January 24, 2020

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
438 University Avenue
5th Floor
Toronto, ON
M7A 2A5

Dear Minister,

As labour negotiations continue with teacher and support staff unions, Ontario’s public school principals and vice-principals are concerned about the impact the situation is having in our schools and on our students. The parties need to get back to the table to continue negotiating. While both sides have signaled a willingness to return, no talks have been scheduled since December 2019. We urge you to direct the mediator to schedule talks immediately so that agreements can be reached as soon as possible.

As educators, we want to signal our support for some of the issues that are being discussed at the tables.

- As we have said in the past, there is no one number that ensures the perfect class size. Size needs to vary based on age, grade, program, pathway and learning needs of students, as well as the facilities available. We encourage you to allow for both adequate funding and flexibility in class size so that principals can ensure the size and staffing of classes that best serve student learning.

- We support the availability and promotion of e-learning for students on a voluntary basis. While this is one method of instruction, it has proven to be inappropriate for some students, particularly those with special education or other learning needs. Access to reliable internet service is not available in all parts of the province. It would place students who do not have such access at a huge disadvantage if they were unable to complete their course work consistently and effectively.

- Full-day kindergarten should remain in place for the benefit of our youngest learners, with appropriate staffing for our students. The consensus among experts is that early education has the greatest impact on student success.
• Students are most successful when the appropriate number of teachers and support staff are available in our schools. A decrease in staffing levels negatively impacts the learning outcomes for our students and the safety of our schools. At a time when violence in schools is on the rise, a decrease in support is inadvisable.

• A recent memo suggests that the government plans to reduce funding to school boards by more than $200 million over the next four years. Such a significant decrease would have a devastating impact on the system, negatively impacting our world class education system that consistently ranks among the top in the world. This is not good for students and should not proceed.

Finally, we are urging the ministry to stop requesting that schools collect and complete student data and accommodation requests related to the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, Grades 3 and 6 EQAO assessments, PISA, Engaged Math, Specialist High Skills Major initiatives and ONSIS. Our teaching and support staff, as a result of job action, are not participating in data collection activities for these assessments or any EQAO-related activities. Principals and vice-principals cannot complete these tasks in isolation.

It is imperative that the ministry acknowledges that, during the current job action, it is not business as usual in schools. Regular reporting procedures cannot continue in a vacuum without the assistance of all school staff.

Sincerely,

Nancy Brady
President