



## **INTEGRATION ACTION FOR INCLUSION IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY (ONTARIO)**

Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education  
5th Floor  
438 University Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2K8

BY EMAIL: [minister.edu@ontario.ca](mailto:minister.edu@ontario.ca)

July 25, 2020

Dear Minister Lecce:

**Re: 2020-21 Academic Year**

Thank you for your continued efforts to address the complex problem of returning our children to school safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I write on behalf of Integrated Action for Inclusion (IAI) and its members. We are a parent run organization with local chapters in Ontario. Our organization supports students with a broad range of disabilities in the regular classroom. Our purpose is to support our children so they may achieve their potential academically and socially throughout their time in Ontario's publicly funded education system and beyond it. Our belief, which is backed by years of research, is that all students learn best when they attend school in their local community in a regular classroom.

***Our mission: To act as the provincial champion and the driving force for inclusive education as the essential foundation for an inclusive life.***

<https://www.inclusionontario.ca/>

IAI is concerned that students with disabilities will continue to be left behind. We believe that equity must continue to be at the forefront in planning. It is not enough for boards to ask 'how can we serve the most people with what we have'; rather boards must ask 'how can we serve all students and what do we need to get there'. The Ministry must provide the necessary leadership and resources to help our school boards get there.

In thinking about reopening schools, however this is achieved, three areas are important to keep in mind to ensure all students, including students with disabilities, have access to inclusive education: alternate schedules, peers, and educators. We provide a framework of questions for the Ministry's consideration as it considers a return to school plan during this pandemic.

With respect to alternate schedules we ask: What supports are in place for the days that students are not in school? What will be put in place for those students who choose to stay home? If we have students at school every day, how does that fit with the reduced class sizes and bussing needs?

With respect to peers, we know that learning by its very nature is collaborative and peers are an essential part of schooling, both generally and even more so for students with disabilities. How do we continue that process in the time of physical distancing? Will students with disabilities be further marginalized by how a board organizes itself, both in in-person settings and distance learning settings?

Finally, we are concerned about the well-being of educators. What processes are in place to support educators to learn how to teach at a distance or in very different ways than have typically been expected to, remembering that we must provide Learning for All? The emergency distance learning that was happening for many students from March-June cannot continue; in many cases it simply failed to meet the needs of students with disabilities, particularly those seeking to access the curriculum. How do we support educators to engage students in learning in these very different times?

We know that this pandemic has presented us with challenges that we have never dealt with before. We believe that now is the perfect time to begin to think broadly and outside of the box. This may mean using additional community space, hiring more teachers, reducing class sizes to minimize the potential for spread of COVID-19, cohorting students and exploring outdoor education options. Let us take this opportunity to make education in Ontario better than ever while also ensuring it is safe for kids to return to school.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet and discuss the perspective of IAI in this time. We may be reached at [inclusionontario@gmail.com](mailto:inclusionontario@gmail.com). I can be directly reached at [paula.boutis@gmail.com](mailto:paula.boutis@gmail.com).

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Boutis', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paula Boutis,  
President

- c. Special Education Advisory Committees  
Christine Elliott, Minister of Health, [christine.elliott@pc.ola.org](mailto:christine.elliott@pc.ola.org)  
Marit Stiles, Education Critic, [MStiles-QP@ndp.on.ca](mailto:MStiles-QP@ndp.on.ca)  
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