



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
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Cathy Abraham
President

W.R. (Rusty) Hick
Executive Director

September 23, 2022

To: The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Dear Ministers,

I would like to applaud your government's acknowledgment of the need to address the current housing challenges facing our province, which are likely to continue for several years to come. There is no doubt that our province will need to continue building more housing in order to meet the needs of a growing population. As I'm sure you'll agree, in order to maintain the quality of our education system and the liveability of our communities, an increase in housing must be accompanied by a corresponding increase in school infrastructure.

Ontario's school boards strive to be effective partners in supporting growth and changes in our communities. Our member boards spend considerable time and effort developing their Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy in a manner that balances student enrolment and equitable access to programming. They also take into consideration the use of schools by local child care partners and community groups. In many areas, schools remain community hubs and need to be supported for their widespread and after school usage.

As we approach a period of nearly unprecedented growth in our province, it is important for capital projects (new builds, additions, and retrofits) to be announced regularly and predictably, and they need to reflect the local needs of the school board. In recent years, delays between approvals and the flowing of funding have led to increased costs for goods and services. This was particularly seen during the pandemic and now continues during this inflationary era. These costs are typically absorbed by the board. Accordingly, it is extremely important that attention be given to improving the Approval to Proceed process. These improvements would be greatly appreciated and allow boards to keep students in their home school environments longer.

With the government's plan to build 1.2 million homes over the next 10 years, it is clear that many new schools will also need to be built. The type of new home (single or multi unit) and location (urban, rural, northern) will also be a factor. Several school boards have experience working with developers and the building sector to create innovative partnerships, such as a 2010 project that saw a rebuilt North Toronto Collegiate sharing space within a new condo building, and the recently announced elementary school to be built inside of a condo building along the Toronto waterfront – a first at the elementary level for Ontario.

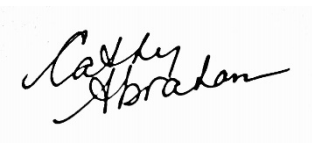
OPSBA and our member boards will continue to seek ways to support the growth of our communities by working constructively with the government and industry partners, and we would of course appreciate your perspective on additional ways we may do so.

In order for school boards to optimize our efforts in this regard, OPSBA has a series of recommendations. The Government of Ontario should:

- Continue to provide funding for capital maintenance for heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, as well as structural, mechanical and electrical repairs;
- Continue to release Capital Priority project funding on a regular planning cycle;
- Provide greater transparency on the decision-making process when capital projects are approved or denied;
- Increase capital funding benchmarks to reflect inflation and the increased cost of construction (related to supply chain/material shortages/labour shortages);
- Amend the Education Development Charge (EDC) regulation to allow for flexibility for non-eligible boards to collect EDCs and increase the EDC rates to accurately match actual land purchase costs;
- Lift the moratorium on school closures and release the revised Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines (PARG); and
- Review and amend Ontario Regulation 193/10: Restricted Purpose Revenues, to allow school boards more flexibility in how they use monies received from selling surplus board properties.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss this matter with you both in the near future. We would welcome any opportunity to work with you and your ministry staff to reduce red tape and break down the barriers to building more schools in our communities in an efficient and cost-effective manner. We will be in touch with your staff in the near future to request an in-person meeting to discuss this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cathy Abraham
President

CC:

Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education

Kate Manson-Smith, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Dasha Androusenkov, Deputy Director, Stakeholder Relations, Ministry of Education

Kai Nademi, Director, Strategy & Stakeholder Relations, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing