



**DURHAM CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**
Learning and Living in Faith



Wednesday March 6, 2019

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

I am writing today, on behalf of the Durham Catholic District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee, to express our concern about the recent changes to the provincial funding model for Autism services and the impact that it will have on children, families and school boards.

We know that parents of children with special needs, regardless of the diagnosis, require significant support from both the government and the school system in order for their children to have meaningful access to education. Parents in our school communities have shared the devastating impact the changes to financial support are having on their children. They are also being challenged by the level of uncertainty that this new plan leaves families facing due to the lack of opportunities for transitional planning.

In keeping with our philosophy of inclusion, staff are prepared to support the children with autism who will be returning to our school system earlier than their parents had intended. However, the lack of clarity around the process is presenting a difficulty to our Student Services department. Educators in the Durham Catholic District School Board are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment to all of our students, but without any clear details this task becomes even more difficult. Almost four weeks have passed since the changes were announced and there has been no contact with the school boards made by the Ministry of Education. The board has no clear understanding of which students will be returning or when, nor has there been any indication from you or the Ministry of Education as to what your promised increased support to school systems will look like. The Durham Catholic District School Board SEAC would like to know when the board will be given, or when the Board will hear about, the funding to support the influx of students into our system on April 1, 2019. Furthermore, what will the funding look like going forward into September 2019? Without this information, staff are unable to develop a plan to support these students who generally require intensive support and comprehensive planning around transitions.

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, regardless of where they are on the Autism Spectrum, require effectively planned transitions. The changes to the Autism Ontario program are the exact opposite of effectively planned transitions. We strongly request that the Ministry of Education informs us immediately as to the funding and transitional support that they are going to provide so that the staff of the Durham Catholic District School Board is able to provide a safe and accepting environment to meet the needs of all of these students.

Sincerely,

Valerie Adamo
Chair of Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

cc: Anne O'Brien, Director of Education DCDSB
John Rinella, Chair DCDSB
Chairs of Ontario Special Education Advisory Committee
Members of Provincial Parliament for Durham Region