



ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL BOARDS'  
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

**Ontario Public School Boards' Association**  
439 University Avenue, 18th Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 1Y8  
Tel: (416) 340-2540  
Fax: (416) 340-7571  
inquiry@opsba.org  
www.opsba.org

Cathy Abraham  
President

Stephanie Donaldson  
Executive Director

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Minister of Education Stephen Lecce

Dear Minister:

I am reaching out to you today on behalf of the Indigenous Trustees' Council (ITC) of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA).

The ITC is composed of First Nations trustees appointed to school boards, and other trustees who are Indigenous but elected through the Municipal and School Board electoral process. The ITC engages in a range of initiatives to support the education of Indigenous students, and to ensure all students are educated about the history and culture of Indigenous peoples.

Following recent discussions of the ITC at the Public Education Symposium, and at a follow-up meeting in February, it has become clear that there is an urgent need to revitalize and maintain Indigenous languages in Ontario. Our languages are essential for maintaining our cultures, traditional knowledge, and histories. Taiaiake Alfred states in his book, *Peace, Power and Righteousness* that "Our bodies may live without our languages, lands or freedom, but they will be hollow shells."

The Treaties that First Nations have signed with various governments give us the right to a fully funded education. Moreover, Article 14 of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP), states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education **in their own languages**, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning."

Our cultures, ways of being, identities and spirits live within our languages. In our Onkwehonwe/Anishinaabeg languages, and in fact all "New World" Indigenous languages, all things have a spirit given by the Creator who has bestowed upon us all that we need to exist in this world – on Mother Earth. The Creator gave us our languages inside of which lives our traditional knowledge about living sustainably. It provides us with traditional knowledge and thought processes and perspectives that respect all living things. If we lose our languages and use colonial languages such as English or French, all of who we are, as peoples, will be gone. We will not see a world that respects our ways and our ancestors. We will only hear empty and unfamiliar voices.

In many communities across Ontario, school boards face a number of challenges when seeking qualified Indigenous language teachers. One particular challenge is the Ontario College of Teachers accreditation requirement. We are [once again asking](#) for your government to support the concept of a Temporary Letter of Approval for Elders in Residence and Indigenous Language-proficient speakers to teach Indigenous languages in classrooms across Ontario. There are, of course, other challenges associated with finding appropriate language teachers, however we feel that this recommendation would eliminate one unnecessary barrier that exists in our system.

In addition, the ITC feels strongly that full secondary credits must be given for Indigenous languages similar to what is done for French.

Today, those empty and unfamiliar voices speaking in English are being set to the side among our people and there is a return to what is real for us. But we cannot do this by ourselves. We need the government's support because so many of our children attend publicly funded schools and are learning colonial ways. Historically, federal and provincial governments have taken little heed of our ways. We must keep our languages because who we are, as peoples, resides inside of our languages and we cannot and should not give that up.

Government policy must always respect Indigenous languages, cultures and ways of being. The Ministry of Education must support the development of quality online language courses, and work with OPSBA to embed the use of Indigenous languages throughout the public education system. We also ask that there be encouragement and support for the development of quality second language and immersions programs *within* district school boards, in partnership with local First Nations. Credits must be given for this type of learning.

We look forward to participating in further discussion on this very important issue. Please do not hesitate to reach out directly to me and our Association through our staff.

Sincerely,



Elaine Johnston  
Chair, Indigenous Trustees' Council of OPSBA

CC: Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education  
Dasha Androusenkov, Director, Stakeholder Relations, Ministry of Education  
Denise Dwyer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Indigenous Education and Well-Being Division, Ministry of Education

*Our 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 expert 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.*