



June 27, 2024

Honourable Todd Smith
Minister of Education
315 Front Street West, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

Re: Menstrual Education and Equity

Dear Minister Smith,

At our Special Board meeting on June 19, 2024 the following motion passed unanimously:

Be it resolved that the Chair write a letter to the Minister of Education regarding ministry funding to support menstrual equity across Ontario, in collaboration with HDSB Student Trustees and the HDSB Student Senate Equity Subcommittee.

And, be it further resolved that the Chair's correspondence indicates the support of the HDSB Board of Trustees for this student-led initiative and advocacy.

On behalf of the Halton District School Board (HDSB), I am requesting that the Ministry of Education invest in Menstrual Education and Equity resources across the province.

The request to write this letter was brought forward by our Student Trustees, Shrena Sribalan and Sultan Alimzhanov, and received unanimous support from HDSB Trustees.

The Ontario government's groundbreaking initiative, announced in 2021, which promised six million free menstrual products yearly to school boards in partnership with Shoppers Drug Mart, marked a significant advancement in improving access to these essential products. Unfortunately, this partnership is slated to conclude by the end of this 2023-2024 school year, with no confirmation yet on its extension.

Street Address: J.W. Singleton Education Centre • 2050 Guelph Line, Burlington, Ontario L7P 5A8

Mailing Address: J.W. Singleton Education Centre • P.O. Box 5005, Stn. LCD 1, Burlington, Ontario L7R 3Z2

Phone: 905-335-3663 | 1-877-618-3456 Fax: 905-335-9802

www.hdsb.ca

The issue of menstrual equity continues to affect the achievement and dignity of students who menstruate. I'm writing to you to emphasize the vital importance of menstrual equity and the urgent need for continued funding for menstrual products in schools.

We would like to encourage the Government of Ontario to consider renewing this partnership to provide funding in support of this initiative in every school board across the province, to further support gender and economic equity and destigmatize menstruation.

The lack of a continued partnership or sustainable funding means many boards won't be able to continue providing menstrual products in schools, creating a significant burden for students. Given that businesses are now federally required to offer menstrual products for all employees, the same provision should apply to school boards and their students.

The inconsistent access to free menstrual products in schools across the province is a question of equity, accessibility and respect for students' dignity. In a survey conducted by our HDSB Student Senate, 81% of students responded they felt uncomfortable while menstruating in a school environment, while 52% reported feeling ashamed.

Access to menstrual products and the stigma surrounding menstruation impacts the attendance of students who menstruate, and subsequently their achievement. Students of all ages, genders and economic status deserve a right to equal opportunities, and that starts with every bathroom, regardless of gender identity, providing free menstrual products with the appropriate mechanisms to support their placement.

In the fall of 2020, the HDSB implemented a very successful free menstrual product pilot initiative in four of our schools. A Student Feedback Survey found 85% of students felt that "Knowing that the products are available at school helps me feel more confident/comfortable coming to school while menstruating".

Our board has shown how providing free menstrual products makes school environments safer and more equitable. However, the estimated cost to stock dispensers is \$10,000 annually. Not all boards will be able to absorb this financial burden making it unsustainable for future years.

Centralized provincial funding, purchasing and distribution would ensure efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and allow schools in every region to participate in this project and support students.

We appreciate your continued commitment to student equity and engagement, especially to the mental health and well-being of students. We invite you to further your commitment to student achievement and experience by providing provincial funding for free menstrual products in every school board in Ontario.

We urge immediate attention and action to evaluate the continuation of free menstrual products in schools. Ensuring ongoing support beyond the current timeline is vital to safeguarding the well-being of students throughout Ontario.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amy Collard
Halton District School Board
Trustee, Burlington Ward 5
Chair of the Board

CC: Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford
All Members of Provincial Parliament
ACEPO
AFOCSC
OCSTA
OPSBA
OSTA-AECO