

EDUCATION MINISTER CRITICAL OF HANDLING OF TEACHER CONTROVERSY

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Toronto Star

The Halton school board has not done enough to address student safety — nor uphold educators' professional standards — in dealing with the continuing controversy of the Oakville high school teacher who wears oversized fake breasts, the province's education minister said in a rare public rebuke.

"Many families in the community have expressed profound concern with the management of this issue," Stephen Lecce said on Dec. 19 at an unrelated news conference, where he was asked about the shop teacher who dons large prosthetic breasts with protruding nipples underneath revealing shirts.

"So we reaffirm our expectation with the school

boards, as employers, that they act in the interests of children and they listen to the voices of families of the kids themselves in various schools, and parents who want their kids to go to school and focus on learning and not have to deal with threats of violence, lockdowns or incidents that are very distracting, and frankly unacceptable, in any school environment in the province."

The situation at Oakville Trafalgar High School made international headlines, sparking protests outside of the school and even bomb threats after photos of the trans teacher appeared online.

Police were stationed at the school, and staff members have received death threats.

Lecce had asked the Ontario College of Teachers to review and "consider



Torstar file photo

Ontario Education Minister Stephen Lecce rebukes school board over handling of teacher dress code controversy.

strengthening" standards, but was told school boards already have the tools they need to do so.

"I do continue to believe that the Halton school

board, which is the employer, has an obligation to ensure that these classrooms are safe and respectful places to learn. Teachers need to uphold the

highest professional standards when they are in front of children," Lecce said.

"I do not believe the board administration has done so to date, and I do believe the Ontario College of Teachers corroborates this principle. It said the board has the necessary authorities to enforce those standards, so I expect them to do so."

The board has cited the human rights code in choosing not to take any action on the matter.

Curtis Ennis, director of education for the Halton District School Board, said in a statement to the Star that "we are sensitive to the toll the ongoing threats continue to have on parents/guardians and students. It is unsettling that anyone would suggest putting the safety of children at risk. We condemn any

messages of hate and violence — it has no place in our schools."

He said "individuals within the (Halton board) have also received multiple death threats in the last number of weeks. But to concede to threats from anonymous sources does not uphold human rights, it undermines and regresses them. Those making the threats are responsible and must be held accountable" and the board is working with police.

"Our commitment to human rights is rooted in the (board's) core values and commitment to each and every student and staff who identifies as a member of an underserved and under-represented group, and our approach is informed by opinions from leading employment law firms with human rights and equity advisers."



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