

March 24, 2023

The Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor, 438 University Avenue  
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5  
minister.edu@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Lecce,

**Need for Greater Provincial Investment in our Schools**

At the direction of the Board of Trustees for the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB), I would like to take this opportunity to ensure that you and other elected members of government are aware of the seriousness of our accommodation and over capacity concerns. This is a rapidly escalating issue that is frequently being expressed by our school communities and fellow Board members.

As Ministry of Education staff are aware, the SCDSB has been experiencing record growth for some time now which is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. By fall 2023 elementary utilization will exceed 113 percent and secondary utilization will exceed 103 percent. This translates into approximately 6,000 students over the built capacity of our board by this time next year. By 2028, staff are projecting total utilization to be at 124 percent, or approximately 12,500 students over capacity. These estimates take into consideration our approved capital projects currently in the design and/or approval to proceed process.

For added context, on February 22, 2023, the Board approved our annual accommodation plan. In this plan, 15 growth related projects (new schools and additions) were identified that are justifiable today, along with two further renewal related projects. I would like to stress that these are projected needs to address our immediate pressures and do not even account for the expected residential growth which will continue to generate significant numbers of students annually. While the board appreciates the province's initiatives to reduce costs and processes to assist with the development of housing (Bill 108, *More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019*, Bill 109, *More Homes for Everyone Act, 2022*, Bill 23, *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022* and Minister's Zoning Order's), this will only further exacerbate the issue unless mechanisms are put in place for school boards to respond accordingly in a timely and logical manner.

As a result of the noted growth in Simcoe County, the board is now at a point where the various strategies and contingencies that have been used to deal with this critical shortage of accommodation are showing signs of failure. The board has undertaken attendance area changes, program relocations, restricted out-of-area attendance, utilizes a fleet of more than 360 portables and has even temporarily located classes on stages, in libraries and in gymnasiums to respond to these pressures. Even with these actions, the SCDSB has numerous schools that have now reached their physical, servicing, and municipal approval limits for the number of portables they can accommodate. The schools that are handling the overflow

(sometimes in other communities entirely) are also now beginning to reach their accommodation and portable limits as well. In some communities, the board has had to resort to developing contingency plans that could involve temporarily moving specified grade cohorts of classes to other schools that have capacity for additional portables. This is not a sustainable situation.

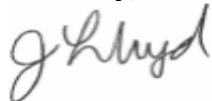
Significant investment, streamlined Ministry of Education processes, and a reduction in municipal barriers to school development and portable approvals is urgently needed. Even if numerous capital approvals were approved today, it would be several years until these projects would be able to serve our most overburdened communities.

Currently, school boards have very little autonomy or power to address accommodation issues at the provincial (funding) or local (approvals) level. Our communities continue to grow, our capacity cannot keep pace, and staff have diminishing resources and very little approval authority to make up for the shortfall. One of the only remaining tools available to the SCDSB is, as a commenting agency, to object to new housing development applications in communities where accommodation pressures are critical.

The Board acknowledges the provinces competing priorities and challenges in the current fiscal climate as well as its recent endeavors in reducing barriers to capital project development. This, however, does not change the fact that the SCDSB, and other growth school boards, are facing extraordinary pressures where immediate solutions are required. The SCDSB respectfully requests greater and timely investment in our schools along with the necessary tools and reductions in barriers to allow staff to effectively accommodate students temporarily as needed.

As always, the Board and SCDSB staff, are willing to work with the Ministry of Education to find timely solutions to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Jodi Lloyd  
Chairperson  
Simcoe County District School Board

c: Hon. Doug Downey, MPP, Barrie, Springwater, Oro-Medonte  
Hon. Jill Dunlop, MPP, Simcoe North  
Andrea Khanjin, MPP, Barrie, Innisfil  
Brian Saunderson, MPP, Simcoe-Grey  
Hon. Caroline Mulroney, MPP, York-Simcoe  
Ontario Public School Boards' Association  
School Board Chairs  
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Board of Trustees, SCDSB  
John Dance, Director of Education, SCDSB  
Dawn Stephens, Associate Director, SCDSB  
Corry Van Nispen, Superintendent of Business and Facilities, SCDSB