

September 15, 2020

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON
M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees for the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB), I would like to take this opportunity to bring forward concerns expressed by our school communities and my fellow Board of Trustees.

While the SCDSB is appreciative of the recent capital announcements for our jurisdiction, significant accommodation challenges remain in many of our communities. The ever increasing residential growth has resulted in rapidly increasing school populations. When combined with insufficient capacity, the result is a longstanding issue of over-crowding in many of our public schools. In recent years, this has been exacerbated by delays in the Ministry's capital priorities program, and now further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated physical space needs and challenges that result. Some examples of the accommodation pressures our schools and students are facing include, but are not limited to:

- elementary schools in the community of Angus (Township of Essa) are a combined 414 students over capacity (160% utilized) with 22 portables in use;
- elementary schools in the community of Alcona (Town of Innisfil) are a combined 338 students over capacity (120% utilized) with 21 portables in use;
- elementary schools in the community of Alliston (Town of New Tecumseth) are a combined 350 students over capacity (123% utilized) with 18 portables in use;
- elementary schools serving west Orillia and the surrounding rural areas are a combined 254 students over capacity (129% utilized) with 15 portables in use and further restricted due to septic capacity;
- elementary schools in south Barrie are a combined 287 students over capacity with 23 portables in use. New development in south Barrie is continuing and 4,450 residential occupancies are projected over the next 2-3 years; and,
- significant facility condition pressures exist at Banting Memorial High School in Alliston.

As noted, these examples are not exhaustive, and the continued residential growth and influx of new families into Simcoe County increases our accommodation pressures by the day. We respectfully request that the Ministry continue with capital priorities project funding submissions in a timely fashion, so that growth boards such as the SCDSB can effectively plan for and accommodate our students in safe learning environments.

Another significant concern expressed by community and Board of Trustees is with regards to the criteria on which the Ministry of Education evaluates and approves capital priority business cases. Recent media announcements regarding new schools, including Shanty Bay, have highlighted the influence that both community members and elected officials have played in the decision making process by advocating directly to you. A perception currently exists that approvals are influenced by community and political advocacy more than the actual merits of the proposed projects. The SCDSB strongly supports the notion that criteria and evaluations should be transparent and based upon the relative needs of the school community. We believe this approach results in a stronger degree of trust in the overall process and is more fair and equitable for all of our students and communities.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be pleased to discuss at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Jodi Lloyd
Chairperson
Simcoe County District School Board

c: Doug Downey, MPP, Barrie, Springwater, Oro-Medonte
Jill Dunlop, MPP, Simcoe North
Andrea Khanjin, MPP, Barrie, Innisfil
Jim Wilson, MPP, Simcoe Grey
Hon. Caroline Mulroney, MPP, York-Simcoe
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister of Education
Board of Trustees, SCDSB
Steve Blake, Director of Education, SCDSB
John Dance, Associate Director, SCDSB
Brian Jeffs, Superintendent of Business and Facility Services, SCDSB
All Simcoe County Municipal Clerks