

Ministry of Education

Minister

Mowat Block
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre

Édifice Mowat
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2



March 26, 2018

Dear colleagues,

I would like to start by thanking you for the warm welcome I've received as the new Minister of Education. Since being appointed in January, I have had the opportunity to visit many of your schools and have enjoyed speaking with students, parents, staff, leaders and trustees.

On those visits, I have seen first-hand the impact that strong and healthy governance can have on student achievement, equity, well-being and public confidence. To continue to build a strong publicly funded education system, our government understands that it is essential to support school board governance.

In fall 2017, the ministry engaged with education partners on five governance topics and received a total of 119 responses from trustee and student trustee associations, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, teacher federations and unions, principal and supervisory officer associations, school board advisory committees and staff, a First Nation education department, student senates/councils, accountability officers, the Ontario College of Teachers, and individuals with governance expertise.

I was delighted to see the high level of engagement from our education partners, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your commitment to building strong, accountable and transparent governance in our school boards. Ministry staff carefully reviewed each submission to ensure that your views and concerns were considered.

In response to the feedback we received, I am pleased to share our next steps with you on the five topics of engagement.

Trustee Codes of Conduct and Integrity Commissioners

The ministry heard that a code of conduct for trustees is one of the key elements of a local accountability and transparency framework, and that, if used effectively, a code of conduct can serve to encourage respect for divergent views and help boards focus their efforts on student achievement, equity, well-being and public confidence.

The ministry also heard that school boards should continue to be given the choice of appointing an integrity commissioner where the need arises. Education partners indicated that trustees would benefit from having access to an ethics expert who would provide advice and education to trustees on their ethical obligations.

In response to the feedback received, in late 2018 the ministry will establish a working group with the trustee associations to develop minimum standards for trustee codes of conduct. The ministry will also work with you to provide school boards with voluntary access to integrity commissioners, should they choose this path.

In the meantime, a new regulation is being proposed that would, if approved, require all school boards to have a publicly available code of conduct for trustees and to review their code on a regular basis - typically following each trustee election cycle.

The ministry will also continue to work with our partners to develop and/or refresh resources, including *Good Governance: A Guide for Trustees, School Boards, Directors of Education and Communities* (2014), to support school boards in their efforts to strengthen board accountability and transparency.

Trustee Honoraria

Education partners raised a number of issues related to the current formula for calculating trustee honoraria, and student trustee honoraria. Due to the complexity of these issues, we heard that there is a need for further collaboration to understand the diversity of perspectives and identify acceptable options for moving forward. As such, in late 2018, the ministry will be establishing a working group with the trustee associations and student trustee associations to review the honoraria formula for trustees and student trustees in district school boards, as well as trustees in isolate school boards.

In the interim, changes to the regulation regarding honoraria are being proposed that would, if approved, increase the base amount for trustees in district school boards by \$400, from the current annual rate of \$5,900 to the new rate of \$6,300, effective December 1, 2018. The full \$400 increase would be provided in the Trustees Allocation within the Grant for Student Needs (GSN). The proposed changes to trustee honoraria are also outlined in the March 26, 2018, 2018: B06. We know that there is still more work to do and we look forward to working with you and your associations to establish the working group and its terms of reference.

Student Trustee Term of Office and Election Process

The ministry consistently heard from student trustees, students and student councils that student trustees experience a steep learning curve, and could benefit from more time to become familiar with the requirements of the role, accomplish their goals, and build relationships.

Proposed changes to regulation would, if approved, provide student trustees with more time and greater support, prior to and while in the role, by:

1. Requiring all school boards to have at least two student trustees to encourage collaboration and shared ownership of responsibilities;
2. Providing school boards with the option of a two-year, staggered term of office or a one-year term of office;
3. Moving the student trustee election date to the end of February for boards that maintain a one-year term of office to enable greater time and opportunity for orientation and mentoring of incoming student trustees.

These changes would take effect for the 2019-20 school year.

Moving forward, the ministry will explore opportunities for greater consistency in the student trustee election process, promoting awareness of the position and increasing student voice in decision-making, in collaboration with our partners. This includes examining possible legislative changes that would allow student trustees to move board motions.

Electronic Meeting Participation

Education partners generally expressed a preference for in-person participation by the chair, while acknowledging that electronic participation should be permitted in extenuating circumstances. Some partners also raised that the current in-person requirement for board and committee chairs dissuades some trustees from running for the chair position, especially in geographically large boards.

To bring greater equity of access to the role of chair, amendments to the electronic meetings regulation are being proposed that would, if approved, permit boards to include in policy the ability for board and committee chairs to preside over meetings electronically in certain circumstances (i.e., the distance from the chair's current residence to the meeting location is 200 kilometres or more; weather conditions do not allow the chair to travel to the meeting location safely; or the chair cannot be physically present at a meeting due to health-related issues). School boards would be required to establish processes to ensure the security and confidentiality of proceedings discussed in closed meetings. No more than half of board meetings in a 12-month period could be chaired electronically, and the current requirement for at least one trustee and the director of education to be physically present would be maintained.

Director of Education Qualifications

Education partners consistently expressed a preference for maintaining the existing framework for the recruitment, retention and development of directors of education. Education partners also expressed interest in working collaboratively with the ministry to develop and refresh policy and program supports.

In response to the feedback received, the ministry will work with its partners to develop and refresh policy and program supports, while enhancing the accessibility of related information to foster high levels of public confidence.

Moving Forward

The academic success and well-being of students in schools across the province relies on the focused and collaborative efforts of school boards, educators, school and system leaders, parents and guardians, and other education partners. Working in partnership toward the goals of achieving excellence, ensuring equity and promoting well-being, we can continue to foster high levels of public confidence in our education system.

Thank you, once again, for taking the time to participate in the governance engagement. I look forward to continuing our work together.

Sincerely,



Indira Naidoo-Harris
Minister of Education
Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care

c. Bruce Rodrigues, Deputy Minister of Education

Trustee Associations