

July 30, 2020

Hon. Doug Ford
MPP Premier of Ontario
Room 281, Legislative Building, Queen's Park Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Hon. Stephen Lecce
MPP Minister of Education
315 Front Street, 14th Floor Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Lecce:

On behalf of our Board of Trustees, I am writing to strongly highlight the concerns and needs of our Board in order to support a safe reopening of our schools in September.

Hybrid/Adaptive Model

HWDSB parents and guardians have strongly expressed to us that a hybrid model – with in-school and distance learning – places undue hardship on families because they will be unable to work. This model will force many working parents with young children, single-parent households, and low-income families to face an immoral dilemma: Should they focus on their child's education, or their own employment? This is an unjust decision that no parent should have to make. Our Board is extremely concerned that many children may be left alone, or in unsafe situations, without available and affordable childcare options in our community.

In light of these concerns, we implore the government to develop a school reopening plan that is consistent across the province while supporting the needs of communities, families and children. This plan should prioritize our shared commitment and investment in public education and balance the health and safety of students and staff with the needs of Ontario families.

Safe & Effective Return To School

To prioritize the health and safety of our students and staff and close gaps in student learning and achievement, our Board also implores the Ministry to develop of a larger and more robust staffing plan. This is vital if we are to welcome as many students as possible, as soon as possible, into our learning spaces while respecting public health advice.

Financial Commitment Needed

Regardless of the reopening model selected, Ontario school boards need to receive temporary, emergency funding to support a safe and successful return to school.

Remote learning requires additional and ongoing investment in technology, internet, support, maintenance, professional development, as well as mental health and well-being supports for students impacted by school closures and social isolation.

HWDSB

Alex Johnstone
Chair of the Board
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
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Learning in schools – whether through a hybrid or conventional model – requires adequate funding for personal protective equipment, additional staffing, additional transportation, technological devices, mental health and well-being supports, cleaning supplies, repair/maintenance of ventilation systems, touch-free sinks and soap dispensers for handwashing, and water bottle refill stations.

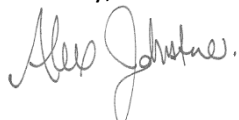
HWDSB implores the Government of Ontario to make a financial commitment that makes the health, safety and well-being of students and staff the top priority. At a minimum, HWDSB requires \$2,068,000 to fully fund personal protective equipment for a return to school in September. A full and transparent breakdown of costs are included in Appendix G of the Board report presented to Trustees on July 27, 2020. (<https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/meetings/Special-Board-Agenda-1595888044.pdf>)

Like our colleagues in Toronto, our Board will also be writing to the Prime Minister and the Mayor of Hamilton to encourage their collaboration with the Ontario government on other funding, policies and programs, such as increased affordable and accessible childcare spaces and paid parental leave options, that will help allow children and families fully participate in the reopening of our schools.

There remain many unknowns about the 2020-21 school year and how the pandemic will unfold and affect our community. Emergency, temporary funding is needed if we are to implement a responsible and responsive plan for a safe and effective school reopening. Collaboration is needed between all levels of government to support the needs of our community.

We offer these recommendations with respect, but ask that they be considered and implemented as soon as possible. Together, we can ensure the health, safety and well-being of students and staff and offer a school reopening plan that meets the needs of our families and community.

Sincerely,



Alex Johnstone, Chair
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

cc: Ontario Public School Boards' Association Chairs of all Ontario School Boards
All Hamilton City Councilors
All Hamilton Members of Parliament
All Hamilton Members of Provincial Parliament