

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

August 12, 2020

Re: The Government of Ontario's Plan to Reopen Schools

Dear Minister Lecce,

We are writing today as the Board of Trustees of the Durham District School Board (DDSB) to express our grave concerns about the Government of Ontario's plan to reopen schools.

The plan as outlined in the Ministry of Education's *Guide to Reopen Schools* is inadequate to protect the health and safety of all students and in particular, elementary students. The failure to ensure limits on elementary class sizes and the appropriate physical distancing as recommended by the medical community disregards the reality that children can also contract and transmit COVID-19 between each other and their close contacts.

We are also concerned that the Ministry has not provided enough funding to ensure the safe transport of students to school based on the guidance from Transport Canada and the Public Services Health and Safety Association, as referenced in the Ministry's *Guide to Reopen Schools*.

The Durham District School Board urges the Ministry of Education to immediately provide the funding necessary to all publicly funded school boards in Ontario to ensure that the full hierarchy of safety controls are implemented before the return to school, less than a month away.

Funding is needed to provide more staff to create smaller and safer class sizes in elementary schools that ensures physical distancing, to address safety concerns on school buses, along with the necessary capital upgrades and further improvements to ventilation systems in DDSB schools.

Parents have expressed concerns to us about the Ministry's plan and are highlighting that no amount of money should be spared for well-being of their children. They need to see changes to the Ministry's plan in the form of direct action and funding in response to their concerns. We are also requesting that you provide to us, in writing, the scientific evidence that you are using to base your decisions on and what the risks to students will be as part of the Ministry's current plan.



As you know, the people of Durham Region and Ontario have worked very hard to make many sacrifices that flattened the curve and continue to reduce and eliminate the prevalence of the COVID-19 virus in our communities. It is critical for students, families, staff and our economy that we do not erase the progress we have made because of your Ministry's plan to reopen schools.

Without additional measures, you are risking a second closure of schools, businesses and our economy, along with the individual social and financial impacts that would come with it. We also understand the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on government finances. That is why it is so important to make this additional investment into schools now, to prevent a second wave and what is certain to be a significantly higher impact on the provincial treasury in the future.

The health and safety of students and staff is our top priority and we strive every day to provide a safe learning and working environment for all. As the elected representatives of families to the Durham District School Board, we feel as though we must do everything that we can to ensure that students, parents/guardians and staff do not have to worry about the return to school. We urge you to do the same.

Respectfully,

Chris Braney, Chair and Trustee, City of Pickering
Niki Lundquist, Vice-Chair and Trustee, Town of Whitby
Patrice Barnes, Trustee, Town of Ajax, Wards 1 & 2
Michael Barrett, Trustee, City of Oshawa
Paul Crawford, Trustee, City of Pickering
Donna Edwards, Trustee, Town of Ajax, Ward 3
Darlene Forbes, Trustee, City of Oshawa
Carolyn Morton, Trustee, Townships of Brock, Scugog & Uxbridge
Ashley Noble, Trustee, City of Oshawa
Scott Templeton, Trustee, Town of Whitby
Christine Thatcher, Trustee, Town of Whitby

Cc: Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, MPP Pickering-Uxbridge
Hon. Rod Phillips, MPP Ajax
Hon. Laurie Scott, MPP Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock
Lorne Coe, MPP Whitby
Jennifer French, MPP Oshawa
Lindsey Park, MPP Durham
Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, Durham
Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, District 13, Durham
Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 218
Board of Trustees, Durham District School Board



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