

May 20, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
438 University Avenue, 5th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

RE: Ontario PICs Concerns with MOE Proposed Centralization/Privatization of E-Learning/Remote Learning

Dear Minister Lecce,

We write to you as concerned Chairs/Co-Chairs of the Parent Involvement Committees (PICs) across the 76 public school boards in Ontario. The purpose of our PICs is to support, encourage and enhance parent engagement at the school board level to improve student achievement and well-being of the over 2 million students in approximately 5,000 publicly funded schools across Ontario.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

It has come to our attention that the Ministry of Education (MOE) is proposing changes which include making remote learning a full-time, permanent option for all grades in our education system by September 2021. This proposal includes allowing the province to centralize control of online learning under the auspices of TVOntario/Télévision française de l'Ontario (TVO/TFO) and removing control from school boards that currently have collaborative consortia to deliver online courses; make changes to the roles and responsibilities of school boards and school authorities, including requiring them to pay a per student, per course fee to TVO/TFO for access to online courses; and set up TVO/TFO as an income generating entity, marketing online courses and resources to other provinces and other countries. Although the full proposal was shared with educational organizations on an embargoed basis, many of the details have been published in a variety of media outlets, such as the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail. The MOE proposal is the topic of considerable discussion and concern among education stakeholders including school boards, supporters of public education, parents/guardians, students, and education workers. **The MOE approach with this proposal lacks transparency.**

CONCERNS WITH E-LEARNING/ONLINE/REMOTE LEARNING PROPOSAL

We add our voice to the concerns with the proposal by the Ministry of Education regarding online and remote learning that also includes an expanded mandate of TVO/TFO, which has been raised by education sector stakeholders including the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA), the Ontario Student Trustees' Association, and the Federations which represent Teachers and Education Workers. We are extremely concerned with the content of this MOE proposal and potential new legislation changing the Education Act, especially since this comes at a time when our province continues to struggle with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and plans for the return to school this September are uncertain.

While remote learning over the past year may have been a positive experience for some students, education stakeholders including OPSBA have seen marked increases in mental health concerns and feelings of isolation among students. We are also concerned that the current proposal may be promoting the online learning option to the detriment of student well-being and undermining the integrity of our education system.

We echo the concerns of OPSBA regarding the accelerated timelines and lack of data, investigation and understanding of the short and long-term ramifications of this MOE proposal. We do not support e-Learning/online learning becoming provincially centralized or outsourced to an external agency that risks privatization with competing/conflicting priorities and agendas. **We are concerned that this approach may open the door to further privatization, increasing commercially packaged programs for credits that do not have the necessary pedagogical rigor and alignment to the Ontario curriculum and Growing Success practices.**

QUESTIONS

- i. Why is this proposed change being rushed through with such lack of transparency?
- ii. How does the province plan to address the possibility that this MOE plan will exacerbate the disproportionate negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students from vulnerable and racialized communities?
- iii. How will students develop necessary social-emotional, collaborative, critical thinking, and creativity skills, through content delivery models that have little interaction with other students and teachers?
- iv. Would new funding models be created to ensure boards have the resources they need to provide things like support for Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing including the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), and essential mental health and guidance supports?
- v. How will the Ministry of Education and TVO/TFO's volunteer board ensure that TVO/TFO has the capacity to effectively manage this major change in such a short period of time?
- vi. How is the province intending to govern TVO/TFO to ensure that high-quality pedagogy and assessment practices will be present in their course delivery model?
- vii. How would the proposed newly created TVO/TFO Learning Centre ensure that students are getting the supports they need?
- viii. Does TVO/TFO currently have the experience or capacity to generate revenue by marketing online courses and resources to other provinces and countries?
- ix. TVO/TFO is an arms' length agency, and a charity, governed by a volunteer, unelected board.
 - Who will the organization be accountable to?
 - Who will set standards for the organization's delivery of equitable and high standard quality education?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Ministry of Education **delay the proposed implementation of e-learning/remote learning** and conduct a transparent and collaborative consultation and engagement with education stakeholders including school board trustees, educators, board staff, parents, and students to ensure a data informed understanding of the pandemic's impacts on student learning, mental health and well-being, so that a vision/proposal for e-learning/remote learning would be equitably supported by provincial funding and appropriately delivered.
2. That the Ministry of Education **convene a working table** which includes school board consortia, school board representatives, parents/guardians and online learning experts, along with TVO staff, to co-create a vision that is mutually beneficial and does not undermine school board and consortium leadership or eliminate the positive online learning approaches that have been effective for student engagement and success.
3. That the terminology being used to describe various **delivery models of virtual learning be clearly defined** (e.g. online learning, e-Learning, remote learning, digital learning, independent

learning) to allow for an informed discussion and lead to a distinction between the roles and responsibilities of school boards and that of TVO/TFO.

We look forward to a dialogue and will continue to be here to advocate in the best interest of all our children through the active participation of parents in supporting improved student achievement and well-being at the school level and at the board level in each of our respective school boards.

Sincerely,

The undersigned Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) Chairs/Co-Chairs

Alain Bellefeuille
UCDSB PIC

Hirosh Abeywardane
YRDSB PEAC

Lee-Anne Kerr
HPEDSB PIC

Alison Marshall
RCDSB PIC

Holly Sabara
WCDSB CPIC

Linda Gregorio
WCDSB CPIC

Amanda Fehrman
HWDSB PIC

Ingrid Lambie
YRDSB PEAC

Lindsay Stewart
PSSBP PIC

Brian Conley
DSBONE PIC

Jennifer Ball
PVNCCDSB PIC

Lisa Mooney
DSBN PIC

Christalla Kouroushis
NDCSB PIC

Jennifer Cox
Avon Maitland DSB PIC

Mandi Bond
WRDSB PIC

Crystal Bevens-Leblanc
Limestone DSB PIC

Joe Fiorante
TCDSB PIC

Melissa Bevan
DCDSB CPIC

D. Williams
TDSB PIAC

Julie Marshall
CDSBEO PIC

Mellisa Gallagher
RRDSB PIC

Darryl P. Nohara
NCDSB PIC

Kathleen Holmstrom
KCDSB CPIC

Melissa Robertson
WCDSB PIC

Danielle Magvas
KPRDSB PIC

Kelly Schultz
HPCDSB CPIC

Monique Dufresne
RRDSB PIC

Erin James
KPDSB PIC

Kelly Verdecchia
HSDSB PIC

Mostafizur Khan
OCDSB PIC

Felicia Seto-Lau
TDSB PIAC

Krista Tomini
SMCDSB PIC

Nancy Kreiner
SMCDSB CPIC

Gerry Bergin
HCDSB CPIC

Kristen Siapas
GECDSB PIC

Romana Siddiqui
PDSB PIC

Heather McAuley
WECDSD PIC

Laurie Murray
NPSCDSB PIC

Shayla Bradley
Limestone DSB PIC

Sarah Nichol
GEDSB PIC

Shazia Hassan
PDSB PIC

Valerie Estridge
DDSB PIC

Sarah Thomson
TVDSB PIC

Tiffany Sherwood
DDSB PIC

Zena Al-Mudaris
HDSB PIC

Scott Bell
HPCDSB CPIC

Tracey Machan
LKDSB PIC

Shaun Peirce
Lakehead DSB PIC

Tressa Brown
SCCDSB PIC

cc: Nancy Naylor - Deputy Minister
Chris Rastrick - Chief of Staff, Minister Lecce's Office
Marit Stiles - MPP Davenport | Critic, Education | Member, Standing Committee on Government Agencies