

School Board Trustee positions return with limited power

By Riley Murphy, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In an April 13 announcement, Minister of Education Paul Calandra announced major changes coming to Ontario's education system.

Included in this was the long-awaited decision regarding school board trustees, who Calandra had previously sidelined in a March decision to appoint supervisors at both the Peel District School Board (PDSB) and York Catholic District School Board.

Put forward as the Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026, Calandra announced the decision to standardize the number of elected trustees to a maximum of 12, as well as limit their discretionary expenses and honoraria.

Trustees will be required to pay out of pocket for external organization membership fees and to improve oversight over school board subsidiaries and their use of public funds.

The PDSB has 12 trustees, elected on November 15, 2022.

In addition to these trustee changes, Calandra also announced that English-language district school boards will soon have two new roles.

The Director of Education would become known as the Chief Executive Officer, who would be responsible for financial and operational oversight and required to have business qualifications.

As well as a new Chief Education Officer, who would be appointed by the CEO to focus on student achievement and required to hold pedagogical qualifications, including Ontario College of Teachers membership or equivalent.

The CEO would then lead budget development, while referring budget matters to the Minister for decision when trustees are unable to reach an agreement.

Calandra also announced the introduction of mandatory written exams on official exam days in Grades 9 to 12, as well as requiring attendance and participation to be part of the final mark for students in Grades 9 to 12, with attendance worth 15 per cent for Grades 9 to 10, and 10 per cent for Grades 11 to 12.

Stan Cameron, PDSB trustee for Caledon, says that the one positive from the Bill introduction is that the school board Trustee position remains in place, and on the October election ballot.

It is frustrating, however, to see how Minister Paul Calandra has treated all English Public and Catholic Trustees by minimizing their role with respect to budget development and approval, says Cameron. In addition, he is flexing his political muscle to remind everyone involved that he still has the power, in Bill 33 which he orchestrated, to take down any board of Trustees, for any reason he deems necessary. He explicitly said in his press conference that he won't hesitate to use that take down power.

Cameron says that Calandra misrepresented the facts when he stated that the PDSB operated for the past five years with a deficit budget.

That is blatantly untrue and can be proven with research into the Board's budget deliberation files, he says. It fits his intentional narrative. Or, you can trust Trustees who can attest to passing a balanced budget. One such vote that is on record for all to see.

Cameron added that Calandra says he will keep the eight boards he currently has under his supervision until they show a balanced budget and a built-up reserve fund.

?The PDSB has always approved a balanced budget, and perhaps unknown to the less-than-detailed-researcher Minister Calandra, the PDSB has a \$140 million dollar surplus,? says Cameron.

?If those two reasons are why he has the PDSB under supervision, perhaps he needs to think of another fictitious reason to keep the PDSB under his control.?

Cameron adds that ?nowhere? in Calandra's announcement was a word addressing the Ministry's ?lack of funding? for children, their families, and staff.

Cameron also announced his intentions regarding the upcoming trustee election.

?I wouldn't personally consider running in the October 26 election for a Trustee position, the less-than-honourable Minister Calandra has intentionally created a high risk-low reward situation for Trustees,? he says.

Cameron says the high risk is the chance that Calandra could yet again take down any Board of Trustees.

?The low reward can be seen in a message I received from a long time and retired Trustee who said, ?It looks like Trustees will now become glorified call centres for frustrated parents with complaints and questions'," he says.

?I have a lot more to give my community and will look at the Town Council for opportunities to serve there. I refuse to make myself vulnerable to the erratic, controlling, and less-than-truthful Paul Calandra.?

?It's a lot of important work moving forward for all Trustees in the province. All at the risk of Paul Calandra taking their board down, just because.?