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December 17, 2021

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

**Re: Competitive Wages for Educational Assistants**

Dear Minister Lecce,

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the world of education unlike any event in recent memory. Despite the hardships, it is important that we come out of this moment in time in a better place than we entered. One way we can achieve this mission in our schools is by showing some of our most vital staff members how much we value them by correcting a serious wage disparity that resulted from the move to central bargaining under the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

Educational assistants (EAs) are some of the hardest-working individuals in schools by aiding students who require additional support, but they do not always feel the appreciation they deserve. Despite HWDSB's ongoing recruitment efforts to maintain healthy pools of occasional staff, administrators are unable to fill all vacancies on a daily basis.

Competition from other school boards, decisions to take leaves from work in the education sector, and the hiring of additional staff from occasional/casual pools are all factors that can lead to a shortage of educational assistants. A suitable hourly rate is a solution to this problem and can be achieved at the bargaining table.

Unlike teachers, who are placed on a salary grid after having their academic credentials evaluated for salary purposes, educational assistants are paid according to wage levels set previously in local bargaining. Through the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act wage increases can only be bargained as part of the central process. Pay increases apply to all school boards in Ontario equally, resulting in an unintended consequence of widening the wage disparity for EAs at different boards. The current state makes it very challenging for HWDSB to be competitive in recruitment and for our EAs to be fairly compensated.

Some HWDSB educational assistants work and manage more than one job due to the income disparity that exists for EAs in the K-12 educational sector, but they do so with grace. It was also our EAs who answered the call to support in-person learning in specialized classes while many other staff members worked remotely. These sacrifices should not go unnoticed or unappreciated.

Throughout the pandemic, we have often thought of medical professionals as “frontline workers”, but it is clear that Ontario’s schools are home to heroes of their own. Even after COVID-19 has come and gone, educational assistants will continue to prepare students requiring special education supports and services for academic and social success. It is about time they feel that same sense of success, too. We



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respectfully request that the Ministry of Education correct the wage disparity for educational assistants by setting a fair comparable wage level and framework that we see in other boards before central bargaining starts. In addition, we would welcome a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss these specific challenges and the impacts on the educational assistants wage framework at HWDSB.

The next time Ontario is at the bargaining table to discuss a new collective agreement, HWDSB hopes to see educational assistants receive the pay they deserve as they are critical in supporting student success. HWDSB will continue to recruit for our occasional pools and address gaps in our hiring plan, but a suitable hourly rate would assist our efforts. Our classrooms, schools, and communities are better places when we feel supported.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D Danko".

Dawn Danko  
Chair of the Board