



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

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Cathy Abraham
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Jeff Brennan
Director of Stakeholder Relations
Minister's Office (Education)

Matt Klassen
Senior Policy Officer
Minister's Office (Education)

Dear Mr. Brennan and Mr. Klassen,

On behalf of my fellow northern school board trustees, thank you for attending the recent meeting of our Northern Board of Directors to discuss student transportation and specifically to listen to comments pertaining to the north's challenges and concerns. This group of trustee represents the Algoma DSB, DSB Ontario North East, Near North DSB, Rainbow DSB, Keewatin-Patricia DSB, Lakehead DSB, Rainy River DSB and Superior-Greystone DSB.

We are aware of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association's (OPSBA) participation as a stakeholder in the ministry's Student Transportation Advisory Committee and appreciate you seeking additional feedback from our group.

While we agree with the four main issues of concern for student transportation to be ride times, driver retention, funding and safety, there are several issues facing the north. Below we have summarized our comments which include:

- Lengthy bus rides, sometime 3+ hours
- Consider adding free Wi-Fi to buses to allow students to do homework and be connected for safety reasons
- Many communities do not have local public transportation in their communities to back up and support student transportation
- Weather is a major factor in the north; temperatures affect bus cancelling decisions and the conditions of the roads
- Temperature is a major factor; ambient temperature and actual temperature with wind chill
- Many student pick up points are spread apart; equity issue to ensure bus ride lengths are fair among students
- Issues with consortia not accepting board students
- Increasing transportation costs; efficiencies made in 2010 were not taken into account when the government reduced transportation funding
- North's unique geography – no sidewalks, 2 lane highways and poor road conditions

- Reminder about the important connection between transportation and child care; transportation and extra-curricular activities
- The impact of providing transportation to Indigenous communities with smaller student populations
- Increasing use of transportation as a competitive enhancement for student enrolment
- The revised RFP process led to the extinction of many small operators and this was more noticed in small towns and in the North. These drivers were members of the community and knew the students and their families.

We acknowledge that many of these issues are also felt and experienced by students and families across the entire province, but these can and tend to be worse in the north.

We hope this information is shared with the other stakeholders and is considered in any decisions made regarding student transportation. We look forward to learning about next steps in this important issue that affects many students and their families across the province.

Sincerely,



Mark Mannisto
Northern Region Chair
Ontario Public School Boards' Association

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the credible voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.