



JESSICA BRENNAN, CHAIR OF THE BOARD

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Kate Gooding, Coordinator, Education Finance Issues  
Education Finance Branch  
Ministry of Education  
Mowat Block, 20th Floor, 900 Bay St  
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Re: School Board Efficiencies and Modernization Consultations

Dear Ms. Gooding,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into developing a School Board Efficiencies and Modernization Strategy to best utilize resources for education in Ontario.

We are pleased to provide you with some input and insights to your specific areas of discussion from the perspective of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB).

**Specific Areas of Consultation:**

***Identifying Efficiencies***

Principles: We agree with the suggested principles and would like to add the principal of:  
Integrated planning and service delivery: changes must promote savings through identifying common approaches across Ministries and sectors.

HWDSB continues to strive to create efficiencies and move forward with modernization to improve student achievement. We look forward to the Ministry working with school boards to find these efficiencies with the greatest positive impact on our student achievement goals.

***Making More Efficient Use of School Space***

HWDSB takes this issue very seriously. We have taken steps to right size our secondary panel and reduce underutilized space. Our Trustees made decisions for reviews that looked at 15 schools in three areas of the district. These decisions will close eight secondary schools, eliminate 4,893 unfunded pupil spaces, remove an estimated \$155 million in deferred maintenance and operating costs and fill remaining schools to 90 per cent of their capacity by 2020. In the elementary panel, it is anticipated that over the next 5-6 years, HWDSB will complete ARCs in all of the elementary review areas to reduce the surplus of approximately 5,000 pupil places.

As leaders in the Province in this area, the Board recognizes the importance of eliminating underutilized space. We also recognize the challenges associated with the ARC process. It is a very time consuming and emotionally charged issue. We started the ARC process in 2011. The first results of this process will not be seen until 2016. The extended time period creates uncertainty for parents, students, staff and the

community, which can have a negative effect on enrolment in the communities being studied. HWDSB looks forward to the results of the revisions of the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline to make the process more effective for boards and the community. Some other uncertainties and delays are created by the fact that some school closures are contingent on HWDSB receiving funding to consolidate schools. We appreciate the Ministry's investment in capital funding to support consolidations and right-sizing of school facilities and expect that this funding will assist HWDSB in moving forward in this process.

HWDSB would also like the Ministry to recognize that right-sizing a system can cause increases in other operating costs. The ARC process has expenses related to it. Consultants are required to assist staff with the process. In order to meet the needs of a diverse community, there are costs associated with the public meetings. There may be loss in GSN funding with temporary declines in enrolment in the studied areas. It is also important to realize that while the end result is expected to be better programming opportunities for our students and operating efficiencies, there will be increases in transportation costs, for example, as more students are eligible for transportation to school.

Closures may also damage relations with the coterminous municipality, particularly in urban areas, as the closures may be seen as the potential loss of green space, historic buildings, and schools as hubs for the community.

### ***Community Partnerships***

HWDSB is a big proponent of community partnerships and the results of our recent elementary ARCs are proof of this commitment. The Board will work with community partners, including the Hamilton Public Library Board and the City of Hamilton to work together to build new facilities that act as community hubs and better serve the needs of community members.

We want to remind the Ministry that community partnerships in existing school facilities require additional costs which are not funded and which are difficult for non-profit partners to contribute to. These include accessibility requirements and leasehold improvements to make the space usable. There are also parking and access issues which sometimes make it difficult to attract community partners in excess space. Additional funds are also required for older facilities that have high maintenance costs, are inefficient in terms of energy use, and require upgrades, to be attractive to any partner.

We agree that child care is a priority in our schools, but feel that Boards are penalized by not being recognized fully for all school space being used by child care organizations. Presently child care and PFLCs spaces are regarded as half full.

Adult and Continuing Education provided by school boards needs to be recognized in terms of any formula for determining excess space in schools. Presently school boards are pushed into taking out expensive leases for these programs rather than using excess spaces in schools.

HWDSB feels that there needs to be a comprehensive financial plan that goes beyond simply selling surplus properties, to enable boards to lease excess space or to share excess space with other community partners, municipalities and other preferred agencies, ministries, and other school boards. These actions should be possible without penalty to the boards, so that surplus space can be removed from boards' inventories. This plan should not necessarily result in decreased grants to school boards but create efficiencies to be shared with other

provincial ministries. Savings could be incurred by other Ministries placing offices and agencies in vacant spaces in schools rather than building new separate facilities where publicly funded space exists.

### ***Accountability***

HWDSB supports increased transparency and accountability to the public it serves and applauds the Ministry for those changes. That said, HWDSB would like to remind the Ministry that those improvements are costly in terms of non-instructional administration time and reporting requirements. A reduction in reporting requirements without sacrificing accountability for LOG and Safe Schools would be welcomed. A reduction in board administration is not consistent with the initiatives currently underway.

### ***Sharing Efficiency Savings***

HWDSB supports the Ministry direction for Transportation Consortiums, including the concept of a separate entity, and wishes to move more quickly to the concept of One Road, One Bus, and One Policy. HWDSB looks forward to a more comprehensive, equitable, effective and efficient model through the Consortium objectives. Boards need to be funded so that all students receive a similar standard of transportation service wherever they live in the province, and regardless of the school system to which they belong.

HWDSB would like to see integrated and aligned strategic directions for children and youth across Ministries and Municipal government. It would be helpful if sectors serving children were better integrated both internally and externally thus creating more effective services. This would reduce the need for school boards to have to compensate for their deficiencies, especially in the area of mental health but also including the need for adequate vision screening and glasses, and nutritious food.

Investing in health services on school sites, including mental health workers and nurse practitioners could reduce costly emergency room visits by youth.

Ministries and sectors often levy charges on school boards for their regular work. Savings could be found if these practices were curtailed. Municipalities particularly often levy charges on school boards as though they are not going to be permanent fixtures in the community, and charge park levies. They may then complain when green space is lost when a school is closed.

Our excess space may be one way to achieve efficiencies. The recommendation of the Declining Enrolment Task Force in this area should be considered with regards to greater opportunities for partnerships. We would like to see more shared facilities and synergies with our municipalities, social agencies and the three other school boards. Again, this could result in the use of the excess space and create savings within other Ministries of the province. We fully support schools as hubs in the communities they serve.

More joint initiatives amongst school boards, or simply the reduction of the number of school boards in the same jurisdiction, would bring substantial cost savings to the Province and hence taxpayer.

### ***Conclusion***

HWDSB thanks the Ministry for the opportunity to comment on the 2015-16 Grant for Student Needs and looks forward to working with the Ministry to continue to find efficiencies with the greatest positive impact on our student achievement goals.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge Trustee Bishop, Chair of our Finance Committee, for orchestrating our responses to your questions and coordinating our input for this letter.

Sincerely,

Jessica Brennan  
Chair of the Board  
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

Cc:

Judith Bishop, Trustee  
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Stacey Zucker, Superintendent of Business and Treasurer, HWDSB  
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Honourable Liz Sandals, Minister of Education

