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Hon. Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Flr, 438 University Ave
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VIA Email

June 24, 2019

Honourable Minister,

Congratulations on your recent appointment as Ontario's new Minister of Education.

Ontario's public education system helped make our province the economic engine of Canada, and ensuring that high quality, accessible and equitable education is there for the next generation of Ontarians is one of the government's most sacred responsibilities.

Under the previous government, hundreds of community schools closed, special education funding did not keep pace with student needs and the school repair backlog reached an outrageous \$16 billion. Sadly, Doug Ford's policies have taken a system already under strain and have added substantial new pressures that will impact students in every part of the province.

Rolling back the Health and Physical Education curriculum meant that for this entire school year, students learned from an outdated 1998 curriculum that does not prepare them for today's world or reflect the diversity of our province. Following a lengthy and costly consultation, a new curriculum was promised by the end of May – yet Ontarians are still waiting.

Cancelling the Indigenous curriculum writing sessions was one of your government's first acts upon taking office. When a new curriculum was finally announced in May, Indigenous experts and community leaders were taken by surprise. This, coupled with cuts to the Indigenous Culture Fund and the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, calls into question the government's commitment to real reconciliation.

The decision to increase class size averages beginning in Grade 4 will worsen crowding and leave students with less one on one support, while tens of thousands of teaching positions and education worker jobs will be gone for good.

Funding cuts in the Grants for Student Needs along with Budget 2019's below-inflation increase and the class average increases mean that school boards have been left scrambling to adjust their budgets and forced to cut positions and axe course offerings.

For students, that means fewer course options, and fewer pathways to post-secondary education and the skilled trades. Classes in the arts, music and literature are being scrapped; advanced placement courses, and even courses in STEM – contrary to the government's own stated commitment to enhancing those areas of study.

Moving to make four high school credits online-only, and making them mandatory for all high-school students has also raised concerns about graduation rates, equity issues related to technology and creeping privatization. Thus far, the ministry has provided scant details on a plan that is meant to roll out as early as next year.

Your government's drastic changes have resulted in surplus notices and layoffs for teachers and education workers, and so many course cancellations that students have had to re-do their timetable for the next school year, with many facing summer school or even delayed graduations as a result of the cuts.

As Official Opposition Education critic, I have worked alongside Andrea Horwath and the NDP caucus to draw attention to the very real impacts these cuts are having and to bring the voices of students, families, teachers, education workers and experts into the debate, including those of:

- The over 40,000 students who walked out in September in protest of the repeal of the 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum and the cancellation of the Indigenous curriculum writing sessions;
- The 100,000 students who staged another historic walk-out to protest cuts and class-size increases in April;
- 30,000 education workers, parents, students and community members who rallied on the lawn of Queen's Park to oppose your government's cuts and changes to class-sizes; and
- Countless more Ontarians who have written letters, made calls, collected petitions and organized parent groups to defend public education.

Minister Lecce, in this new role you have an opportunity to chart a new course for public education – one that invests in our children's future instead of asking them to settle for less.

I urge you to work with parents, students, teachers, trustees, education workers, and those of us in the Opposition to strengthen local schools and keep caring adults in them.

By standing up to Doug Ford's agenda of cuts, you can stand with the rest of Ontario – those who believe that a strong, publicly-funded education system is not only a right, but also a social and economic good.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet in person to discuss these issues, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Marit Stiles
MPP for Davenport
Official Opposition Critic for Education