

# Under fire, York Region District School Board placed under Provincial review

By Brock Weir

Amid allegations of systemic racism, along with problems over equity and accountability, the Province of Ontario has stepped in to review the York Region District School Board (YRDSB).

In a statement Thursday announcing individuals appointed to review the YRDSB, Ontario Education Minister Mitzie Hunter called the matter an "urgent" one.

"There have been significant and growing concerns from parents and community members regarding governance and equity issues in the York Region District School Board," said the Minister. "These include allegations of systemic racism, concerns about the Board's equity and inclusive education policies, accountability for spending on trustees' international travel, and deteriorating relationships between the trustees, the director of education and the Board's senior staff."

"In November, I met with the Board chair and director of education to discuss these concerns. During that meeting, I was not provided with the reassurance that the Board had an adequate plan in place to deal with these issues, so I asked the Board to submit a report outlining their plan of action by January 13. Unfortunately, their proposal also fails to address these issues."

"As a result, an urgent review of the Board is needed. I am appointing Patrick Case and Sue Herbert to review the governance and performance issues at the YRDSB. The reviewers will recommend improvements, particularly regarding equity, accountability and transparency, to regain public confidence in the school Board. In addition, they will recommend ways to improve the working relationships at the Board, including amongst trustees, between the Board and the director of education, between the director of education and senior staff, and with the community. In addition, they will review whether Board members and the director of education are fulfilling their legislated duties."

Philip Parappally, the YRDSB's beleaguered Director of Education, set out a letter to York Region parents that afternoon.

In his message, he said the YRDSB "remains committed" to providing students with "safe, welcoming inclusive learning."

"These are critical issues and we welcome this opportunity to work with the reviewers in an open and transparent manner," he said.

"This review will foster a common understanding of how we need to move forward with our community, the Board and staff members alike. I will ensure that all staff members cooperate fully throughout this important review."

"I want to assure you that we take these issues very seriously, and will not shy away from the difficult conversations and the important work that lies ahead to address these concerns. Our Board has long had a reputation for excellence and I want to acknowledge the good work that continues to take place in our schools and workplaces to advance student achievement and well-being."

"We remain committed to providing our students and staff with safe, welcoming and inclusive learning and working environments that enable all of our students and staff to succeed."