



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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November 28, 2016

To: Grant Crack, MPP, Chair of the Standing Committee on General Government
Sylwia Przewdziecki, Clerk of the Standing Committee on General Government

Re: Bill 45, Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback and address some of the provisions regarding Bill 45, Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016.

In a fair, open and democratic society, legislative bills are to be given the opportunity for full discussion and input by all parties and, at some point, members of the general public. Although this legislation was introduced by the Attorney General and focuses on changes to the provincial election timelines and processes, we felt it important, as leaders in the advocacy for public education, to share our comments with members of the committee.

The policies of government are far-reaching. They affect the world our children and youth will inherit tomorrow and they very much have an impact on the conditions in which our children and youth live today.

OPSBA advocates for non-partisan strategies to raise public awareness and engage politicians in issues that focus on student achievement and the well-being of children and youth. As school board trustees, we support those measures that expand the rights of the public to fully participate in democratic elections and to have access to information that supports and encourages them to exercise their democratic rights.

In past Federal elections, we developed a *Federal Resource for School Boards* that identified key issues for the educational sector. We encouraged our members to ask candidates their positions on such issues as children and youth mental health, public infrastructure, indigenous education and poverty.

We want to encourage everyone to vote and, in particular, create opportunities for the participation of children and youth. We also want to give young people an opportunity to participate in and help organize an all candidates' meeting. In the past, we have also suggested that youth volunteer to provide child care so people can vote and encouraged family viewing and discussion of televised debates.

With regards to Provincial elections, our Association has declared a separate day leading up to Voting Day as "Education Day" in the province of Ontario. This day included hosting all candidates meetings with the four major provincial parties, which allows them the opportunity to share their views and answer questions on the issues affecting public education in local schools throughout the province. This is particularly important as education is the second largest item in the provincial budget.

The fundamental democratic right to participate in a fair election process is a matter that is respected and honoured by every citizen in Ontario.

Closer to home, as municipal politicians, trustees invest time and energy to raise the profile of their local democratically elected school board role so that our electorate has a direct conduit to local decision making..

Part of this has been in our advocacy to highlight Local Government Week, which occurs every October. This is an opportunity to engage students in both elementary and secondary schools in learning that leads to civic awareness, knowledge of the election process, the importance of exercising democratic rights and the fundamental Canadian value of the right as a citizen to have one's voice heard.

Our students, parents and community members expect us to lead by example. In prior municipal elections, OPSBA prepared a series of candidate resources and developed a public information campaign that described the role of trustee and encouraged greater participation in the municipal election process. We see this as a public service and an encouragement of participatory democracy. As we represent the only publicly elected officials with direct responsibility for the education of our children, OPSBA will continue to promote and support the role of the local democratically elected trustee.

With respect to voter education, our member boards have had their schools participate in the Student Vote program. We know that this organization has a large presence in schools and classrooms across the country. This is a program that promotes civic engagement among the generation of young people who are the future of this country.

With regards to specific provision of Bill 45, Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016, we offer these comments:

- OPSBA supports the concept of the Chief Electoral Officer providing public education and information packages to new electors. The legislation also allows the Chief Electoral Office to use more modern means of communication including web-based and social media. These are important education/communication pieces from a non-partisan entity to share and explain the voting process.
- OPSBA supports moving the 2018 election date to Spring from October. This will provide a less crowded campaign and voting period for all Ontarians. The next School Board and Municipal election occurs on October 22, 2018. This separation will benefit our members and our constituents to have a more focussed campaign.
- OPSBA supports the move to modernize the voting process for all Ontarians. We have always advocated for more voting methods in order to increase voter turnout and at the same time increase accessibility. However, we share the concerns expressed by others about the ability to “hack” vote tabulation. Votes need to be counted quickly, but accuracy is more important.
- OPSBA supports the use of schools as polling stations based on discussions with municipal partners that consider student and staff safety. School boards and municipalities have been working closely together on this issue for many years.
- OPSBA supports measures to streamline administrative processes including combining registration and nomination papers.

- OPSBA supports the creation of a volunteer provisional register of 16 and 17-year-olds who want their names be added to voter list. The voting age remains at 18 but this pre-voter list is a tremendous opportunity to get more young people engaged in the democratic process.

The current provincial curriculum includes two fixed instances to learn about government. In Grade 5, elementary students learn about all levels of government. It is not again until Grade 10 Civics class in secondary school that students are formally reminded about elections and how governments work.

We know the Minister of Education’s Fall 2016 mandate letter asked her to “*enhance civic engagement opportunities in schools, including through updates to the civics curriculum for students, student and school participation in initiatives such as Student Vote...*”

We see great value in using the expertise from this group to make this provisional voter register a valuable educational tool. Young people want to be involved and we would recommend that Elections Ontario connect both with Student Vote and the Student Trustees across the province.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurie French".

Laurie French
President

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. Together our members serve the educational needs of almost 70% of Ontario’s elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA believes that the role of public education is to provide universally accessible education opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, social or economic status, individual exceptionality, or religious affiliation.