



5 June 2019

Toronto District School Board (TDSB)
Finance, Budget and Enrollment

Re: Proposed cuts to psychology staff at the Toronto District School Board

Dear TDSB Trustees,

The purpose of this letter is to highlight the risks associated with your proposed cuts to psychology staff. These cuts will bring the ratio of psychology staff to students down to 5:10,000; half that recommended in Canada. Reducing access to psychological services for those who need it most, could produce adverse consequences such as higher dropout rates, higher rates of mental illness and disability, justice involvement, hospitalizations and even deaths by suicide. Your proposed cuts to psychological services will place an entire generation at greater risk over the long term.

School boards should never be put in a position to choose between a child's education and his or her psychological wellbeing, they are intrinsically connected. Despite the unilateral cuts that have been imposed, the TDSB must find ways to enhance access to psychological, in turn mental health, services. Ontario's Auditor General was critical of the long wait times to see school psychologists two years ago and the proposed cuts will further increase wait times as well as the related negative implications for students, teachers and families.

As the largest school board in the province, the TDSB, supporting about 246,000 students in 588 schools, has the largest pool of children and youth in need of psychological services. Approximately 17% have been identified as exceptional students or are provided with some special education programs and services in the province. These include tens of thousands with learning and intellectual disabilities, autism, ADHD, FASD and brain injury, but tends to exclude those with mental health challenges such as depression. Up to 10% of students are believed to have serious thoughts of suicide and 3% reported a suicide attempt according to the Ontario Government.

School psychologists are often a first point of contact for those with challenges. This far exceeds the assessment of learning disabilities. Along with our colleague social workers, they help do the suicide and danger-risk assessments. School Psychologists diagnose learning and intellectual disabilities and other neurodevelopmental disorders. They have the tools necessary to diagnose mental health disorders and put in place the necessary scaffolding a child needs to best ensure cognitive, academic and social/emotional success. They are a vital school resource that cannot be replaced. A reduction in their numbers, will mean an increase in health care risks for students. Prevention and management of mental health challenges are always more cost-effective longer term, compared to short term cuts to services overall. We implore you to consider this longer-term view.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Diana Velikonja".

Dr. Diana Velikonja, Ph.D., C.Psych., MScCP
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Sylvain Roy".

Dr. Sylvain Roy., Ph.D., C.Psych.
Past-President