

Provincial supervision ?isn't necessary,? say YCDSB leads

Supervision by the Minister of Education is an unnecessary step as the York Catholic District School Board works to address Provincial concerns.

That was the message driven home this month by leaders within the York Catholic District School Board as they responded to an announcement made by the Ministry that they would be placed under ministry supervision if they didn't act.

On January 28, Ontario Minister of Education Paul Calandra said the Ministry was putting the Peel District School Board under provincial supervision with immediate effect, while the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) would be subject to a similar move if it did not respond to long-standing Ministry concerns.

In his statement, the Minister cited ?infighting, disruption and serious financial concerns? that have ?undermined student success for years.? These, he said, ?need to end immediately with every penny of public funding directed to support students in the classroom.?

?The Board's years of inadequate financial management have depleted its reserves, putting its ability to serve students and the broader community at serious risk. High-risk financial assumptions in the Board's financial recovery plan, along with an alarming revolving door in leadership and ongoing governance issues, have raised doubts about the YCDSB's ability to balance its budget and put students first.?

At a special board meeting held in Aurora on February 10, many of these issues were addressed by Maria Iafrate, Chair of the YCDSB, and Jennifer Sarna, Interim Director of Education at the Board.

?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 is 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.?

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