



January 11, 2021

The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education

To the Honourable Doug Ford and the Honourable Stephen Lecce,

On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, the Halton District School Board unanimously approved the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the Board of Trustees direct the Chair to write a letter asking the Minister of Education and Premier of Ontario to expedite facilitating high speed internet connectivity to increase equitable access in rural and remote areas.

The Regional Municipality of Halton is close to 1000 km² in area and large swaths of the region are rural. Many families in these areas (North Burlington and rural Milton and Halton Hills) have little access to reliable high-speed internet service, or when it is available, it is cost prohibitive to acquire and maintain. This has produced a growing and concerning inequity in access to education across the Halton District School Board. Many students have been unable to access synchronous virtual learning as mandated by the Ministry of Education.

Band-aid solutions of cellular access hubs are expensive for the board to acquire and distribute, and require 5-7 days in lead-time to process and distribute to our families. Cellular signals are not always available or strong enough in areas of Halton for a hub to be a viable solution for all families in need. Due to the delayed closure announcement of in-person learning until after the holidays had begun, the hub acquisition process could not begin until January 4. With the January 2, 2021 letter from the Minister confirming a January 11, 2021 return to class date as well as the noted processing delay, it was logical for the board not to pursue this avenue when hubs would not arrive until after elementary students had returned to in-person learning. Note that in an extremely tight budget year, expenditures on potentially unutilized technology in the short term is not felt to be prudent.

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

For some rural elementary school families, it has not been possible to participate in synchronous virtual learning during the first week of January. The last minute announcement of the extension to elementary virtual learning has exacerbated the internet access disparity for rural families.

The government has stated that boosting high-speed internet access and connectivity in rural and remote areas of the province is a priority. The Trustees of the Halton District School Board are aware of the issues [of local rural families](#) and note the growing sentiment of frustration because students can not access the mandated synchronous virtual learning through high-speed internet. We understand this concern is being raised [across the province](#) and from other school boards.

Access to high-speed internet is an equity issue that must be immediately addressed by the government. During the press conference on January 8th, it was suggested that the province could be in a crisis situation until at least April 2021. We cannot leave families with limited or no access to synchronous learning as we “pivot” in and out of in-person and virtual learning during that time. We ask the government to urgently raise the priority of providing reliable and affordable high-speed internet access to rural and remote regions of Ontario.

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 Board Association