



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
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Cathy Abraham
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Stephanie Donaldson
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August 21, 2023

Minister of Education Stephen Lecce

Dear Minister:

I am writing today in my capacity as Chair of the Indigenous Trustees' Council (ITC) of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA).

The ITC is composed of First Nations trustees appointed to school boards, and other trustees who are Indigenous but elected through the Municipal and School Board electoral process. Our Council engages in a range of initiatives to support the education of Indigenous students, and to ensure all students are educated about the history and culture of Indigenous peoples.

Following recent discussions of the ITC at its annual August planning and strategy meeting, we have two specific action items to discuss:

1. While I appreciate your offer to attend Queen's Park in September and be recognized within the Legislature, we would ask for more meaningful engagement in order to justify the expense of making a trip to Toronto from our home communities. I am requesting a **face-to-face meeting as soon as possible this fall** to discuss the urgent education needs of Ontario's diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.
2. We are asking you, through the Ministry of Education, to fund travel and accommodations for Indigenous Student Trustees from across Ontario to visit Sault Ste. Marie on the weekend of October 13 to 15, 2023, as part of OPSBA's Northern Regional Meeting and Program. We are working on a special meeting that would instill confidence in our Indigenous youth leaders and create space for this important and influential group of students to have their voices heard, the first they would have ever had together in person. **Our specific ask is for \$30,000 in funding to support this initiative.** (A document that outlines the cost estimate is attached).

I also want to reiterate an issue that has been pressing for some time and one that the ITC has consistently communicated – we are all aware that we must act quickly to revitalize and maintain Indigenous languages in Ontario or risk losing them forever. **This must be a priority.** Ontario has a responsibility to work with Indigenous partners to provide quality education and support for First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement and well-being. Moreover, Article

14 of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP), states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education **in their own languages**, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.” The ITC was inspired by hearing about the ministry’s work on the Elder Endorsement Model for Language Circles at our August meeting and supports the urgent proliferation of this good work to revitalize and maintain Indigenous languages.

Finally, we would like to discuss the changes to how Indigenous Education is being funded for the 2023-24 school year. There is some concern and confusion from our members regarding the implementation of the realignment of the Indigenous Education Grant. Some boards are reporting worrisome impacts. Furthermore, the ITC would appreciate relaying a request for ensuring accountability of school boards and of the province, to report back, regularly and specifically, on the achievement of Indigenous students as well as achievement of Indigenous education priorities. I would greatly appreciate being able to talk about this with you directly.

We look forward to engaging in further discussion on these issues which are of critical importance to the success of our youth, who are the future of our communities. Please do not hesitate to reach out directly to me and our Association through our staff.

Sincerely,



Elaine Johnston
Chair, Indigenous Trustees’ Council of OPSBA

CC:
Kate Manson-Smith, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education
Dasha Androusenkov, Director of Stakeholder Relations, Minister of Education’s Office

Additional Resource:

[March 9, 2023 Letter to Minister Lecce from the ITC re: Indigenous Language Revitalization](#)

Our 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 expert 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.