



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
439 University Avenue, 18th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 1Y8
Tel: (416) 340-2540
Fax: (416) 340-7571
webmaster@opsba.org
www.opsba.org

Laurie French
President

W.R. (Rusty) Hick
Executive Director

January 31, 2018

To: Honourable Zach Churchill
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development

via email

Dear Minister,

It is with great shock and disappointment that we send this letter to you. We cannot agree with your rationale with both the recently commissioned "Raise the Bar" report and the subsequent decision by your ministry to abolish locally elected school board trustees in favour of government appointees. These announcements reached us last week on the eve of our annual Public Education Symposium, at which we celebrate our trustees and offer critical professional development opportunities. This event was attended by our own new minister of education, Indira Naidoo-Harris who repeatedly thanked school board trustees for their commitment to public education and acknowledged the important work that they do.

While we know that governments have from time to time intervened with a particular school board and imposed certain requirements and even supervision, it is incomprehensible that your government has moved to eliminate all seven English school boards. Why were no changes directed at the other school system even though it too was included in the report? If student achievement is the concern, why does this action not address the other supports necessary for success (i.e. the Ministry, staff federations, system leaders), whose collaboration with local trustees would better address the local and unique needs of students and communities going forward? It would appear that the rights of the minority to govern their own school system are being protected while those of the majority are being removed. Surely there must be a more balanced approach to the concerns raised and a better way to show our students how adults can come together to find solutions instead of this heavy handed, top down directive. Why could there not be meetings established among the interested parties to discuss and review the recommendations? The approach taken in Nova Scotia does not support "collaborative professionalism" but instead removes the vital and important role of democratically elected trustees.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) maintains a strong advocacy focus on student achievement and well-being. At the same time, we invest in supporting the governance and community representative role of trustees and building their leadership capacity since these are key aspects of effective decision-making and responsiveness to the needs of students, parents and the public at large. As we have stated many times, we continue to promote and support the role and voice of the locally democratically elected trustee - the only publicly elected official with the direct responsibility for the education of our children. We know this is equally true for our colleagues with the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, who are also members of the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA). CSBA's senior executive recently met in Calgary and were equally outraged by this erosion of local democracy.

Trustees play an important role in publicly-funded education. They are the crucial link between the school board and their local community. Trustees are of the community; they live in their communities, know their community and advocate for their community. In all boards, trustees work toward the goals of achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being, and fostering high levels of public confidence in our education system. Trustees serve as advocates, as ombudsmen, as originators of ideas, as guideposts and hold both government and staff accountable. Advocacy for student mental health strategies, a fair and coordinated ministry approach to education and services, advocacy for equity in Indigenous education and funding, fairness in special education funding, inclusiveness and equity, and effective use of technology in teaching and learning are a few of the ways that trustees make a difference.

In closing, we strongly ask you to rethink your decisions. We suggest you meet with members of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association and begin a dialogue about the rationale and details for each recommendation and a new plan forward. With a self-imposed deadline for changes to be in place for next September, this should begin immediately. We are hopeful that through your meetings, the importance of the locally elected school board trustee, indeed, local democracy, will become evident.

Sincerely,

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

Laurie French
President
Ontario Public School Boards' Association

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.

cc.

Hank Middleton, Nova Scotia School Boards Association
Valerie McLeod, Executive Director, Canadian School Boards Association