

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

RE: *Proposed Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) Changes in Ontario*

January 27, 2015

The Ontario Student Trustees' Association - l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères (OSTA-AECO), as the largest student stakeholder in Ontario, representing over 2 million students across the province, is unsettled on the proposed changes to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline. Students were not consulted on changes being made to improve student achievement. The proposed changes directly affect the environments in which students learn, and OSTA-AECO believes that students should be consulted before making these changes.

The proposed changes reduce the role of the community in the Pupil Accommodation Review process by allowing only parent/guardian representatives from the school(s) under review and school board administration to sit on the review committee. Under this proposed change, key members of the school community are now prohibited to serve on the Accommodation Review Committee. This restricts the role of the community in the Pupil Accommodation Review process, undermining a school's impact on their community and vice-versa. Community involvement is vital in any decision regarding the future of any school.

Changes to the Pupil Accommodation Review process also involve a decrease in the time allotment for each review. An expedited process restricts communication between parties involved, reduces opportunities for public input, and rushes the school closure process. Schools are not capital investments to students; they are platforms for achievement, learning hubs, and homes. Elected school board trustees and senior staff frequently do make informed decisions while considering occupancy, financial standing, and future of the school community. However, closing schools affects the lives of students directly and should not be a decision that is made lightly, but rather carefully, collaboratively and deliberately.

Overcrowding classrooms, eliminating bus transportation, and decreasing student-to-teacher ratios are not ways to reduce spending on education. "Student well-being" and "student achievement" are far more than simply words to be used in documents. They are real factors that change the level of student success, and they are not to be sacrificed for budget costs.

The students who will be affected by these proposed changes – the foundation of our education system – were not consulted. Students should be the primary priority for this Ministry, and if they are not included in discussions affecting their future, provincial debt and wasted tax dollars will be the least of our worries.

