



Tuesday April 9, 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 class size averages and mandatory e-learning courses.

We are very concerned about the impact these changes are going to have on students with special education needs and our students who are at-risk for a variety of social, emotional and academic reasons. These most recent changes will have a detrimental impact on their education. The proposed class-size average of 28 is not in the best interest of any student, especially students for whom individual attention, additional support, and a differentiated program is essential for their success. Relationships with teachers are critical for this group of students. The research is very clear; children and youth develop resiliency when they have strong connections with one or more caring adults. Students who are not connected at school and are struggling as a result are not likely to develop the connections with teachers when they are in classes of 30 or more.

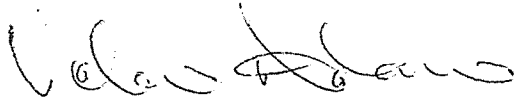
Students with special education needs or students who are at risk require significant support to have meaningful and equitable access to education. This drastic increase in the class-size averages is the opposite of such support. When secondary schools begin timetabling to meet your proposed class average, fewer teachers will mean a reduction in course options or sections. The negative impact will be multifaceted.

- Fewer courses mean fewer teachers to support our students in terms of their well-being.
- Fewer courses mean fewer electives; electives are often the glue that keep students connected to school.
- Fewer courses means specialized classes that support students with learning needs (e.g., Learning Strategies (GLEs)) will disappear because they typically have lower enrolment.
- Fewer courses means that students' options will be limited which will in turn limit the pathway choices of our students.

The proposed change requiring all students to take four mandatory e-learning credits is equally as concerning for this particular group of students. Besides the obvious issue of inequitable access to technology and Wi-Fi across the province, e-learning will simply not benefit all students. Individual learning styles are varied and not all students have the independence, problem-solving skills or resiliency to be successful in e-learning platforms. This includes, but is not limited to students with special education needs or students who are already at-risk for learning difficulties. Four mandatory courses will further erode choice from students who need to have the opportunity for as much choice as possible.

We strongly encourage you to reconsider the proposed changes to secondary education. We ask that you consider the impact that these changes are going to have on all students, but especially those with special education needs and/or students at-risk because of social, emotional and academic concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Valerie Adamo', written in a cursive style.

Valerie Adamo
Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee
Durham Catholic District School Board

cc: Chairs, District School Board Special Education Committees