



## Official Opposition · l'Opposition officielle

Ontario NDP Caucus • Groupe parlementaire du NPD de l'Ontario

Hon. Stephen Lecce  
Ministry of Education  
5th Floor  
438 University Ave.  
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

**August 19, 2020**

Dear Minister Lecce,

We are writing to insist that your government adopts a comprehensive COVID-19 plan for students with disabilities, ensuring that they have the tools they need to thrive during this pandemic.

On July 8, you stated in the legislature that you've been in touch with disability rights leaders, but there is still no plan to support the learning requirements of 340,000 students with special education needs.

Firstly, we are concerned about the lack of any uniform guidance on the issue of school exclusions. The AODA Alliance has reported that a majority of Ontario's 72 school boards do not even have a policy guiding the use of exclusions.

This could set the stage for exclusions to be applied by administrators when schools lack the resources to accommodate students with disabilities.

Your Ministry should issue guidelines to school boards on the use of exclusions without delay, so that no student with a disability is unfairly denied the right to learn with their peers.

Another area where some students with disabilities have been denied equal learning opportunities relates to the discrepancies in how online learning has been implemented. Depending on the school board, different platforms with wildly varying levels of accessibility are being used. It is important for the Ministry to be supporting boards to ensure their online learning systems are equitable and accessible to all students.

Finally, your government has committed only \$10 million in additional funding for students with special education needs to date. This amounts to a paltry investment of \$34 per disabled student. How could anyone believe that is sufficient to meet the challenges before us? Significant investment in hiring additional educational assistants

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and reducing class sizes is crucial to ensuring that all students' learning needs are supported.

Minister, people with disabilities have been among those hit the hardest by this pandemic. This includes education, where many students with special education needs have struggled with the transition to distance learning.

In order to ensure that students with disabilities can thrive in the classroom or remotely, it is crucial that your Ministry develops a plan in consultation with the disability community, and puts real resources behind it.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Joel Harden  
Official Opposition Critic for Accessibility & People with Disabilities  
MPP for Ottawa Centre

Marit Stiles  
Official Opposition Critic for Education  
MPP for Davenport

Monique Taylor  
Official Opposition Critic for Children & Youth Services  
MPP for Hamilton Mountain