



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

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Cathy Abraham
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February 25, 2019

To: Nina Tangri, MPP (Mississauga – Streetsville) and
Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Policy
Eric Rennie, Clerk of the Standing Committee on Social Policy

Re: OPSBA Submission regarding Bill 48, Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act, 2018

Last fall, Minister of Education Lisa Thompson introduced Bill 48, Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act that proposed several changes to the *Early Childhood Educators Act*, the *Education Act*, the *Ontario College of Teachers Act* and the *Teaching Profession Act*.

We have followed this proposed legislation as it moved through the legislative process and sought feedback and input about those particular changes that may affect our members. Key components of this legislation, if passed, would:

- Allow the Minister of Education to establish policies and guidelines respecting service animals in schools
- Revoke teaching certificates from teachers disciplined by their profession's regulatory body for committing sexual abuse against a student or child
- Proclaim existing provisions allowing for the funding of counselling and therapy support for children who are victims of sexual abuse by a teacher or an early childhood educator
- Require teachers to successfully complete a math test before obtaining their teacher's license
- Allow the government to determine the number of elected and appointed members to the governance structure of the Ontario College of Teachers

We support the overall intent of the legislation and its name – Safe and Supporting Classrooms – and remind the government that there are many other serious and important issues that are not part of this bill that would also contribute to safe and supportive learning environments for our students and teachers. In our recent funding submission to the Ministry of Education we outlined the real needs and pressures facing school boards. These needs and pressures connect to our Association's overall priorities – our areas of focus to ensure student achievement and well-being.

Supporting Students and Families

Families and children with special needs deserve to have the supports and resources that allow them to fully engage in learning and participate in their classrooms and school activities.

OPSBA supports a consistent service animal policy approach across the province and we welcome the opportunity to be part of stakeholder discussions to provide input into any future policy directive or guideline. This consistent approach should include minimum requirements but allow boards to adapt locally and make final decisions. Our member boards are seeking consistency in service dog certification and mandatory training. Given the increased public awareness of emotional

support/therapy animals in settings other than schools and no current legislation or valid certification in Ontario for emotional support/therapy animals, there is a need for the policy to provide clarity to establish a common understanding.

Boards have indicated that accommodation requests for service animals are increasing. We have informally surveyed our member boards and many have either a policy or procedure in place, while others review requests on a case-by-case basis. The benefits of service animals for some children can be quite significant; bringing a calming influence and lowering anxiety which can often lead to an increase in student success at school.

As a publicly funded school system, we do also need to consider the competing rights for students and staff who have fears of service animals, cultural sensitivities, or physical and medical realities of their own.

We believe it is important that the government bring together key education stakeholders as soon as possible to provide input into the policy, given that implementation is anticipated for September 2019.

When discussing supports needed for children and families with special needs, we would also like to reiterate Special Education has been consistently underfunded for many years. One of the top funding concerns and pressures repeatedly mentioned by our member boards is Special Education and supports for Mental Health. This was underscored in our recent education funding submission to the Ministry of Education mentioned above.

We will also monitor the impacts regarding the recent changes to autism services. Our member boards have expressed concern about the lack of detailed information and what this will mean at the local school level. They have questions as to how many students will now be in schools full time who were previously offsite and receiving therapy and whether or not there will be enough qualified staff to support them. OPSBA will be asking the Ministry of Education for more information and will connect further with its member boards.

Protecting Students and Providing Support

OPSBA fully supports the legislation's mandatory revocation of a teacher's certificate when they are found guilty by their disciplinary committee for any act of sexual abuse. We agree with any measure that increases the protection of our children and students. This clearly demonstrates that these types of behaviours will not be tolerated and action will be taken.

We appreciate the government commitment to move forward on funding therapy and counseling programs for student victims of sexual abuse. The effective date of January 1, 2020, remains many months away and we would hope that past and current victims are also able to participate. Regulations will determine program funding details but we recommend there be a discussion about grandfathering claimants.

Math Proficiency

We acknowledge the government's recent initiatives regarding increasing student math performance including last fall's release of a teacher's guide and parent fact sheet. We also note the re-allocating of math funding within our boards to support math training and the request that boards focus a professional activity (PA) day on fundamental math skills.

We want our teachers to be comfortable and confident when teaching math. OPSBA supports on-going professional learning, and developing applicable relevant resources to support teachers in implementing a range of effective instructional strategies.

The regulations are to determine the form, content and test exemptions. We would ask that this involve stakeholder participation. Our members had several questions about this new teacher requirement including:

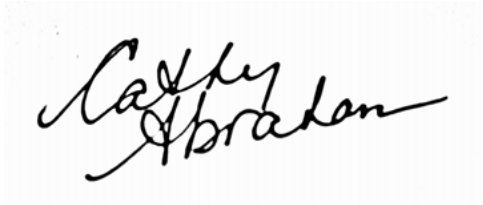
- Should the government consider waiting to implement this requirement while it continues to analyze the data and feedback from the recent public education consultation that asked about math?
- No other subject currently has a proficiency test. Will this requirement lead to other similar tests?
- Will this apply to teachers in both elementary and secondary panels and therefore require different tests?

College Governance Structure

In late November, the College of Teachers released its governance review report. We recommend the government study its recommendations that include, “a smaller, balanced Council of 14 members, 7 of whom would be Ontario Certified Teachers and 7 members of the public appointed by the province.”

We thank the Committee for its consideration of our comments and look forward to working with the Ministry of Education regarding the proposed *Education Act* amendments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cathy Abraham
President
Ontario Public School Boards' Association

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the credible voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.

cc:
The Honourable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Education
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education