

April 11, 2019

Honourable Lisa Thompson
Minister of Education
MPP (Huron-Bruce)
Ministry of Education
Mowat Block
22nd Floor
900 Bay St.
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Renfrew County District School Board (RCDSB) I am writing to you to express concerns regarding proposed changes to public education outlined in the government's new vision, *Education that Works for You*.

As a predominantly rural District, with a small population in a large geographic area, we are faced with a unique set of circumstances. The impact of these changes will most certainly affect our ability to offer programs and services.

As trustees, our constituents have told us that they are anxious about the proposed changes and the impacts they may have on their children.

Our Vision for the District states: "We will be a community of learners where curiosity, creativity and innovation are celebrated and where students are encouraged to explore and discover their own pathways to success." The proposed changes to education in Ontario will greatly limit our ability to achieve this vision.

The greatest concerns regarding the first year of the proposed changes are:

Class Size

- Increasing class sizes in Grades 9-12 as well as Grades 4-8 may seem simple to implement at first glance, however the implications of these changes are far reaching, particularly in terms of our course offerings. It will directly impact the ability of schools to offer courses for apprenticeship, college and university pathways. This will unduly influence employment options for students as they move into the workforce.
- As some of the course offerings (e.g., woodworking, auto mechanics) must have low class size maximums to address safety concerns, other classes will have much higher numbers to maintain the proposed class size average. These larger classes will not be ideal learning environments for students.
- Higher average class sizes will increase pressure on us to push students to schools with larger student populations. This may have the unwanted consequence of accelerating consolidation reviews of school sites in certain small, rural communities. This is something we have worked very hard to avoid as we understand and appreciate the importance and value rural constituents place on their neighbourhood schools.

Mandatory e-Learning

- In our District, we have communities that do not have cell service nor is there reliable, high speed internet. Our schools are the only locations where students can be assured to find this service. For these reasons, requiring students to take four e-learning credits will pose challenges.
- In addition, there are areas that have an overrepresentation of poverty. This means that a significant number of students are financially unable to purchase devices which will impact their ability to participate.
- As well, there are students for which e-learning is not suitable. This will potentially affect their achievement and future success.

Hiring Practices

- While our District is committed to minimizing impacts on staff, the attrition model alone will not allow us to avoid layoffs.
- Reducing teachers will also have a direct impact on our ability to offer extra-curricular activities. As a rural District, our extra-curricular offerings (e.g., music, art or athletics) are often the only option within a community for students seeking an outlet to pursue a passion or pastime.

The key concerns raised above highlight the impact on our District of the government's proposed changes for year one. I encourage you to consider the impact of these matters going forward and we remain open to discussing them with you.

As trustees we take our responsibility for ensuring quality education very seriously and have worked hard to ensure we are operating within a financially responsible framework. We feel that the proposed changes will greatly limit our ability to provide our students with the quality of education that they deserve.

Sincerely,



Susan Humphries
Chair
Renfrew County District School Board

Cc: Hon. John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, MPP (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke)
Ontario Public School Boards Association
Jeffrey Barber, President - OSSTF District 28
Allison Ryan, President - Renfrew County Teachers' Local, ETFO
RCDSB Student Senate
RCDSB Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)