



DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD ONTARIO NORTH EAST

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May 22, 2019

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

via email: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Thompson:

I am writing today, on behalf of District School Board Ontario North East 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.

The government and the school system, is relied upon by parents of children with special needs, regardless of the diagnosis, in order for their children to have meaningful access to education. We have been contacted by parents in our communities who fear the changes that have been made to the levels of financial support will have a devastating impact on the futures of not only their children, but other school children as well. Our community schools, already feel the pressures of often being the only hope for some parents and families, as the widening gap in the amount of available support from community agencies in North East Ontario, continues to be an obstacle for them. Our region is given 48 intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) spaces (through HANDS) for children from an area that ranges from Muskoka to the James Bay coast. Many agencies have indicated to us that the level of service that families will be able to receive will be diminished as they will have to choose what kind of service they will have to purchase with their reduced dollars. This could mean having to pick from some IBI service or respite care or groceries. Having to make these kinds of choices will no doubt put more pressure on our resources.

Another issue that requires remedy is how the waitlist for service works in Northeast Ontario. For example, if a student on the service waitlist lives in Smooth Rock Falls, service providers must attempt to meet the needs of that student in their home community. This student cannot be "leapfrogged" until every attempt is made to meet the needs of the student. The difficulty in getting service in our small, rural towns means that delays in service are inevitable and cause backlogs to be longer than necessary.

We are proud of the level and quality of programming we currently offer our students with autism, but we know we cannot provide the same level of specialization that an IBI program would offer. We have seen, time and time again, the benefits of such interventions for students who have qualified for this important skill building programming.

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On behalf of our many families and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, we request that the Ministry of Education review their funding decision to reduce full funding for this important, life changing programming that these students deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Brush".

Bob Brush
Chair of DSB Ontario North East

Phone: 705-288-4974

Email: bob.brush@dsb1.ca

Copy: Lesleigh Dye, Director of Education DSB Ontario North East
Christine Heavens, Chair, DSB Ontario North East Special Education Advisory Committee
Chairs of Ontario Special Education Advisory Committee
Members of Provincial Parliament for Northeastern Ontario