



April 19, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Ministry of Education
5th Floor, 438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

To the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education,

In late March, various media outlets [provided details](#) from a “confidential slide deck” about the province of Ontario’s plans for “Expanding Student Access to Online and Remote Learning”.

At the Wednesday, April 7, 2021 meeting of the Trustees of the Halton District School Board (HDSB), the following motion received unanimous approval:

Be it resolved that the Chair of the Board be directed to write a letter prior to the next Board meeting to the Minister of Education to request reconsideration of the plan for “expanding student access to online and remote learning” and to request a collaborative approach so that any new direction reflects insights and experiences from all public education partners, and are in the best interests of students and the public education system.

In December 2020, the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association (OPSBA) submitted a very [detailed document](#) to the Minister regarding the Ministry’s concept of expanding student access to online and remote learning. Despite the Ministry of Education’s use of the words “education partners” and “consultation”, much of the advice from OPSBA seems to have been overlooked, and to this day, neither the HDSB Director of Education nor I, as the Chair of the Board, have directly received this information, despite the profound impact these plans will have on public education.

The Board of Trustees’ concerns are twofold: first, we are concerned about whether the proposal will, in fact, be in the best interests of students and second, we are concerned that the proposal appears to be set to move forward, without collaboration and advice from diverse stakeholders. Both of these points are further elaborated below.

The proposal represents a large shift for public education in an area where the status quo is serving students quite well. For example, boards including the HDSB have robust online offerings which students may access, generally with high rates of completion. Boards have also fine-tuned their approaches to online and virtual learning based on local and contextualized experience during the pandemic. You have mentioned “lessons learned” around remote and virtual learning, but the associated data, analysis and conclusions on which these decisions are being made appears limited, particularly as related to regional differences, equity and inclusion, and serving students with a range of learning needs. To the best of our understanding, parents, students and on-the-ground teaching staff have not been invited to provide direct and focussed feedback on this matter.

Collectively, we are still in the midst of the pandemic with the most recent pivot back to virtual learning happening now. No year over year achievement comparisons are available yet and no quality of education surveys have been completed by any of the stakeholder groups. Only once the pandemic crisis has passed and there is an opportunity to fully study the positive and negative aspects of online and remote learning is it appropriate to propose changes to the public education system. Changes should be based on meaningful data.

Changes should also be based on consultation with education partners and stakeholders. By limiting input through a tightly time-limited consultation and the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements with parties to that limited consultation, the optics as well as the decision making process are as much a challenge as the prospective outcome.

Minister, the Trustees of the Halton District School Board implore you to halt all proposed changes until adequate data is available and a collaborative consultation is completed. We are aware of and would like to amplify the calls from OPSBA, [Council of Ontario Directors of Education \(CODE\)](#), [Ontario Student Trustees' Association \(OSTA-AECO\)](#), [publicly funded school boards](#) across the province, and [education advocacy groups](#) to strengthen both the process and the resulting outcomes. This way, school boards, parents, students, staff, education-focussed organizations and associations can develop a shared vision, and be able to commence implementation with a singular, shared purpose. Moving forward with the current proposal ignores the concepts of strong evidence-based decision-making and stakeholder consultation as fundamental tenets of public education.

Sincerely,



Andréa Grebenc
Chair of the Board of Trustees, Halton District School Board

Cc: MPP Ted Arnott,
MPP Stephen Crawford,
MPP Parm Gill,
MPP Jane McKenna,
MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos,
Ontario School Board Chairs (English Public, English Catholic, French Public, French Catholic)
President Cathy Abraham, Ontario Public School Boards' Association