



Durham District School Board
400 Taunton Road East
Whitby, Ontario L1R 2K6
Ph: 905-666-5500
1-800-265-3968
TTY: 905-666-6943
Fax: 905-666-6474

www.ddsb.ca

June 3, 2019

Minister Lisa Thompson
Minister of Education
315 Front Street West, 14th Floor
Toronto ON M7A 0B8

Dear Minister Thompson:

Re: Provincial Funding Model for Class Size Averages and Mandatory E-Learning

The Durham District School Board's Special Education Advisory Committee ("SEAC") writes to express its concerns with respect to the provincial funding model for class size averages and mandatory e-learning.

We believe that increasing the class-size average to 28 will have a detrimental impact on our students with special education needs. We know that students build resiliency when they develop meaningful connections with one or more caring adults¹. Class sizes of 30 or more will result in teachers having less time for individualized attention for all students and will inhibit those important connections from being made. As exceptional learners are already at risk due to a variety of social, emotional and academic needs that require individual attention, additional supports and differentiated learning, the ability to make meaningful connections with teachers and school is imperative to ensure their success.

At the secondary level, the increase in class-size average will result in fewer teachers and, therefore, fewer electives for students. Given the requirements for graduation and electives required for some students to enter post-secondary programs, if faced with this choice, it is likely that electives that are currently provided that are not required for post-secondary acceptance will be the ones eliminated (photography, fashion, art, shop, etc.). These reductions could impact access to work experience and trade program opportunities, an area we need more of not less. For our students with special education needs, electives are the classes where many of these students can channel their strengths. Fewer electives will have a negative impact on their sense of well-being and limit meaningful pathway choices.

We also have serious concerns with respect to the proposed change requiring students to take four mandatory e-learning credits. Over and above concerns relating to equitable access to technology and wi-fi across the province, many studies have shown that e-learning is not suitable for many students and, in fact, can result in lower success rates. Students in this age group mature at different rates and many lack the independence, problem-solving skills and resiliency to be successful with e-learning programs. E-learning courses make it difficult, and in some situations, impossible for exceptional

¹ Durham Region Health and Wellness, School Health, Educators, "Mental Health Promotion", <https://www.durham.ca/en/health-and-wellness/educators.aspx>



@DurhamDSB



Facebook.com/DurhamDistrictSchoolBoard



www.youtube.com/DurhamDSB

students to receive the supports that they need to be successful, such as modifications, accommodations, extra teacher support, etc. setting them up for learning difficulties and results that will not accurately reflect their capabilities. For our students with IEPs, there is a legal obligation to ensure the supports set out in that document are provided, something that mandatory e-learning may not be able to provide.

In light of the above, the Durham District School Board's Special Education Advisory Committee requests the Ministry consider the following suggestions:

1. Provide e-learning opportunities to students across the Province as an option, but not make it mandatory for all students.
2. Encourage professional learning for staff, and e-learning exposure for students in Learning Strategies courses to allow for specific opportunities to explore the D2L platform and gain direct experiences with digital learning with the support of their SERT. This will allow students to self-assess their confidence and suitability to this learning delivery method.
3. Allow students all access to all pathways (community living, workplace, college, university) online, should they wish, including during alternative school times, to encourage students to explore other opportunities (e.g. summer courses).
4. Slow down changes to class size and establish clear guidelines to measure and monitor impact on students, particularly those with special needs.
5. Provide further transparency about students' pathways and monitor how changes are impacting pathways, including students earning a Certificate of Achievement and Certificate of Accomplishment.

Should the Ministry proceed with the proposed changes, we have the following questions:

1. Learning for All, K-12, a report that is "based on one of the most important findings of educational research since 2000", states "that all students learn best when instruction, resources, and the learning environment are well suited to their particular strengths, interests, needs, and stage of readiness", and further indicates that "personalization, precision and professional learning" are what is most needed for students to learn best. How do the current proposals support personalization, precision or professional learning?²
2. Learning for All, K-12, further explains that tiered intervention,

"approaches help improve student achievement because they rely on greater personalization and precision in instruction. Their success depends on educators' clear understanding of their students' strengths and needs, the types of learners they are, their readiness to learn in a given subject at a given time, and the kinds of learning tasks that are likely to engage their interest and stimulate their thinking".³

² "Learning for All, K-12" A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, page 8.

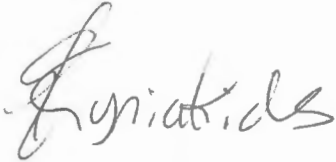
³ "Learning for All, K-12" A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, page 13.



How would compulsory e-learning or larger classes help teachers gain a better understanding of students' strengths and needs, the type of learners they are or their readiness in that subject?

Durham District School Board's Special Education Advisory Committee strongly encourages the Ministry to reconsider the proposed changes and consider the impacts they will have on overall student achievement, but in particular, the achievement of students with special education needs.

Sincerely,



Eva Kyriakides
Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee
Durham District School Board

cc: Chairs, Special Education Advisory Committees
Lisa Millar, Director of Education, DDSB
Andrea McAuley, Superintendent of Education, Inclusive Student Services



@DurhamDSB



Facebook.com/DurhamDistrictSchoolBoard



www.youtube.com/DurhamDSB