiw or the Director of Education.