

Province stepping in to strengthen accountability at York board

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Concerns over 'infighting' has prompted Ontario's Education Minister to take action against the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) Minister Paul Calandra is taking action against the in response to serious concerns that risk disrupting learning and undermining student outcomes. These actions, he said, will help the province restore sound financial management at these boards and ensure that every dollar invested is preparing students with practical skills for good-paying, stable careers. 'I'm taking immediate action to put an end to mismanagement and disruption at two school boards (York, Peel District) that are directly and negatively impacting both students and teachers,' said Calandra. 'I am also putting the YCDSB on notice that the infighting, disruption and serious financial concerns that have undermined student success for years need to end immediately, with every penny of public funding directed to support students in the classroom. 'The YCDSB has also been informed that the Minister intends to take action to place the board under supervision if it fails to appropriately respond to the pressing governance and financial concerns in the next 14 days. The board's years of 'inadequate financial management have depleted its reserves, putting its ability to serve students and the broader community at serious risk. 'High-risk financial assumptions in the board's financial recovery plan, along with an alarming revolving door in leadership and ongoing governance issues, have raised doubts about the YCDSB's ability to balance its budget and put students first. In a joint statement released by Board Chair Maria Iafrate and Jennifer Sarna, Interim Director of Education, they said the Board of Trustees and the Senior Team are working together to create a plan that best serves our students, staff and families. As part of the process, there will be board meetings in the coming weeks to discuss this plan. They encourage the public to attend in person at 320 Bloomington Road West, Aurora, or watch it live on the YCDSB's YouTube channel. 'Please rest assured that the YCDSB's day-to-day operations will continue as usual. We will provide you with more information as it becomes available. 'The Minister's action against the Peel District School Board (PDSB) is more direct. 'The action I am taking at the PDSB will put an immediate halt to a disruptive mid-year upheaval in staffing that would have created uncertainty for parents, students and teachers alike. 'The Minister is immediately placing PDSB under provincial supervision and has halted the board's imminent layoff plan, which would have seen 60 classroom teachers lose their jobs and caused significant learning disruption for nearly 1,400 students in the middle of the school year. The board has also run a deficit for five consecutive years, affecting its long-term financial sustainability. The board has been given 14 days to respond to the Minister's concerns, after which the Minister will determine whether to continue with supervision. Peel Board Chair Dr. David Green said his board is fiscally responsible and they're backed by a great senior team. 'There's no mismanagement,' he stressed, noting the board actually has a healthy reserve fund. However, the Ministry has told them they cannot access the reserve to offset the shortfall or deficit. Green said they often went into the reserves to help bolster board finances and he's never seen a stance like this from the Province ever in his more than two decades serving on the board. The decline in enrolment, he said, did leave the board short some \$12 million. The board and staff have met several times and are committed to balancing the budget and looking for savings and efficiencies. They did suggest that some board staff return to the schools as LTOs, to avoid layoffs. The union reached out on behalf of members, noting this wasn't a solution. Trustees and staff were set to discuss the matter further at last week's board meeting, but the Minister's letter put that on hold, preventing any decisions from being made. The Minister cited 'public interest' as a reason for the move, but Green said trustees are elected to be the voice for parents and students, and the Ministry has effectively taken that away from them. Green said they want to work with the Minister and remain proactive, innovative and student-focussed. The union representing teachers condemned the actions. ETFO condemns government takeovers of Ontario school boards. 'ETFO is once again raising urgent concerns about the Ford government's escalating and unjustified takeovers of democratically elected school boards across Ontario. These interventions represent egregious government overreach, a troubling centralization of power, and a direct threat to local democracy in Ontario's public education system. 'There is growing concern that these takeovers are part of a broader plan to seize control of school board finances and real estate across the province. This treats public education as a profit-making enterprise rather than a vital public service meant to serve every child. Parents and communities must join us and act now to prevent lasting damage to our high-quality public education system. 'Elected trustees are a critical link between communities and publicly funded schools. They provide local accountability, represent and elevate diverse perspectives, and make decisions that reflect the needs of the students and families they serve. Replacing them with supervisors, government insiders with little to no education sector experience, strips communities of their

democratic voice and hands control over to a government that has repeatedly shown disregard for public education. Six other school boards are under provincial supervision to address concerns related to growing deficits, depleting reserves and poor management decisions. These actions reflect the government's continued focus on upholding public trust in Ontario's publicly funded education system and are a part of the government's plan to build a strong, accountable and well-supported public education system with a back-to-basics approach that is focused on improving student outcomes. When a school board is placed under supervision, the Minister of Education may appoint an individual, commonly referred to as a supervisor, to exercise powers and duties of the board. Supervisors have leadership and expertise in governance, finance and/or public accountability matters. They report regularly to the ministry while working to improve stability and efficiency in school boards under supervision.