

## FIVE QUESTIONS FOR THE MINISTER

The Ontario government has just released a directive ordering the Toronto District School Board to make drastic changes to the role of school trustees, and clearing the way for closing up to 100 schools. We have been down this road before. When the Mike Harris government was attempting to impose its will on school boards across Ontario, it accused the trustees in Toronto and other cities of being “dysfunctional” if they resisted the Conservative directives.

The behaviour of a small number of trustees and Board staff was rightly called into question. But in fact many of the individuals who were in the centre of the controversy have gone, either of their own accord or by defeat in the last election. In fact, half the TDSB trustees are newly elected by the public – democracy is at work in renewing the composition of the Board. Before the directive of the Minister of Education is implemented, there are some questions that need to be answered.

1. How many schools and childcare centres will the Liberal government close in Toronto? Education advocates believe that schools should be fully functioning community hubs, combining day-time teaching with evening classes for adult learners, childcare facilities, parenting centres and other community services. Once these buildings and the green space surrounding them are sold off, how can they be replaced if the population cycle brings back more young families?
2. Trustees represent the same number of residents – over 100,000 – as our elected MPP’s. Yet MPP’s have both an office in Queen’s Park and one in their riding, along with three full-time staff of their choosing. Why should trustees be evicted from their office and stripped of their part-time assistant? Where are they to meet constituents, keep records and notes, and carry out their interactions with TDSB staff?
3. The Minister is suggesting that the TDSB is too big to operate effectively, yet the Liberals have centralized control of nearly all decision-making in a Ministry that oversees the operations for over a million students and hundreds of thousands of adult learners. The only accountability for this massive bureaucracy is during Question Period at Queen’s Park – in the limited time the Legislature is in session. Is this not a double standard about institutions and their scope of operations?
4. Toronto’s schools have been on the cutting edge on issues of equity and services for immigrant families for many years because of the efforts of parents and activist trustees. From creating alternative schools within the system; to English as a

- Second Language Programs, to Heritage Language and Black and African Heritage Programs; to LGBT equality; to school community outreach programs -all these measures are essential in making our schools inclusive and inviting. What makes the government believe that parents want their trustees to be stripped of their role as advocates for local schools or neighbourhoods? Do they not want trustees to be able to respond to families experiencing problems with the school bureaucracy?
5. Why does the Liberal government believe it has superior record on either spending or accountability, given the debacle of Bill 115, the 8 billion dollars wasted on Public-Private Partnerships, another billion on gas plant closures, or the ORNGE, e-health and welfare payment fiascos

The Minister wants to impose a model of board governance on Toronto which drastically reduces the ability of Trustees to be champions for their communities. Experience shows that every education system which shuts out grass roots input ends up failing significant sections of the population in cities as diverse as ours. Before we go down that road, these questions need to be fully answered by the Minister and the Premier.

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