

February 28, 2019

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

To the Honourable Stephen Lecce:

Re: Bargaining to better education

At the February 25, 2020 regular board meeting, the Avon Maitland District School Board directed the Chair to write a letter to the Minister of Education on behalf of the Board addressing the following motion:

Resolved that, the Avon Maitland District School Board direct the Chair write a letter on behalf of the Board of Trustees to the Minister of Education to draw attention to the impacts and implications of announced education reforms on the Avon Maitland District School Board, and ongoing anticipated pressures in the budgeting process for the 2020/2021 school year. The letter will also include a request to refrain from using confusing and divisive rhetoric in the media and to return to the bargaining table in the hopes of focusing on a respectful process and positive outcomes for students that lead to investment in education and to return the education sector to stability.

In April of last year, we sent the then Minister of Education, Lisa Thompson, a letter outlining our concerns about the hopefully unintended consequences of your government's proposals to "find efficiencies" by increasing secondary class size averages, mandating e-learning, and cutting educational supports. The government claimed then, and continues to claim, that you are increasing your investment in education but we are not seeing that at our board.

Last year's budgeting process was extremely challenging as we dealt with a 7.1 million dollar decline in funding from the previous year. And while there has been a much-touted release of funds to ameliorate the loss of teaching jobs, our purported four-year funding will be completely depleted by the end of this second year. Which will, in turn, increase our budget challenges. The statement that no individual teacher's job would be lost is also not accurate as we, for example, have 39 secondary school teachers who were employed and put on the redundancy list in the spring of 2019 but are no longer employed – not by their choice but because of the funding changes.

As a small rural board, the higher class size average ratio is devastating to our programming options and will continue to have harsh implications within our system. Minister Lecce, I invite you to contact the student organization OSTA/AECO and have an honest conversation with the primary stakeholders of this situation – the students. And, if you have any further questions come to our board and we will show you the difficulties small rural schools face in trying to offer a slate of course offerings to fulfill our commitment to honour all pathways – including your government's focus on science and trades. Huron and Perth Counties currently have a shortage of employees in our region which will be exacerbated if students have to leave to get courses such as technology, business, social sciences, and the arts. Giving additional funding to colleges to support the trades is laudable but (a) once they leave many young people don't return to their rural roots

and (b) a direct path to the trades into work is preferred by many and would be possible if secondary schools could ensure course availability.

OPSBA, in association with Nanos Research, conducted a poll released in November 2019 that included the following sampling of results:

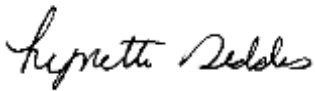
- Ontarians are twice as likely to say spending money on public education is more important than eliminating the deficit.
- A majority of Ontarians agree that spending on public education is an investment in the future

The full report is available at <https://www.opsba.org/strong-support-for-public-education-in-ontario>. The Conference Board of Canada stated that “each dollar of public education spending generates \$1.30 in total economic benefits to Ontario. At the same time, the inverse holds true for each dollar taken from public education.” It seems education has an excellent return on investment and the taxpayers of Ontario would expect the Province to take full advantage of this to benefit the economy and the people of the province over the long term.

Trustees and the administrative team of the Avon Maitland District School Board have worked hard **in conjunction** with our union partners to nurture and support positive relationships knowing that this collaboration is in the best interests of our students and our communities. The lack of respectful and collaborative attitudes at the provincial level is noted and unacceptable. The province needs to step back from their preemptive legislated cuts and go back to the bargaining table with a starting position of conditions that existed when you took power. Bargaining in good faith is a key principle in any negotiation process.

So, in this week that schools across Ontario observed Pink Shirt Day to end bullying, we respectfully request that you lead by example in setting a positive and collaborative tone.

Sincerely,



Lynette Geddes
Chair, Avon Maitland District School Board

cc Randy Pettapiece, MPP Perth-Wellington
Lisa Thompson, MPP Huron-Bruce
Mayors in Huron and Perth Counties
Ontario Public School Board Association
Ontario Student Trustee Association