



Dawn Danko
Chair of the Board of Trustees
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
20 Education Court, P.O. Box 2558
Hamilton, ON L8N 3L1
ddanko@hwdsb.on.ca
289.775.0269

May 7, 2021

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

Re: Permanent Online Learning Proposal

Dear Minister Lecce,

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Trustees express concerns related to the Ontario Government's plan to incorporate permanent online learning options for students in public education.

While we understand the Ontario Public School Board Association (OPSBA) has been invited to consult on the proposed changes to public education we, as a Board, have not had an authentic opportunity to consult nor provide feedback due to the confidentiality order.

Our Board and our community would like to participate as critical stakeholders in this discussion before any changes to public education are implemented. As such, we respectfully request that you postpone the introduction of any legislation relating to permanent remote/online learning.

We have reviewed the publicly available summary of the Ministry's proposals with respect to online education and have serious concerns.

Staff and trustees need time to review, reflect and learn from the remote experiences of students and staff during COVID-19 before any permanent plan is enacted. Remote learning during the pandemic was a necessity and an emergency measure, not a plan grounded in research or ideal pedagogical principles. Before we jump to a permanent online offering, we need to step back and learn from the experiences of our students, families and staff this past year. We need to use evidence-based decision making that will benefit public education quality into the future.

We also need to consider the holistic needs of the whole student. Public education is not restricted to student achievement but is a critical system of supports and learning opportunities that help students through stages of childhood and youth development, physical and mental well-being, and positive relationship development. When students are physically present in our classrooms, educators can observe and assess the whole child in a way that is not possible online.

Another concern is the significant inequities of online learning as a "parent option." Student success in online learning is dependent on several factors that are not equitably accessible to all students. For example, having a space to work online, having adequate connectivity to participate, having supervision and academic supports at home, and having space to engage in physical activity are all critical aspects



Dawn Danko
Chair of the Board of Trustees
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
20 Education Court, P.O. Box 2558
Hamilton, ON L8N 3L1
ddanko@hwdsb.on.ca
289.775.0269

that are not available to all students. This means a remote option for families is only available to families who can afford to provide the conditions for success online and a permanent remote school model may further create gaps in our system.

With respect to quality of online education, we agree that ongoing sustainable investment in online interactive elements and course structures is needed. We advocate for the inclusion of trained teachers in the development of curriculum resources and see an opportunity for digital tool and interactive learning artifact development centrally to support local delivery of courses for our students.

Public education in Ontario is a system of supports that are intended to meet the needs of the whole student. Local delivery in an in-person setting is the ideal and we request ongoing investment into our existing classrooms to support student success. Where online learning is needed for exceptional circumstances, or where it is helpful to provide additional learning opportunities in secondary school through individual courses, we would like to collaborate on the appropriate model and framework going forward.

In summary, the HWDSB Board of Trustees requests a transparent, comprehensive consultation on any planning changes to delivery for public education, particularly the current consideration of options for permanent full-time online learning. We firmly believe in quality public education that meets the needs of our students today and into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D Danko".

Dawn Danko
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