



# Robin Pilkey

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**Minister of Education, Lisa Thompson**

Re: Reduction of Funding and Teaching Positions

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Minister Thompson,

On behalf of the Toronto District School Board, I am writing you to express our deep concerns with your recent [announcement](#) on Friday, March 15, regarding funding reductions and increased class sizes.

While we continue to analyze this information, I can tell you that these changes, especially at the high school level, will have immediate and long term implications on our students and the programs we are able to offer them in our schools.

We are particularly concerned about the magnitude of permanent teacher reductions as it relates to the following areas:

## **High School Programs**

When the class size increase is fully implemented, we project the changes to secondary class size averages will translate into the loss of approximately 800 high school teachers.

When the class average needs to be 28 and yet collective agreements cap limits on how large classes can be, this means that a large proportion of classes need to be built close to 28. Ministry regulations determined that students with special needs, who are being served in congregated settings, must be small. This means very few classes may be offered that do not reach the threshold of at least 26. This will impact elective courses as well as supports for students with special needs who are not in special classes.

Students should have diverse learning experiences beyond the compulsory subjects. Such experiences are typically found in course electives, yet these are the subject areas most affected by a teacher reduction of this extent and a class size increase by this magnitude. In real terms, one teacher reduction represents six classes in a school. A teacher reduction to the scale announced by the government places a very wide range of electives in jeopardy. These electives cover such areas as:

- Visual and performing arts;
- Humanities;

- Social sciences; and
- Skilled trades.

In smaller higher schools with enrolments under 800 students, the impact of fewer electives will be even more serious.

Once secondary schools complete their timetabling for next school year after April 12, we will be able to provide you with more specific information about which classes will be cancelled.

### **One-on-One Relationships and Student Well-being**

The relationships between students and teachers form the very basis of teaching and learning. One of the consequences of a permanent teacher reduction of this magnitude and the resulting increased class size, is less one-on-one time for remedial and coaching, guidance, personal development and supervision.

What is most concerning is that this change comes at a time when our own data ([2018 Student and Parent Census](#)) is telling us that the mental health and well-being of students decreases during their high school years. Many students told us they felt disconnected and struggled to connect with a caring adult in their school.

- Since 2012, students between Grades 7-12 reported that their emotional well-being dropped nearly 10 per cent, from 69 to 60 per cent in 2017;
- Many more middle and high school students compared to the last census felt nervous and under a lot of stress and pressure often or all the time, and had multiple worries especially about their physical and mental health, their own future and their school marks; and
- More Grade 7-12 students, between 15 and 22 per cent, reported feeling lonely. Nearly 50 per cent of Grade 12 students reported being under a lot of stress or pressure related to their future.

When considering the emerging implications on high school courses and student well-being, we believe a teacher reduction and class size jump of this scale requires more evidence-based consideration. We respectfully ask the Ministry to take these points into consideration when proceeding with class size changes and teacher reductions of this magnitude.

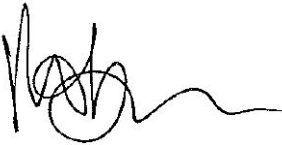
With regards to adjustments to class sizes in Grades 4 to 8 to 24.5, our collective agreement commitment states that our Grade 4 to 8 class average must be 23.24. If we were to move to the class average – determined by your government – that would result in 216 fewer teachers in the Toronto District School Board. Because we must honour our collective agreements, we would not be able to have 216 fewer teachers and, therefore, we would face a \$9.6 million shortfall in the coming budget year. This is not a budget reduction the Board can absorb without alternative solutions.

We are deeply concerned that the Ministry will proceed with this change knowing full well that some school boards are in this predicament.

My hope is that we can have a different resolution to the elementary teacher reduction target and that your Ministry considers the points listed above when proceeding with class size changes and teacher reductions at the high school level.

As always, I am happy to discuss this further with you in person.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Pilkey', with a stylized, wavy flourish extending to the right.

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