

Province names Supervisor as it takes control of Catholic Board

The Province of Ontario has appointed Carrie Kormos to supervise the York Catholic District School Board after the Ministry of Education determined the local Board, along with the Peel District School Board, can't resolve ongoing problems on their own.

The appointment came Wednesday, March 4, and the Ministry said it follows serious concerns about infighting and long-term financial unsustainability that risk disrupting learning and undermining student outcomes.

As part of its plan to protect Ontario and ensure students are prepared for the jobs of tomorrow, these actions will help the Province restore sound financial management at these boards and ensure that every dollar invested is preparing students with practical skills for good-paying, stable careers, said the Province in a statement.

Added Education Minister Paul Calandra: After careful review, it is clear that both Peel and York Catholic are facing serious challenges that they cannot resolve on their own. I have appointed supervisors to restore sound management, strengthen oversight, and ensure every decision is focused on protecting student learning and success.

While school boards and their futures have long been a focus of the Ministry, both the York and Peel boards came under closer scrutiny in January when the PDSB was put under Provincial Supervision on a provisional basis to prevent a mid-year staffing change that could have resulted in uncertainty for parents, students and educators.

York Catholic wasn't put on supervision immediately, but was advised it could be the outcome if they were unable to address the Board's significant governance issues [that] were affecting matters of public interest.

Although the YCDSB had not released a formal statement to families following last week's decision at press time, they hit back on the idea they couldn't resolve the issues cited by the Ministry on their own at a Special Board meeting last month led by Maria Iafrate, Chair of the YCDSB, and Jennifer Sarna, Interim Director of Education.

The Board of Trustees and the Senior Team take this motion seriously, said Sarna. But supervision isn't necessary. Because the goal of every school board is to support student success, and the YCDSB has a proud track record of student achievement. Despite our students' excellent academic results, we are not complacent. Through our Multi-Year Strategic Plan, the YCDSB continues to implement the supports that students need.

Iafrate acknowledged turnover in the Director of Education position but, in turn, said Sarna brings stable, experienced leadership of nearly 35 years to the table. Governance, she admitted has been an area of concern for the Ministry and ongoing governance training within the Board was set to be completed by the end of June.

The Trustees will use the resources available through the Ontario Education Service Corporation, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, and the Archdiocese of Toronto, to facilitate the work, she said. The training will cover everything we do: trustee roles and responsibilities; financial oversight; strategic decision-making; and how to maintain a unified voice in support of our students. We're committed to knowing everything possible about effective governance because we know that is how we will best serve our schools.

Sarna said it will take time to complete the work, but the Board already has a financial recovery plan in place that our CFO is confident will meet the government's timelines, including contingencies to mitigate risks.

We believe our students matter, Iafrate concluded. Our staff matters, and the constitutional protections that allow Catholic school boards to be governed according to our faith matters, too. Catholic school trustees are essential for keeping Catholic schools Catholic. Yes, we handle the same governance work that any school board trustee does, but we also carry the responsibility of keeping Christ at the centre of everything our schools do.

That work requires trustees who actually understand Catholic teaching and can apply it to governance decisions. When decisions are made, Catholic trustees protect the distinctive identity that parents chose when they sent their children to Catholic schools. This is not work you can outsource or replace with ministerial oversight. It requires people who are called to serve in this specific way. This takes people with both the competence to govern and the faith to lead.

Upon Kormos' appointment as Supervisor, the Ministry said she was a seasoned advisor with over 30 years of experience supporting executive teams and boards in Canada's government, gaming, hospitality, and tourism sectors.

Ms. Kormos has previously advised Ministers and Premiers, and has also served as Chief Marketing and Communications Officer at one of Canada's largest hospitality companies, said the Ministry, noting she currently serves as Director for Invest Ontario and the Canadian Gaming Association.

As Supervisor, Kormos is tasked with taking measures to enable the Board to provide financial stewardship and good governance in the interests of all students of the Board, including addressing the in-year deficit in a manner that ensures that students' learning environments remain stable and that financial decisions support not disrupt classroom learning.

The Supervisor will work with senior Board leadership to build Board financial and governance capacity and ensure the implementation of appropriate measures to address the in-year deficit. In doing so, the Supervisor will: assist the government in restoring public confidence; assess the operational inefficiencies and opportunities to improve resource allocation; review saving opportunities to inform the development and implementation of a plan to return the Board to a balanced financial position while protecting the best interest of students; enhance financial oversight and governance by promoting transparency and ensuring accountability in financial operations; provide accountable, transparent, and effective governance, and increasing alignment between governance and administration; respect the Board's collective agreements and other financial contracts and legally-binding obligations; defer to the Board's trustees in relation to denominational matters (and non-denominational matters required to maintain denominational character); and report progress on these actions to the Ministry of Education at the times and in the manner directed by the Ministry.

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