

February 6, 2018

The Honourable Indira Naidoo-Harris
Minister of Education
Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Naidoo-Harris:

On behalf of the Peel District School Board, I'd like to welcome you to your new role as Minister of Education. We look forward to working with you to ensure public schools meet the diverse needs of students in our communities. In that vein, I'm writing to request your support, as Education Minister, regarding a significant issue that is negatively impacting our students and their families.

For over a year, many of our school communities have experienced ongoing, significant bus delays, as a direct result of a shortage of qualified school bus drivers in the Greater Toronto Area. There is currently a shortfall of nearly 70 school bus drivers in our region, which means that approximately 150 of our daily bus runs do not have a regular driver and haven't since the early fall. As a result, more than 1,500 students from over 50 schools are faced regularly with bus delays ranging from 20 minutes to over an hour.

Children and their families are waiting at the curbside or school entrances for extended periods of time for a service that they not only deserve, but require in order to get to and from school each day. This is not acceptable. The impact on schools, students and their families has been tremendous and cannot be sustained. As the result of ongoing bus delays:

- **students** are consistently arriving late to school, causing them to miss assessments, assignments and hours of valuable instructional time. Then, at the end of the day, long pickup wait times are taking students away from extracurricular activities they have outside of school.
- **parents/guardians** are missing work to accommodate for the inconsistent or non-existent transportation service. In some cases, families have resorted to alternate methods of transportation to avoid losing their jobs, including paying for cabs out-of-pocket and pulling their child out of class early to drive them home.
- **school administrators and staff** are having to remain at school well beyond their work day to ensure all students are picked up and arrive home safely. This is especially onerous for single-administrator schools. Late arrivals at the start of the day result in disruption to class instruction and activities, causing staff to restructure lesson plans to accommodate for these delays.

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It is our understanding that bus service providers continue to work to hire and train more drivers to fill their vacancies, and Student Transportation of Peel Region (STOPR) is working closely with these companies to adjust and consolidate routes; however, these efforts have not been able to resolve these ongoing delays. We aren't able to turn to other service providers to assist as they are also struggling to maintain a sufficient number of drivers to meet their own contractual requirements or they charge fees that well exceed the board's provincially allocated transportation budget.

We know we are not alone in this challenge. Other GTA transportation consortia have also reported similar bus driver shortages, with no end in sight. The challenges that our bus service providers are facing in retaining and hiring drivers throughout the Greater Toronto Area are great, and are heightened with the recent minimum wage increase.

While we appreciate the recent ministry initiatives to help improve the issue, including a school bus driver retention program and engagement sessions to develop a new vision for student transportation in Ontario, these initiatives will not start to have an effect on bus driver retention until next school year. **We have exhausted our options, and now look to you for support in the short-term by providing much needed funding to help with bus driver recruitment and to assist the board in exploring other transportation options for our students.** While this may not fully resolve the shortage, you will help students, families and staff who are becoming increasingly frustrated and discouraged with the ongoing delays.

On behalf of the Board, I am requesting an opportunity to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss this matter in more detail. Together, I'm hopeful that we can come to a solution that ensures all students arrive safely at school, on time and ready to learn.

Sincerely,



Janet McDougald
Chair, Peel District School Board

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