

Trillium Lakelands school trustees share frustration with Ford's school plan

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Parents are not alone in their frustration with how the province is handling back to school preparations.

Although they appreciate the financial support provided to this point, Trillium Lakelands District School Board trustees are sending a letter to the Ministry of Education outlining concerns and frustrations.

The motion was put forward by trustee David Morrison during the Aug. 18 special meeting held to discuss the board's budget - that included using \$5 million in reserves as per approval by the province to cover COVID-19 related costs - and back to school plans.

Morrison expressed frustration with how the province has most recently dealt with the pandemic that he said "could have been managed in a different way."

"It seems that the responsibility is coming down to families to navigate through something that should have been managed back several layers in the political process," said Morrison.

He suggested it would have been better if the province provided boards with the funding needed to develop plans that supported smaller class sizes, physical distancing and safety protocols.

Instead, he continued, the government has left boards "scrambling" to the "very best we can" and "it's having a huge impact on what these kids are going to face."

"And it's not just the kids. It's the staff. It's families of all the people involved," said Morrison. "For me, I think, as a board, we have an obligation to stand up to this ministry and say 'look, this is not cutting it'... What our kids and our families and our staff deserve is a situation where they feel absolutely safe because they know that we're following things that the health people have recommended. And this government has just not managed it that way. They've managed it in a way that what's a priority is getting everybody back to work, getting everybody back to school, and you guys figure it out."

Trustee John Byrne agreed noting, although the government initially directed school boards to develop their own plans, that's not what followed.

"The government is not giving trustees and administration the opportunity to do what's best for students," said Byrne. "Full day for everyone is not the best system."

Board chair Bruce Reain backed this up by stating the number one concern he's heard from parents relates to class sizes but this option "was taken out of our hands" so the board is essentially doing the best it can.

Copies of the letter will also be sent to the Ontario Public School Boards Association, all school board chairs and local MPPs.