



April 4, 2019

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson
Minister of Education 22nd
Floor, Mowat Block 900 Bay
Street Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Hon Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services 6th
Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

Dear Ministers Thompson and MacLeod:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's (OCDSB) Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) to express our concerns about the upcoming changes to: *(i)* the Ontario Autism Program (OAP), *(ii)* the announcement of enhanced educational supports for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and *(iii)* the OCDSB's ability to provide adequate supports to meet the needs of students with ASD, as a result of those changes.

On March 22, 2019, the Ministry of Children Community and Social Services (MCCSS) announced several amendments to the proposed OAP including, but not limited to: *(i)* a commitment to hold broader consultations, *(ii)* to explore how to best provide additional supports to families based on the diagnosed needs of their child, and *(iii)* thus allowing all children who currently have an OAP Behaviour Plan to continue their plan until its end date, *(iv)* allowing families to renew the plan for 6 months after the plan ends.

Our SEAC is appreciative of these commitments and acknowledges that the ability of families to renew their OAP Behaviour Plan for up to 6 months will likely have a positive impact on the number of students who may enroll in the OCDSB or increase their level of attendance at school due to their ability to continue to receive services under the OAP for an additional 6 months.

Even with the MCCSS-proposed amendments to the OAP, SEAC remains concerned about the OCDSB's ability to provide a meaningful education and adequate supports for students with ASD. This is in part due to the significant funding changes for the provisioning of Autism services announced by the Minister of Education on March 11, 2019, in Enhancing Education Support: A Plan for Students with Autism.

SEAC is concerned that the proposed funding is insufficient and will not allow school boards to adequately staff positions that support students with ASD, including: (i) professional support staff (i.e. Speech Language Pathologists, and Psychologists), (ii) educational assistants, (iv) ABA coordinators, (v) Registered Behavioural Technicians (RBTs) and (vi) Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBAs). SEAC would also like to express its significant concern with the scope of professional learning and online training outlined in the Minister of Education's announcement.

SEAC believes that additional ASD-specific training is required beyond the ASD Additional Qualification Course to support the implementation and monitoring of the learning. The online training outlined in the Minister's announcement should be made available to all school board staff including educational assistants, early childhood educators, teachers, and administrators.

SEAC supports the recommendations made to you by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) in its letter dated February 26, 2019. SEAC believes further dialogue is required between the government, families, school boards, SEACs, OPSBA, and service providers to find a solution that can meet the government's goals while providing adequate care and support for students. Ultimately, we share a similar goal of ensuring that Ontario's publicly funded education system is sustainable and meets the needs of all students.

Thank you in advance for hearing our feedback around the newly proposed changes. We hope this is the start of a continual collaborative relationship.

Sincerely,



Rob Kirwan
Chair of Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

cc: Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of Education OCDSB
Lynn Scott, Chair OCDSB
Chairs of Ontario Special Education Advisory Committee
Members of the Provincial Parliament for Carleton, Kanata-Carleton, Orléans, Ottawa Centre, Ottawa South, Ottawa-Vanier, Ottawa West-Nepean, Nepean