



SCHOOL BOARDS AND STAKEHOLDERS CALL FOR BROAD PROVINCE-WIDE GOVERNANCE CONSULTATION

Decisions that remove local democracy representation must support students, families, and communities

Toronto, March 11, 2026 – Groups representing all aspects of publicly funded education in Ontario are expressing concerns about recent comments from Education Minister Paul Calandra regarding the potential elimination of elected school board trustees – a system of governance that has been in place longer than Canada has been a country. This change, if implemented, would remove one of the most important ways that families and communities have a say in how their schools are governed. It would also mean that important decisions about education could be made without appropriate public discussion, debate, and awareness.

The groups mentioned here above, are united in calling for the following:

- The government and Minister Calandra should undertake broad consultations with education partners before advancing any legislative reforms to school board governance.
- The consultation should include the voices and perspectives of students and parents – including parents of students with disabilities, school boards, education staff, and subject matter experts, and
- The government should outline a detailed plan with clear goals and benchmarks for the return to local democratic oversight at school boards currently under supervision.

“When decisions are being made about our children and their education, they must be made in public, open to public scrutiny,” said OPSBA President Kathleen Woodcock, also a trustee with the Waterloo Region District School Board. “The people making these decisions should be directly accountable to you, the public.”

The urgency of this issue increases daily, as nominations for municipal council and school board elections are slated to open on May 1, 2026.

Trustees have a key role in Ontario’s four publicly funded education systems. Without elected trustees, decisions about school closures, special education priorities, student supports, and the use or sale of public school land would be made behind closed doors, further away from the communities they affect. For example, in school boards currently under supervision, important decisions are regularly being made by a provincially appointed supervisor, who is accountable only to a minister at Queen's Park, not to local families.



Public education shapes Ontario's economy, communities, and future. Decisions about curriculum priorities, equity policies, mental health supports, and long-term capital planning require democratic oversight.

OPSBA has long stated its willingness to partner with the government in any dialogue or discussion about possible governance changes, and the groups making this statement share this approach. When government and partners in the sector come together to discuss and debate ideas openly and work through challenges collaboratively, we arrive at stronger public policy – and that is exactly the point of a healthy democracy.

Additional Quotes

"Student trustees are students' only direct voice at the school board level and our role as the authentic advocates for the group most affected by school board policies is crucial. Eliminating student trustees would mean eliminating essential democratic voices for students."

Carter Peios, President, OSTA-AECO

"Dismantling local democratic oversight would be one of the most consequential changes to public education in Ontario's history. Removing this accountability puts students at risk, distances families from the decisions that affect their children's learning, and erodes public trust. Educators and families deserve more than unilateral reforms made without evidence, consultation, or respect from the Minister."

David Mastin, President, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

"Eliminating elected school trustees would remove one of the most important ways families and communities have a voice in how their local schools are governed. Decisions about students and schools should not be taken out of the hands of local communities and handed to political insiders and those who would treat education like a business or move toward privatizing and dismantling the public education system. Strong public schools depend on transparency, democratic oversight, and listening to the teachers and education workers who support students every day."

Martha Hradowy, President, OSSTF/FEESO

"Ontario's publicly funded education system depends on transparent governance, meaningful consultation and the voices of the communities schools serve. Principals and vice-principals value local democratic representation in supporting high quality learning environments and student success."

Jeff Maharaj, President, Ontario Principals' Council

« Depuis 25 ans, les conseils scolaires francophones sont au cœur du développement et de la vitalité de nos communautés. Ils permettent une gouvernance par et pour les francophones afin d'offrir une éducation qui reflète les réalités et les besoins de nos élèves et de leurs familles. Nous sommes solidaires avec l'Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) et croyons qu'il faut entreprendre une consultation authentique auprès de toutes les parties



prenantes. Nous réitérons notre appui aux conseils scolaires francophones et demeurons préoccupés par toute proposition qui pourrait affaiblir cette représentation démocratique essentielle. »

Gabrielle Lemieux, Présidente de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens

“For the past 25 years, Francophone school boards have been at the heart of the development and vitality of our communities. They ensure governance by and for Francophones to provide an education that reflects the realities and needs of our students and their families. We stand in solidarity with the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association (OPSBA) and believe that a genuine consultation with all stakeholders must take place. We reaffirm our support for Francophone school boards and remain concerned about any proposal that could weaken this essential democratic representation.”

Gabrielle Lemieux, President, Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens

“Trustees are a vital link parents and students rely on to advocate for their education needs. Important decisions that affect local schools should be made by local communities, not politicians at Queen's Park. These school board takeovers are a distraction designed to hide years of severe underfunding that is having real impacts on Ontario classrooms.”

Chris Cowley, President, Ontario Teachers’ Federation

“Ontario has at least 330,000 K-12 students with disabilities. Too many are chronically vulnerable and underserved. Things have gotten worse for them at supervised school boards. Trustees were their last resort, short of litigation, for battling to get their child’s disability-related needs accommodated. The recently instituted Student and Family Support Offices are no replacement. The TDSB supervisor has raised permissible class sizes in ways that especially hurt students with disabilities. Without democratic accountability via trustees, school boards risk becoming more bureaucratic for parents and their children with disabilities.”

David Lepofsky, Chair, AODA Alliance, and Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee of the Toronto District School Board

“I personally experienced the negative impacts of government actions biased under the guise of knowing what is best for us as First Nations, as both my parents attended Residential School and I attended an Indian Day School. The Minister of Education’s proposal to eliminate elected school board trustees, which would sideline First Nation-appointed trustees represents a consequential retreat from reconciliation, democracy and due process on consultation. The Education Act, which allows for First Nation-appointed trustees on school boards, has recently been ignored as the minister has supervised school boards. First Nation-appointed trustees provide accountability for the financial transfer payments from First Nations to school boards and also provide oversight to ensure the negative impacts of the history of the Residential School system never happens again. Student well being, achievement and outcomes are important metrics that we should all aspire to achieve. I stand in solidarity with my elected trustee colleagues in a call to action to the Ontario government for appropriate consultation on



how we can all improve on the most important work of student success and achievement in a democracy.”

Elaine Johnston, Chair, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Trustees’ Council

“Strong oversight and governance protect students. When trustees are removed from their roles and equity structures are paused or reduced, the system’s ability to identify and correct race-based disparities is weakened.”

Debbie King, Chair, Black Trustees’ Caucus

“Effective and responsive school board governance originates from local communities. While provincial standards are necessary, centralized policies aren’t able to respond to the local realities that Ontario’s strong and diverse communities face. Centralized provincial mandates remove local voices and local choices. Having navigated similar challenges in Manitoba, I’ve learned that the most effective, responsive and accountable solutions are found in the community, not in centralized provincial mandates. One-size-fits-all education isn’t just inefficient – it is a disservice to the specific cultural and regional identities of students and families.”

Alan Campbell, President, Canadian School Boards Association

“For many families of children with disabilities, school trustees are not an abstract level of government — they are the person they call when their child is unable to access needed supports, a problem facing a large proportion of our community. With more than 350,000 students with disabilities in Ontario schools, data collected by the Ontario Autism Coalition showed that over 28% of children with special education needs required their parents to advocate on their behalf with their trustee at least once last year. This adds up to over 100,000 points of contact with democratically elected trustees. That kind of community connection and accountability cannot be replaced by a centralized system.”

Kate Dudley-Logue, Vice President, Community Outreach, Ontario Autism Coalition

“Parents are essential partners in public education, particularly when it comes to advocating for students with disabilities who rely on appropriate supports to access their learning. Locally elected trustees help ensure families have direct connections to the decisions that shape their children’s education”

Elizabeth Garkowski and Julia Evangelisto, Ontario Parents for Education Support

“Public education is a cornerstone of a democratic society. Democratic accountability requires that those most affected by decisions have a real and respected say in how those decisions are made. When governments sideline elected school board trustees, democratic principles are weakened, education systems are destabilized, and communities are silenced.”

Harini Sivalingam, Director of Equality, Canadian Civil Liberties Association



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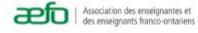
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