

CONCERNS RAISED OVER PROPOSED DOWNLOADING OF STUDENT SUPPORTS

PARENTS, STAFF FEEL MOVE WOULD NEGATIVELY IMPACT VULNERABLE YOUTH

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Provincial revisions to health support services for medically fragile students of the Halton District School Board (HDSB) have left parents and staff reeling from the "severe and negative implications."

In late January, Minister of Education Stephen Lecce outlined the government's draft plan to download medical services to education staff this fall.

This move would have a "significant impact" on the board and has the potential to affect students beyond special education, said Colette Ruddock, HDSB superintendent of

education, during a presentation for the board's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) in early February.

Changes to the current delivery model prompted more discussion and questions about risk management, lawsuits, union partners and additional funding during the Feb. 16 HDSB trustees meeting.

Currently, staff from Erinoak Kids provide complex medical support services — such as tube feeding and catheterization — to medically fragile students. Under the proposed plan, such responsibilities would fall to staff, as "delegated by a health-care professional" reads the confidential ministry memo.

Should the revised policy, known as PPM 81, go forward, "in all likelihood, these tasks would fall to our EAs (educational assistants) to provide the

services," said Ruddock.

"It is unbelievable to me that the ministry would recommend that we actually remove trained health-care professionals who currently come into our schools and provide support to our medically fragile students and students with various medical conditions, and put this incredible responsibility onto our educational assistants who already have a great deal of work and responsibility," commented Oakville trustee Joanna Oliver.

To ensure that students with medical supports have access to an EA, there would be a redistribution of EAs, which will draw from the service available to students with significant special education needs, said Ruddock.

The government proposal is ethically and morally inappropriate, said Alison Brindle, chair of



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HDSB's SEAC.

In her response letter to Lecce, Brindle references revisions that would allow medical professionals to delegate their tasks to non-medical staff, and "for the system to require educational assistants to undertake services which are not in their job descriptions, they have not been medically trained for and which may impact the life of a student."

Staff also envision inequity in service as some families may hire private healthcare professionals for OT, physiotherapy and speech-language therapy, potentially disrupting a school community as prin-

cipals make attempts to accommodate the time and access they require.

"As this PPM covers vital day-to-day and life-saving services to students, it deserves a deeper discussion and analysis," said HDSB chair Margo Shuttleworth in her written feedback to Lecce.

Shuttleworth also addressed the "lack of additional funding" to cover the sweeping changes.

"If educational assistants will be pulled from the classrooms to provide medical care for students, and administrators required to oversee private care providers in school settings, and ensure compliance with all regulations, additional staff will be required to undertake existing tasks," stated Shuttleworth.

Staff are not healthcare providers, and principals are not in the business of organizing healthcare professionals, said Milton trustee Heather Gerrits.

"We are educators; we are in the business of educating. I'm very disappointed that this would even be put in writing."

INPUT SOUGHT FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD BUDGET

The Halton District School Board is encouraging students, staff and the community to provide input on budget priorities in the development of the 2022-2023 budget. Interested individuals can do so online by March 7 through a questionnaire found on the Budget Input page of the HDSB's website, www.hdsb.ca

Before providing input, the board suggests individuals review the board's Multi-Year Plan 2020-2024, Special Education Plan and Operational Plan. A key objective of the annual budget process is to align the HDSB's financial resources with these documents.

Community members are also able to delegate to the board of trustees. Please follow the "Delegation By-law" posted on the HDSB website.




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