

Ministry of Education

Minister

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Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre

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August 29, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

With September just around the corner, we know that many students and their families are eagerly anticipating a new school year. At the same time, school boards are busy finishing preparations to welcome students to school – some for the first time, and others for their next year of learning.

Getting to and from school safely each day is an important consideration for those students and their families. For many, this will involve riding the school bus. In fact, each school day in Ontario, more than 800,000 students are safely transported to and from school by school buses and school-purpose vehicles. The Province of Ontario, school boards, transportation consortia, school bus operators and thousands of dedicated bus drivers work together to make this a safe, positive experience.

This school year our shared priority remains the same – ensuring that each of these students arrives at school safely, on time, and ready to learn. Though we are working collectively to avoid interruptions, occasionally student transportation services may be delayed or disrupted. This can be particularly true during the adjustment period at the beginning of the school year.

During this busy time, school boards play an important role in minimizing the impact of service disruptions for students and parents. School boards should continue to work closely with their student transportation consortia to be aware of potential disruptions and be proactive in identifying issues. In particular, boards are responsible for developing contingency plans and communicating information about student transportation services to their school communities in the event of delays or disruptions.

In all cases, we expect boards to be addressing disruptions as quickly as possible. And I ask that in instances where disruptions are expected, that boards work to ensure the ministry is made aware of contingency and public communication plans.

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Recently, in response to the Ontario Ombudsman's recommendations, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) have collaborated with their student transportation providers to take important actions to keep parents and students prepared and informed if, and when bus service is disrupted. These actions include:

- Providing families with information on student transportation through an [online portal](#) and offering an email alert service to notify parents of service disruptions
- Equipping all buses with GPS systems to track the status of bus routes
- Adding more staff to board call centres to better answer questions and concerns from parents

I am pleased to see that the TDSB and the TCDSB have taken these steps so that their school communities will continue to benefit from reliable student transportation services. I strongly encourage all school boards to consider how they can work with their student transportation partners to provide parents with the information they need to ensure students arrive to school safely, and on time this September.

I would also like to take this opportunity to address concerns regarding funding for student transportation and the impacts of the new minimum wage. In 2017-18, funding for student transportation is projected to reach an all-time high of \$919.6 million, and during this time the ministry will also provide a two per cent increase in funding to support cost updates.

We are also aware that school bus operators have raised concerns about how the proposed increase to Ontario's minimum wage may affect their operations. School bus drivers provide an invaluable service each and every school day, delivering Ontario's students to and from school safely. Our government is committed to providing these drivers with a fair wage as part of our plan to ensure people in Ontario have fair workplaces and better jobs. The ministry will continue to work with student transportation providers to better understand the impacts of the proposed new minimum wage and to support student transportation moving forward.

That's in part why this fall, the Province will be launching an engagement on a renewed vision for student transportation. The goal is to develop a renewed vision that focuses on the needs of students, families, schools and communities. We hope you will add your voice and ideas to this important dialogue in the coming months.

I would like to thank you for your continued commitment to providing high-quality student transportation services that families across the province rely on. Please accept my best wishes for a safe and happy school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MH' with a stylized flourish.

Mitzie Hunter, MBA
Minister