



**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

May 12, 2021

To: Kaleed Rasheed, Chair of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly
Tonia Grannum, Clerk of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly

comm-legisassembly@ola.org

Re: Bill 216, Food Literacy for Students Act, 2020

Dear MPP Rasheed and Members of the Standing Committee on General Government:

While we note this legislation does not have any public hearing dates set, our members felt this was an important issue with which to share our comments on with the Committee and the Ministry of Education. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) has taken notice of this proposed legislation since it was first introduced last fall and referred to the Committee stage. Our internal consultative group of trustees, the Policy Development Work Team, met earlier this year to discuss the bill's intent and to provide our collective feedback to the ministry to be considered.

We support shedding more light and curriculum focus on the issue of experiential food literacy among our students and we believe schools and classrooms, both indoors and outdoors, can be ideal settings for this learning to occur. And we also think this can be extended to include conversations about healthy eating and lifestyle. In general, food literacy throughout society has been rising in recent years, with the plethora of relevant information and entertainment available on the Internet, television, social media, and even in audio-only media like podcasts. Children and youth are often now involved in meal planning, and grocery stores carry food options from across the globe, something that was not seen in most parts of Canada even a few decades ago. However, students must be given the opportunity to acquire a baseline knowledge to be able to critically assess sometimes conflicting statements regarding food and nutrition.

There are examples of many schools that have created gardens to show how plants are grown, how food is prepared and the work/cost associated. This can be seen at both the elementary and secondary school panels. Many teachers use the gardens and sometimes their school kitchens to increase the knowledge of local foods and what can actually grow in certain conditions. This is also an opportunity to show students how to take advantage of the relatively short Canadian agricultural season.

This proposed legislation, however, was seen to be too prescriptive in that it requires a course completion to be part of a student's overall secondary school graduation requirement. Our members did not support that inclusion, but would rather have this topic be embedded into existing curriculum and teaching opportunities. It also requires boards to "provide instruction in the courses of study and to provide training and support for teachers and other staff of the board."

Trustees had other questions and concerns including:

- How would these courses be developed and by whom?
- How would we ensure they were accessible to all students and their learning pathways?
- How would teacher and staff training be funded?

A scan of the current curriculum does include references to "local" foods with discussions about the differences between local Ontario-grown foods and foods from other geographic regions and cultures, why it's a good idea to eat local foods when they are available, how choosing local fresh food can reduce carbon footprints, and how local produce can be inexpensive in season. There is nothing currently about the concept of experiential food literacy in the curriculum.

We note that the Ministry of Education has a committee called the Healthy School Working Table and suggest this topic be added to a future meeting's agenda.

Sincerely,

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

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.