



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
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Cathy Abraham
President

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Executive Director

February 26, 2019

Minister Lisa Thompson
Minister of Education

Minister Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services

Dear Ministers Thompson and MacLeod:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) to express our concerns about the planned changes to the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) and the potential impact of those changes on the supports that school boards will be able to provide for autistic students.

This was a major discussion topic at our recent February Board of Director's meeting. Our members have questions as to the impact of the OAP reforms at the local school level. They have questions about how many students will now require additional supports in school who were previously off-site and receiving intensive therapy. There is concern regarding the impact of this transitional change for these children from a clinical service model to an integrated school setting, which does not provide this type of specialized service. For students, this type of change can be unsettling. Having sufficient numbers of qualified school staff to ensure safety and support for students is essential.

Special education continues to be an area in which boards request more supports and resources given the complexities of student needs. Year after year, most school boards exceed their Ministry allocated special education budget in an effort to try to provide the best possible learning experiences for students, regardless of exceptionality. We continue to advocate for sufficient funding to meet the needs of all of our students.

With the impending April 1 changes to the funding model, ensuring a shared understanding and clear expectations on the part of parents and school personnel will lead to better planning and outcomes for children and their families.

We recognize the shared commitment of the government to work toward supports for these students that are equitable and adequate and look forward to additional information for planning purposes, recognizing that in many cases this will be at the local school or Board level.

OPSBA extends the offer to collaborate with the government in an effort to ensure smooth transitions for all students in our care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Cathy Abraham
President