



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association

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Cathy Abraham
President

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August 3, 2022

To: The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
The Honourable Raymond Cho, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility

Re: Commitments under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA)

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) has long been fully committed to supporting and meeting the objectives and requirements of the AODA, with its goal of an accessible Ontario by 2025, as well as the Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC) Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities.

Most recently, at our June 2022 Annual General Meeting in Ottawa, our member boards passed a policy resolution calling for several actions to be made regarding accessibility, schools, and student education.

Our shared beliefs are founded on the idea that ensuring fully accessible and inclusive educational opportunities for all students is directly linked to our explicit commitments to, and action on, equity, diversity, human rights; and identification, elimination, and prevention of physical, cultural, and systemic barriers.

We were pleased to see the government respond with immediate action supporting the OHRC's *Right to Read* inquiry report as these are important first steps in addressing the current, literacy-related human rights issues impacting students with disabilities. OPSBA submitted a response to the Ministry consultation regarding the recommendation for mandatory K-2 screening and looks forward to working with the Ministry in ensuring a balanced evidence-based approach to the *Right to Read* recommendations.

Additionally, the K-12 Education Standards Development Committee recently published its final report on recommended standards for removing and preventing accessibility barriers in the publicly funded education system. OPSBA and its member boards are, in general, extremely supportive of the proposed standards and final report and recommendations, which include obligations related to duties of accommodation, professional learning and training related to the different physical, cultural, and systemic identified barriers, universal design for learning, and recognition of the intersectionality and interdependence of these barriers.

In the absence of a clear provincial plan for compliance and dedicated funding support, school boards are struggling to figure out how accessible they should become for students with disabilities, and how they should achieve universal access for facilities and programming. This decision places a significant burden on each school board. Furthermore, it leads to duplication and fragmentation of efforts, inequity, and inconsistencies around the province and burdens and frustrates parents/caregivers and Special Education Advisory Committees in having to engage in the same advocacy work, over and over, board after board, and school after school.

However, the AODA, *Right to Read* inquiry report and K-12 Standards Report provide a clear timeline for the implementation of recommendations with the long-term objectives – by 2025, Ontario’s K–12 education system is to be fully accessible, equitable, inclusive, and learner-centered. The objectives are characterized by immediate, short- and long-term implementation upon the enactment of the regulation and funding support by the ministry.

We look forward to working with your government on implementation of all of these recommendations and standards in the months and years ahead.

With that said, we do have four specific asks for the immediate term:

- Clearly endorse the K-12 standards recommendations and publish a defined timeline for action for system changes required.
- Publish, as soon as possible, clear final guidelines on the built environment for the K-12 education sector.
- Provide capital funding to equal that required for school boards to meet provincially mandated accessibility requirements and phased funding to meet the recommended K-12 standards for system change.
- Work with school boards to ensure compliance with the AODA legislation and Human Rights obligations, providing explicit, short term, time-limited, exemptions to the existing legislation for districts to meet these needs (should deadlines not be possible due to logistical constraints).

As Ontarians, we all need to take ownership of accessibility. The public education system needs a corresponding commitment from the Government of Ontario to make education accessible by collaboratively working together with school boards to create an implementation plan that clearly defines responsibilities, accountability and outcome measures supported by both monetary and human resources.

We look forward to continuing our work with you on this important and increasingly time-sensitive issue for our outstanding public education system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Cathy Abraham
President

CC: Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education
Nancy Matthews, Deputy Minister for Seniors and Accessibility

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. Together our members serve the educational needs of nearly 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.