



February 18, 2020

The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
315 Front Street, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of the Toronto District School Board, I am writing you to share the results of our recent survey about your government's plan to introduce mandatory e-learning courses for all secondary school students.

The short survey, which was issued to a random sample of students and parents/guardians, and all secondary school teachers, posed two main questions:

- Do you support the Ministry's decision to require all students to take two e-learning/online learning credits in secondary school in order to graduate?
- In your opinion, would mandatory e-learning/online learning benefit students?

With approximately 5,000 responses, the results show that most students, parents/guardians and secondary school teachers **do not support** your government's plan to make e-learning a mandatory requirement for graduation, nor do they believe that it will benefit students. For a more detailed analysis, please read the summary of results online at www.tdsb.on.ca/thepulse.

I hope that you will take this information under advisement. It's important that you listen to the voices and concerns of students, parents/guardians and teachers, especially when you're planning to implement a new way to deliver curriculum and credits outside the regular classroom setting.

I want to make it clear that the Board is not against e-learning. However, our survey found that there are significant concerns among students, parents and teachers related to your government's plan for mandatory e-learning, including that they do not believe it will benefit students. It is possible that our school communities may believe this because your government has not provided enough information about its e-learning plans or it has been poorly communicated.

It is also concerning that our students are now choosing their courses for the upcoming school year, with little to no knowledge of what your government's e-learning courses will look like, and yet it will be mandatory for them to not only take two e-learning courses, but to also succeed in them in order to graduate. We fear this could hinder our students' achievement and well-being levels, and effect their graduation and post-secondary education opportunities.

I also want to bring to your attention the other issues outlined in my [letter](#) to you on November, 15, 2019 [see below]. We continue to be concerned about:

- the mandatory nature of your plan, the timing and the lack details for parents/guardians, students and staff;
- potential risk to students who need individual and in-person time with teachers;
- the challenges for students who are not accustomed to learning in this environment; and
- issues of fairness for students who may not have access to high speed internet service that online learning requires or live in parts of Ontario that don't have access to reliable internet services.

In light of the above concerns and what we have heard from our school communities through our recent survey, we ask that your government re-consider its plan for mandatory secondary school e-learning courses and its plans to make such courses a requirement for graduation.

As always, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this topic further.

Thank you,



Robin Pilkey, CPA, CA, ICD.D
Chair, Toronto District School Board

cc: Toronto-area MPPs, OPSBA, Council of Trustees' Associations, and Ontario Student Trustees' Association



November 15, 2019

The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
315 Front Street, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON. M7A 0B8

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of the Toronto District School Board, I am writing you to express our deep concerns with your government's plan to introduce mandatory e-learning courses for all secondary school students.

On March 15, 2019, your government [announced](#) that starting in 2020-2021, all secondary students will take a minimum of four e-learning credits out of the 30 credits needed to fulfill the requirements for achieving an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Since then, we have not received any further information about this plan, which has raised many questions and concerns by parents/guardians, students and our own staff, not limited to how this plan will be implemented and how it will be equitable for all secondary students.

I want to make it clear that we are not against e-learning, but we are very concerned about the mandatory nature of this plan, the timing and the general lack of information available for parents/guardians, students and staff.

In just a few short months, secondary students will begin selecting courses that will lead them to graduation. We fear that the lack of information on mandatory e-learning courses could harm our students' achievement and well-being levels and, ultimately, hinder their graduation and post-secondary education plans. This is a major concern considering our most recent [census](#) data tells us that students are already expressing challenges with mental health, belonging and accessing a caring adult in schools and the role of technology in relation to their overall well-being.

Recently, one of our own educators and current PhD candidate at the University of Toronto – who has taught e-learning and researched it – raised [major concerns](#) with your plan, including: only a small percentage (5%) of Ontario students currently partake in e-learning courses,

which means there is no ability to anticipate its likelihood of success to a greater population; we have little to no time to implement a plan that will require internet and infrastructure updates in some communities as well as professional learning for staff at a time of possible labour unrest; and that we are embracing inequality for our most vulnerable youth. I encourage you to read her research in full as it paints a more fulsome picture of these concerns and more.

Currently, we know that our e-learning program is mostly accessed by higher achieving students and that means we know little about how students with more learning needs may fare in a program that is about to become mandatory. This begs the question, is this plan equitable and could it potentially set some of our students up for failure?

To ensure we are reflecting the concerns of our students, parents/guardians and staff, we will be consulting our school communities about mandatory e-learning courses for all secondary students. We value the input of our communities and feel an obligation to provide your government with this information. The results of our research will be available this upcoming winter, which we will happily share with you.

We hope that we will hear more information about your plan to implement mandatory e-learning courses for all secondary students as soon as possible and that you share the results of your own research publically.

As always, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this topic further.

Thank you,



Robin Pilkey, CPA, CA, ICD.D
Chair, Toronto District School Board

cc: OPSBA
Ontario Student Trustees' Association