



ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL BOARDS'  
ASSOCIATION

**Leading Education's Advocates**

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Cathy Abraham  
President

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April 29, 2021

To: Goldie Ghamari, Chair of the Standing Committee on General Government  
Isaiah Thorning, Clerk of the Standing Committee on General Government

[comm-generalgov@ola.org](mailto:comm-generalgov@ola.org)

Re: Bill 276, Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, 2021

Dear Chair Ghamari and Members of the Standing Committee on General Government:

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) would like to briefly address this omnibus legislation and the proposed amendment under Schedule 3 *Education Act* regarding demonstration schools. These unique schools are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and provide opportunities for students with severe learning disabilities and those children who are deaf, blind, and deafblind.

Our member boards have always been supportive of measures that increase the supports for students with significant needs. Responding to pandemic impacts, last year the government allowed demonstration school programs to operate in both a residential setting and in a non-residential setting. This was to be for the 2020-21 school year only.

With uncertainty remaining, the amendment considered in this current legislation is to remove the requirement for a student to sleep over at a demonstration school during the week, thereby providing more choice and flexibility for students and their families. Students could attend the school during the day but return to their families at the end of the day. We are looking for more details about how those children and families that do not live near these three schools will continue to access the integrated services and specialized programming, and how the number of sites could be expanded to support more students across the province.

OPSBA did comment on the temporary changes to demonstration schools in our [submission](#) regarding Bill 197, COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020. In that, we suggested, "there might be future discussion about the equity of opportunity and access to these unique schools in that there are only a small number of them in the province." In fact, there are three schools that service English-speaking students for the entire province with each school currently having space for approximately 40 students (who meet the admission criteria) who attend for one year.

In the three demonstration schools operated by the ministry, students who meet the admissions criteria are accepted for one year based on space in the program (approximately 40 residence spots at each demonstration school). Students are invited back for a second year, if there is space available and if they will continue to benefit from the program.

We would ask the Ministry of Education to consider the full support system needed for these students that can include transitions between time spent at demonstration school and local home schools. And we suggest the Ministry of Education include the learning disabilities community in this discussion.

Finally, in the backgrounder that accompanied the news release for the introduction of this legislation, there were other Ministry of Education-related items that are meant to ease administrative burden and reduce red tape. These types of actions will always be welcome so that school boards can direct more time, energy, resources and focus to the classroom and supports for students. We look forward to more information from the ministry about the implementation of these changes.

Thank you for your consideration.

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  
Jeff Brennan, Director of Stakeholder Relations

*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.*