



Toronto, April 2, 2019

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Suite 281 - Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford:

Re: Proposed changes to the Ontario education system announced by Minister of Education, Lisa Thompson

RTO/ERO is a voluntary organization providing health benefits and other important services primarily to retired education staff in every capacity in our K-12 system and staff in all roles who worked in the post-secondary system. These individuals represent millions of hours of experience working with students in our educational systems.

On behalf of almost 80,000 members of RTO/ERO we want to express our deep concern with the proposed changes to an Ontario education system that is viewed internationally as one of the top performing systems in the world. Our students outperform almost all other countries in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests and Ontario enjoys one of the highest post-secondary completion rates among most OECD nations.

Based upon the extensive experience and commitment of our members to improving the lives of Ontario's children in publically funded education in Ontario and Canada, the changes you are proposing, if implemented, will have a profoundly negative impact on all students and especially on our most fragile ones.

We are strong advocates in ensuring young learners have the very best programs and connections with their educators. To that end we appreciate your government's ongoing support for the educator teams in the full day kindergarten and the primary classes.

However, we are deeply concerned about the proposed changes to Ontario's secondary system as announced by Minister of Education, Lisa Thompson.

Specifically, we are deeply opposed to the proposed funding cuts to the Grants for Student Needs in the following areas:

- special programs;
- average class size from 22 to 28 for secondary classes;
- the requirement that students take at least 1 e-learning course per year.

Each of these actions will negatively impact all students and especially those who are at risk of not graduating. While the Minister suggests that larger classes will result in more "resiliency" in the students, experience does not support that claim. The students who will be most negatively impacted are those who have a lack of support at home; social or physical difficulties or special needs. Most if not all of these students require

additional supports if they are going to succeed academically and in life. There is a fine line between building resilience and creating unsurpassable obstacles and we believe the proposed changes cross that line.

The requirement of four credits to be taken through e-learning prior to graduation will also be a significant challenge for many students. E-learning courses are already a challenge for most high school students to complete since study habits and maturity play such an important role in determining success in these courses. Your own Ministry of Education has the unequivocal data showing that students who require and deserve support in their learning are singularly unsuccessful in coping with and graduating from e-learning courses.

Your proposed actions will undoubtedly increase the number of students who fail their courses. Failing to pass required credits is one of the highest predictors of students failing to graduate. Failing to graduate has massive negative consequences both to the individual and to the province and our country.

Negative education reductions that result in a decrease in the graduation rate can be neither economically sound nor ethically acceptable. It is the opinion of the members of our organization that your proposals will harm Ontario's preeminent global standing in successful student outcomes. We believe in improvement and change that is accomplished through planning and purposeful implementation and authentic consultation with all parties.

We urge you to consult and deliver more balanced proposed changes that do no harm to our Ontario students. We need to improve the population of Ontario by ensuring our students have the very best opportunities possible and that they are not just ready for school but ready for a productive and contributing life in Ontario.

We support well researched, data based and well planned change. What has been announced by your Minister of Education may, in a short-sighted way, seem to save the government precious dollars while negatively impacting the future lives of so many of our students. In the longer term it will cost Ontario in lost productivity, costly remediation, social services as well as mental and physical health costs.

Mr. Premier, we respectfully request a meeting with you, at your earliest convenience, to lend our deep experience and expertise in helping your government find education change strategies that are fiscally sound while remaining focused on Ontario's graduates being among the best in the world.

Sincerely,



Martha Foster
Chair of the Board



Jim Grieve
Executive Director

C.C: Lisa Thompson, Minister of Education, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario
Andrea Horwath, Leader, Official Opposition, New Democratic Party of Ontario
John Fraser, Interim Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario
Mike Schreiner, Leader, Green Party of Ontario