

Local trustees spared in education reforms, but uncertainty remains in York, Peel

Sweeping changes are coming to the structure of school boards across Ontario, but uncertainty still remains over boards such as the York Catholic District School Board and Peel's school boards that were placed under the Ministry of Education's supervision earlier this year.

Ontario Education Minister Paul Calandra introduced the Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026, on Monday, which will overhaul the structure of school boards across the Province.

Ontario's education system must remain focused on its core responsibility: student success, said Calandra. In some schools, that focus has been lost, and students are paying the price. Ontario's teachers and education workers are dedicated professionals who work tirelessly every day to support students, often under challenging circumstances. They deserve stable, accountable leadership that supports their work and puts learning first. If further action is required to protect students and reinforce respect for the professionals who teach them, we will not hesitate to act.

One significant change announced at the start of the week was shifting the position of Director of Education to a new Chief Executive Officer at English-language district school boards, who would be responsible for Board finances and operational oversights. This new CEO would be required to have business qualifications and they would be responsible for leading budget-development while referring budget matters to the Minister for decision when trustees are unable to reach an agreement.

The CEO would then have the power to appoint a Chief Education Officer, a person with a background in education, including Ontario College of Teachers membership or equivalent, to focus on student achievement.

The role of Trustees, elected by the Public, will largely remain in place, despite their futures being up for review ahead of Monday's announcement.

Trustees going forward will see their expenses and honoraria limited, requiring trustees to pay out-of-pocket for certain organization member fees, a move the Province says will improve oversight over the use of public funds.

Critics within the education sector, however, say the powers invested in the new CEO will be a significant hit on the power of the public voice in local education.

Indeed, the changes announced this week leaves the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) and the Peel District School Board (PDSB) no more certain on their futures.

Boards previously placed under supervision by the Province will continue to be under supervision until the Ministry of Education is satisfied the concerns that led to the appointment of a Supervisor have been met. If this confidence isn't reached, trustees elected by the public to serve on these Boards in October's municipal election may not be able to serve at all with the exception of Catholic trustees, who can still weigh in on matters of faith in education.

The YCDSB was put under supervision this past winter with the Ministry citing ongoing financial mismanagement at the Board had resulted in depleted reserves, putting its ability to serve students and the broader community at risk.

Financial concerns were also cited for the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board and the Peel District School Board.

In the latter Board, the Province's decision to put it under supervision halted the layoff of 60 classroom teachers that would have caused significant disruption for almost 1,400 students in the middle of the school year, according to the Ministry.

The Board had also run a deficit for five consecutive years, affecting its long-term financial sustainability, they said.

Calandra told media on Monday afternoon the Supervision status for these and other impacted school boards will continue for the foreseeable future.

"I think this is a step forward. This legislation must be taken in context with the previous Bill 33, which also allows the Minister significant powers and oversight in Boards," he said. "Taken together, I believe that this gives us the opportunity to deliver a more consistent level of education across the Province, remove some of the distractions that have been the hallmark of our system? but, to be clear, I will not hesitate to continue to look at the role of trustees. Should more refinement be needed to refocus trustees, even after this legislation, on representing parents and students, then I'll take further actions. The goal is to reduce the amount of distractions. The goal is to put parents, students, and teachers first, and I think we've struck a good balance.

"Those Boards will remain under supervision for as long as it takes to put them back on the right track. As long as it takes to have them fully back on the right track, as long as it takes to have them into a balanced budget situation, as long as it takes to ensure that not only are they in a balanced budget but they are rebuilding their reserves, as long as it takes to ensure that communities are confident that the Boards are prepared to put students, parents, and teachers first, and they will not be returned a minute before."

When asked why candidates in areas where Boards are under supervision would bother putting their names forward for positions that might be in suspension, Calandra said the Ministry has the tools to fill vacancies.

"I'm told over and over and over again that the main reason people choose to be trustees is because they want to represent their community and they want to be their community's voice of parents and students at the Board," said Calandra. "There's nothing in this legislation that reduces the education system and provides that leadership from the Ministry to ensure that we have a good quality of education not only in Toronto, but across the Province of Ontario.

"If the Board remains under supervision after October, they will still have the same role that they do now in the Catholic system. They will have denominational opportunities, but in the public board... they will not be returning to a governance. Even if the Board is still under supervision, trustees who are elected in October will not be returning to a governance function. They will not return to a governance function until we have decided that they are in a position to do so in a fashion that the Board has put on the right path with all of the conditions."

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario was quick to voice their concerns in response to Monday's announcement, stating the restructuring of Boards was "unnecessary" and limits the core responsibilities of trustees.

"While the Ford government ultimately rejected Minister Calandra's initial plan to eliminate all democratically elected trustees? a reversal achieved through months of sustained advocacy by ETFO and its education partners? this legislation removes the essential powers trustees need to genuinely represent families and students," said ETFO President David Mastin. "Families deserve trustees who are democratically elected to make decisions, not CEOs with business credentials installed to manage public education like a corporate enterprise. The fallout from this government's poor decisions belongs to this government alone. Trustees are not elected to serve as a buffer for your reckless decision-making."

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