



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

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Cathy Abraham
President

W.R. (Rusty) Hick
Executive Director

April 8, 2021

Dear Minister Lecce:

As you may be aware, OPSBA recently sent a submission to your ministry in response to the proposal by the Ministry of Education regarding online and remote learning that also includes an expanded mandate of TVO/TFO. Given the level of concern that exists among school boards across the province, and many other stakeholders in our sector, I wanted to write to you personally as well to highlight some of my concerns.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) and other education sector stakeholders including the Ontario Student Trustees' Association, the Federations who represent Teachers and Educations Workers, and others, have issued public statements raising concerns about several elements of the proposal. We are extremely concerned with the contents of this proposal and potential legislation, especially since it comes at a time when our province continues to struggle with the pandemic, and plans for the return to school this September are unclear.

As you know, the past year has been unprecedented in many ways, including multiple shifts to remote learning as schools were forced to close based on provincewide and local public health recommendations. School boards across the province met their responsibilities every day to students and their families by quickly pivoting to various online formats. These herculean efforts were aided by the collaborative relationships that exist between all school boards and their stakeholders, and their ability to leverage existing infrastructures and staff expertise in our schools and e-learning consortia.

OPSBA, and our member school boards support modernization, as well as student and parental choice – when it makes sense for student success. School boards have promoted and implemented learning online in various formats for many years, and understand the importance of preparing students for postsecondary settings, the workplace, and lifelong learning. With that said, while remote learning over the past year may have been a positive experience for some students, we have also seen marked increases in mental health concerns, and feelings of isolation among students. We are also concerned that the current proposal may be promoting

the online learning option to the detriment of student well-being and the overall integrity of our education system.

However, this current proposal considers allowing online and remote learning as a permanent option and gives the responsibility for online course content to TVO/TFO. I'm sure you can agree that for the vast majority of our students, remote or independent learning opportunities cannot replace the in-person school experience that has shown to effectively support the developmental, physical and social well-being of students. I know you have on many occasions spoken publicly about the importance of our students being in schools – on this, we couldn't agree more.

In its current form, the ministry's proposal will have significant implications for public education and our local schools including:

- Threatening the viability and diversity of course offerings in small, rural and remote schools. Over time this proposal will result in closed or diminished schools that are currently at the heart of our small communities.
- Reducing support for in-school learning by reassigning Student Success Teachers, Guidance Counsellors and others whose current mandate is to support students who require additional instruction to be successful.
- Leading to unnecessary duplication and additional expenses, while still being unlikely to effectively address local needs. School boards and school board consortia have developed the infrastructure and level of expertise to support remote learning that reflects the requirements of their specific learners.
- Undermining the ability of school boards to have direct and local influence over the logistics and programming linked to online learning as well as associated services and supports in their community schools.

OPSBA has always offered to work in partnership with the government to ensure that policies and legislation can be effectively implemented to maximize the success of each and every student in our care. In December 2020, we submitted [our position on an expanded role for TVO](#) to the government.

OPSBA and our member school boards are prepared to work with the government and education partners to create a workable vision that is mutually beneficial, which does not undermine school board and school board consortia leadership, and does not eliminate the positive online approaches that have long proven effective for student engagement and success.

We believe that school boards and TVO should continue to do what they each do best and work to find opportunities to work collaboratively in areas that could continue to grow and enhance the quality of online credit courses.

OPSBA and our member school boards are concerned with regard to the accelerated timelines and lack of reflection and understanding of the short and long-term ramifications. OPSBA continues to recommend a working table with school board consortia, school board representatives and online learning experts, along with TVO staff, to co-create a vision that is

mutually beneficial and does not undermine school board and consortium leadership or eliminate the positive online learning approaches that have long been effective for student engagement and success.

I know many school boards have commented on this issue and some have even sent letters to you directly about it, as well as reaching out to their local MPPs to raise their concerns. I would appreciate the opportunity to have a further conversation with you about this matter.

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
Chris Rastrick, Chief of Staff, Minister Lecce's Office
Jeff Brennan, Director of Stakeholder Relations, Minister Lecce's Office