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Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
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April 29, 2022

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

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees at Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), I am writing to acknowledge our support for the York Region District School Board April 12, 2022 letter, and request that the EQAO Spring 2022 assessments be cancelled for the current school year.

As you are aware, planning and administration of EQAO is complex and requires significant staff resources across the public education system. The new online platform for EQAO requires additional training for staff, support for students and overall stress on an already stretched system. At this stage in the pandemic, HWDSB is facing ongoing significant challenges to school operations while trying to focus on supporting student well-being and learning recovery. Respecting it is mandatory for school boards to deliver EQAO, we feel it is important to share our serious concerns with the Ministry of Education and request a pause of EQAO.

Boards across the province are experiencing unprecedented absences and staff shortages, and this is negatively impacting operations at HWDSB. Heightened staff absences lead to school and system staff redeployment to new placements where needed and are disrupting staff workflow and preparation time. Our ability to support professional development related to EQAO and the new platform is compromised as we focus on moving staff to keep schools open. We are highly concerned about the additional pressure EQAO administration will place on our staff.

Throughout the pandemic, we have seen an increase in concerns related to the mental health and well-being of our students. Increased anxiety and other mental health challenges have been identified as students have been impacted by multiple transitions and disruptions to their academic and social learning over the past two years. We are also very aware of systemic barriers, including inequitable access to technology for many of our students that will result in increased stress and frustration relating to the EQAO assessment this year. Staff continue to support students who experience a strain on their mental health as they focus on learning recovery and Trustees feel EQAO assessments should not be prioritized at this time.

At HWDSB, EQAO is one of the many tools we use to evaluate how our programming supports student learning and achievement in priority areas of reading and math. We see value in EQAO data as it helps us identify trends and areas where we can focus on bridging gaps in learning and achievement. However, in the current context, as we navigate the pandemic and as a new online platform is introduced, Trustees respectfully request that EQAO Spring 2022 assessments be cancelled this year.

Sincerely,

Dawn Danko, Chair of the Board