

'We're a touchpoint for community members,' says Trustee Wright as Province weighs future of Education Boards

Melanie Wright was active in her daughter's education.

As a school volunteer, she eventually served in various roles on her school council, but, when she graduated, she wanted to continue her work — but on a larger scale.

In 2022, she stepped forward to run for the Public Education Trustee for the York Regional District School Board. It's a role she's taken on enthusiastically since being elected, but, like so many Education Trustees across Ontario, just how long that role will continue to exist is a question she has been left asking.

Ontario's Ministry of Education continues its study into the role and the future of school boards and education trustees across the Province.

Here at home, the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) is currently without an active Board of Trustees after the Ministry of Education took control of the Board and appointed Carrie Kormos as 'Supervisor' of the YCDSB following what the Ministry described as 'serious concerns about infighting and long-term financial unsustainability that risk disrupting learning and undermining student success.'

'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.'

But the Ministry has not yet ruled out the wholesale elimination of school boards as its review continues.

While the York Region District School Board has not come under the same level of Provincial scrutiny as its Catholic counterpart, Wright says she sees the role of Education Trustee as 'essential' at the community level.

'We're a touchpoint for community members, which I think is really important,' she tells The Auroran. 'I just looked at the role [when putting myself forward] as being very important to that connection between community, whether that be staff, students, community members, and the Board. I think it's essential they have that comfort level and someone to reach out to that's going to take their ideas and any of their concerns and bring it to the Board level.'

'Sometimes it's just a matter of redirection, and I've found that a lot in the last three years — it's people reaching out because they don't know where else to go. I didn't know that at the time, but I think that's an essential part of my role — getting people going in the right direction.'

While Wright says the role is important, she has not yet made a decision on whether to seek re-election in Aurora and Whitchurch-Stouffville in the 2026 Municipal Election, should the role continue to exist in its current form, citing the challenge of balancing her Board work with her full-time job.

'It's a hard decision to make. I'm just not sure if I'm ready to give up on the role or not, to be honest,' she says. 'It's an essential role. We're there to make sure the staff are doing their job — there's no way they can hire a team of people for the amount that they pay trustees and the work that we do. They can't replace that. We're a non-partisan person that anyone feels they can come to with their

issues, whereas if you're hiring supervisors like they have in some of the other Boards, it's their hired person as opposed to an elected person.?

As she looks back on the 2022-2026 Board term so far, one of the issues Wright says she's particularly proud of is her work with her fellow Trustees in bringing back applied math after it was de-streamed for high school students.

?Ourselves and a couple of the other Boards had de-streamed Grade 10 as well, and we just found, based on reports and different data that we were looking at, hearing from a lot of parents that there were a lot of struggles because only Academic math was available. Technically they kind of took a step back at the Ministry level and didn't de-stream Grade 10 as quickly as we thought it was going to happen. It was great to see us bringing the concerns of the community forward, looking at data with staff, and then the staff saying, ?You know what? Let's take a step back. We'll add back in Applied math in Grade 10, so that opens up more pathways for students who aren't comfortable taking Academic [courses].?

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