



**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

Cathy Abraham
President

W.R. (Rusty) Hick
Executive Director

October 8, 2020

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Dear Minister:

Across our province students have been welcomed back into the new school year, both in-person and online. School board staff, like so many others across all sectors, are working under unprecedented conditions, with everyone in education striving to provide the best learning opportunities possible. Trustees, in their role as publicly elected officials, continue to provide strong governance as they act on behalf of their communities for student achievement and well-being.

With regard to conducting committee and board meetings, it was much appreciated to have Ontario Regulation 463/97 (Electronic Meetings) and the *Education Act* amended last spring to address the physical attendance requirements for these meetings, given the circumstances at the time. This remained in effect until 60 days after the school closure order was applied, meaning the period between April 6, 2020, and June 30, 2020. Boards found much success in running meetings virtually during that time.

Since the end of June, many boards have been determining how they can safely meet, in an open and transparent manner, to conduct board business. This is a significant challenge for many boards as the demographics of elected trustees puts a significant number of them into higher risk age categories, as well as including many with underlying health conditions. Additionally, in parts of our province trustees need to travel significant distances, and at times stay overnight, to attend board meetings in person. Holding board meetings virtually needs to be an option.

Although some boards are grouping trustees and board staff into cohorts for their meetings, similar to what is being done in the Ontario Legislature, this is not a practical strategy for all, especially for those larger boards with trustee and staff numbers exceeding the current 10 person indoor gathering limits.

This issue was raised during your weekly conference call with school board chairs when requests were made from all publicly funded sectors to have the regulation back in place and extended for the duration of the pandemic. We appreciate that you indicated you would give this some consideration. Our public boards strongly believe that a regulatory change is needed in order to ensure continued safe governance.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and we are happy to have our staff discuss this with you and your staff further if you wish.

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

cc.
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister

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.