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October 25, 2021

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

Re: Request for Approvals for Capital Priorities and Renewal of the Pupil Accommodation Review Process

Dear Minister Lecce,

At HWDSB, school renewal is a strategic priority because we know that quality learning spaces have a positive influence on the learning and well-being of our students. We would like to bring two issues that impact our ability to provide equitable, quality learning spaces to your attention:

1. Request for approval for gym expansions currently submitted through our Capital Priorities
2. Request the renewal and reintegration of the Pupil Accommodation Review process

HWDSB has diverse school buildings, many of which were built over 50 years ago for different student populations (numbers, grades), with different standards or benchmarks for spaces. A key strategy to improve our facilities and offer more consistent and equitable access to quality spaces in our schools is our annual capital plan that includes elementary and secondary facility benchmarks. Benchmarks help ensure that all facilities meet standards for appropriate learning environments.

We respectfully wish to explain how recent Ministry decisions have hindered work on elementary school benchmarks.

At the February 27, 2017 Board Meeting, Trustees approved the following elementary benchmarks and directed staff to bring forward an annual schedule for projects: gymnasiums, science rooms, art rooms, learning commons, and playfields. Our benchmarks reflect our Program Strategy so all schools can deliver a range of programs and access tools they need to accelerate learning.

However, Ministry decisions have impacted this elementary benchmark strategy in two ways:

- gymnasium expansions, previously funded with Ministry approvals through our Proceeds of Disposition, have not received an approval to proceed from the Ministry and have been delayed since 2018; and
- the pause on Pupil Accommodation Reviews has limited the number of schools that we can strategically improve.

Because the Ministry changed the practice of approving an exemption to use Proceeds of Disposition for gymnasium expansions and have not approved our prior submissions, Board staff have submitted three

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gymnasium expansion projects under the Capital Priorities Submission. We are eagerly awaiting results of those submissions for Rosedale, Queensdale and Billy Green elementary schools and hope to have approvals to proceed. For every year that work is delayed, another cohort of students graduates from our schools and misses the opportunity to benefit from these key improvements.

Trustees are also concerned – as we consider benchmarks for the future – that capital work related to accessibility has no Ministry funding source. We ask that the Ministry consider allocating or clarifying funding for accessibility projects to support our commitment to equity, inclusion and providing learning spaces that welcome all students.

We would also like to request the Ministry renew and restart the Pupil Accommodation Review Process. At HWDSB we have done considerable work to review and consolidate schools to support providing quality learning spaces for all students. Schools that have not been through a pupil accommodation review are not eligible for renewal work beyond urgent needs as we are focused on investing in facilities that will remain in our inventory long-term. The unexpected pause on this work has meant many of our communities are waiting for important capital work. We hope we can have support from the Ministry to continue Pupil Accommodation Reviews and related funding for capital improvements where needed.

Thank you for your careful consideration, and for helping clear the way for Board staff and Trustees to support student learning, accessibility and for the creative thinking required to fund this work.

Sincerely,



Dawn Danko
Chair of the Board