



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
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Cathy Abraham
President

W.R. (Rusty) Hick
Executive Director

September 29, 2021

Dear Premier Ford,

This week, in schools across Ontario, students, staff, and school communities are commemorating the tragic history and ongoing legacy of residential schools, which more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were forced to attend between the 1870s and 1997. With September 30, 2021, nearly upon us, I wanted to reach out to you on behalf of the Indigenous Trustees' Council (ITC) of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) to emphasize the importance of this first National Day of Truth and Reconciliation.

The ITC is composed of First Nations trustees appointed to school boards, and other trustees who are Indigenous elected through the regular electoral process. The ITC engages in a range of initiatives to support the education of Indigenous students, and to ensure all students are educated about the history and culture of Indigenous peoples. During the ITC's discussions on our goals for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a number of themes have emerged.

While we welcome the acknowledgement of the severe impact of residential schools, it is important to also draw attention to the broader history and experiences of Indigenous people in this land called Canada over the past 500-plus years, since European settlement and colonization began. Indigenous people want this day to be much more than just wearing orange shirts. There must be a focus on making concrete changes in our education system, and communities. Accordingly, there are two specific issues to which we would like to draw your attention at this time.

The first is the importance of revitalizing and maintaining Indigenous languages, which is essential for maintaining our cultures, traditional knowledge, and histories. In many communities across Ontario, school boards face a number of challenges when seeking qualified Indigenous language teachers. One particular challenge is the Ontario College of Teachers accreditation requirement. We are asking for you to support the concept of a Temporary Letter of Approval for Elders in Residence and Indigenous Language-proficient speakers to teach Indigenous Languages in classrooms across Ontario. There are, of course, other challenges associated with finding appropriate language teachers, however we feel that this recommendation would eliminate one unnecessary barrier that exists in our system.

Secondly, we are asking for your government to make a firm commitment to include Indigenous education leaders in the important efforts to update and correct the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum. Minister's Lecce's announcement earlier today about mandatory Indigenous learning being embedded throughout Ontario's curriculum is a positive step toward greater reconciliation in Ontario. We need to ensure that this creates a true collaboration with Indigenous leaders at all stages of co-development of the curriculum, to ensure that our cultures and perspectives are properly reflected.

These changes that we have proposed would be a demonstration that your government understands the importance of maintaining Indigenous languages and culture for generations to come. There is much more work to be done, but we are hopeful that the progress we see this week will become a catalyst towards an ongoing conversation that leads to real action in the years ahead.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues and Indigenous education more generally at any point in the future.

Respectfully, Chii-Miigwetch,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elaine Johnston". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elaine Johnston
Chair, Indigenous Trustees' Council of OPSBA

CC:

Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce
Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Greg Rickford
Leader of the Opposition, Andrea Horwath
NDP Education Critic, Marit Stiles
Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, Steven Del Duca
Liberal Education Critic, Kathleen Wynne
Leader of the Green Party of Ontario, Mike Schreiner
Indigenous Trustees' Council Members
OPSBA President Cathy Abraham