



**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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Executive Director

October 23, 2019

The Honourable Greg Rickford  
Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines and Minister of Indigenous Affairs

Dear Minister:

On behalf of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA), I want to thank you for adjusting your schedule to speak with our trustees at our recent Northern Meeting in Thunder Bay. This meeting brought together English public school board trustees from our Northern school boards, which include Algoma DSB, DSB Ontario North East, Near North DSB, Keewatin-Patricia DSB, Lakehead DSB, Rainy River DSB and Superior-Greenstone DSB. We were also fortunate to have three of our Directors of Education attend. Although I was not there myself, I know from our Second Vice President Carol Ann Sloat and Northern Region Chair Mark Mannisto that your remarks were well received.

As someone from the North, we have no doubt that you fully recognize and are aware of the many unique challenges facing our schools in the region. School boards and trustees in the North want their students to have the same opportunities as other students across the province. Declining enrolment, loss of community employers, and the overall geography of the landscape all contribute to obstacles in delivering quality educational programming for our students.

Some of the points made by yourself and the trustees included:

- Support from the provincial government for more local industry connections with students. An example was given about mining tours to encourage students to enter into that field.
- A coordinated economic development plan for the North that recognizes its unique challenges and opportunities, and provides students with opportunities to study, live, and work in their Northern communities.
- The need for Indigenous Education in our curriculum for all students. Our support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action regarding the retention and revitalization of Indigenous languages in our schools, taught by Indigenous leaders.
- The effects of declining enrolment and the loss of course offerings – both compulsory and elective classes. The class size changes have exacerbated this issue in the North.
- The difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified teachers, education workers and health and mental health supports and services.
- A request for the provincial government to extending its support for graduation coaches to have one in every secondary school.
- Acknowledging that while there is trend for students to be involved in more online courses, especially in the North, mandatory e-learning courses are not always the best learning methods for students.

After your remarks and dialogue, much of our meeting was dedicated to a discussion of short and long term strategies for Northern school boards as well as an opportunity for members to share their plans for improving graduation rates.

Although your portfolio does not directly include education, we believe you and Minister of Education Stephen Lecce would agree that ministerial collaboration is needed. We are currently compiling the information shared and discussed and will be providing it to you and Minister Lecce in a separate correspondence.

Again, thank you for your remarks and participation in our discussion.

Sincerely,

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

Cathy Abraham  
President  
Ontario Public School Boards' Association

*The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents English 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 Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education  
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education