



Bluewater District School Board

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Sent by email: stephen.lecce@pc.ola.org

April 12, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
315 Front Street West, 14th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 0B8

Dear Minister Lecce:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, we wish to express our concerns regarding your government's exploration of a province wide approach to the delivery of eLearning through TVO/TFO, as recently revealed by the media in various reports referencing private documents. As we continue to gather evidence related to the impact of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe it is premature for the provincial government to be implementing a permanent framework without adequate transparent consultation with education stakeholders.

In Bluewater District School Board, we belong to the Ontario eLearning Consortium (OeLC), which is comprised of 33 school boards from both the public and Catholic systems. This has provided an effective, efficient, and low-cost seat-sharing mechanism for us to offer eLearning courses to our students, while supplementing course offerings from other boards. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this approach has been especially useful by enabling a variety of solutions in smaller schools, and allowing us to pivot quickly to meet the needs and demands of our students and families.

Our longstanding participation in the OeLC is working extremely well. Online class content is edited, supplemented, and differentiated by local educators for our students, as well as those who register for our classes from across the province. We believe it is imperative that our educators retain control over content and delivery at the local level.

The government's proposed plan would have significant implications for public education and our local schools, including:

- Threatening the viability and diversity of course offerings in small, rural, and remote schools;
- Reducing support for in-school learning by reassigning student success teachers, guidance counsellors, and others whose current mandate is to support students who require additional instruction to be successful;
- Unnecessary duplication and additional expenses, while still being unlikely to effectively address local needs (School boards and their consortia have developed the infrastructure and level of expertise to support remote learning that reflects the requirements of their specific learners.);
- Undermining the ability of school boards to have direct and local influence over the logistics and programming linked to online learning, as well as associated services and supports in their community schools.

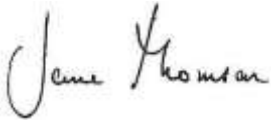
We are concerned that this plan has the dangerous potential of creating a two-tiered education system. As a small rural board, we still have families who live in areas without reliable internet access. There remain questions around access and equity that must be considered with any plan moving forward. In addition, there would be a negative impact on our ability to deliver in-person learning to our rural schools.

We respectfully request that public conversations related to your government's proposal involve consultation with school boards and education partners in Ontario. This includes the many education stakeholders who comprise the OeLC and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, who have also been investigating the potential impacts of this proposal.

By working together, we believe that a strengthened and mutually beneficial vision for online learning can be created, which does not undermine school board and consortia leadership, or eliminate the positive online approaches that have long proven effective for student engagement and success.

As always, our commitment remains focused on providing a quality education for every student in a safe, accepting, and caring environment.

Sincerely,



Jane Thomson
Chair



Jan Johnstone
Vice-Chair

cc: MPP Bill Walker, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound
MPP Lisa Thompson, Huron-Bruce
Ontario Public School Boards' Association

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