



# Bluewater District School Board

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February 20, 2026

Paul Dubé, Ombudsman  
Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario  
483 Bay Street  
10th floor, South Tower  
Toronto, ON M5G 2C9

Dear Ombudsman Dubé:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of Bluewater District School Board (BWDSB), we are reaching out to express our steadfast support of the recent [letter you received from the Waterloo Region District School Board](#) (WRDSB). We join our WRDSB peers in requesting that your office review the potential impacts of removing English Ontario public school trustees, which is currently under consideration by the provincial government.

We recognize the pivotal role of the Ontario Ombudsman in examining the policies and actions of governments with respect to fairness, openness, transparency, and accountability. The Minister of Education has stated the intention to remove the role of democratically elected English public school trustees, but that French and Catholic trustees will not be removed.

Like many other school boards across the province, BWDSB coexists with our French and Catholic counterparts in serving the students and families in our communities. Implementing inconsistent governance structures and eliminating the local voices and decision-making powers of English public school trustees creates an uneven playing field rooted in **unfairness and inequity for our students**.

The removal of English public boards of trustees would also result in the **loss of Indigenous representation** where it currently exists. In our district, this includes a vital voice for the communities of Saugeen First Nation and Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, where a spirit of strong partnership and collaboration has been built and fostered over many years.

Additionally, a move by the provincial government to remove English public school trustees would have a **detrimental impact on the student voice** in the affected boards through the loss of student trustees. This is the sole legislated role giving voice to Ontario students in English public schools.

We are deeply concerned that there has been **no formal public consultation** to date on the proposal to remove the role of English public school trustees. This should be of dire concern to your office given your mandate to help keep government and public services accountable, protect the rights of Ontarians, and ensure fairness.

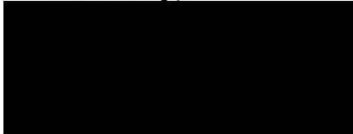
Polls have shown support for the role that trustees play as democratically elected representatives of their communities and reflect skepticism that the proposed governance changes will improve public education. We have already seen that the removal of democratically elected trustees at school boards currently under supervision has resulted in fewer open public meetings, which can lead to less accountability.

We respect the important role of the Ombudsman as an arm's length independent officer of the legislature committed to investigating matters of the public interest. A healthy democracy is one that is built on transparency and reflects, not bypasses, the voices and concerns of its constituents. Any changes to current governance models should not occur prior to a fulsome and inclusive discussion that captures the viewpoints of students, families, school boards, staff, partners, and others bearing the impact of such a sweeping structural shift.

Given the time sensitive nature of the Minister of Education's plans for a decision on this matter, we urge you to prioritize a formal review to help ensure that any new government-initiated rollouts are measured, evidence-based, and truly reflective of the best interests of our students.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to our grave concerns.

Sincerely,



Jane Thomson  
Chair



Jan Johnstone  
Vice-Chair

cc: The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario  
The Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Education  
Abram Benedict, Ontario Regional Chief  
Paul Vickers, MPP, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound  
The Honourable Lisa Thompson, MPP, Huron-Bruce  
Alex Ruff, MP, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound  
Ben Lobb, MP, Huron-Bruce  
Ontario Public School Boards' Association and Member Boards  
Local Municipal Councils  
Local Chiefs and Councils

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Sent by email: [paul.calandra@pc.ola.org](mailto:paul.calandra@pc.ola.org)

February 20, 2026

The Honourable Paul Calandra  
Minister of Education

Dear Minister Calandra:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of Bluewater District School Board, we are writing to request that a formal province-wide consultation process be developed and implemented before any decision occurs that would eliminate English public school board trustees.

It is imperative that this process would seek input from students, parents, staff, and community members and include a thorough discussion of research concerning the pros and cons of eliminating local English public school trustee representation, while also promoting open dialogue and two-way conversations.

We are deeply concerned by the lack of consultation to date with those who would bear the long-term impacts of such a significant decision. English public school trustees serve the largest group of students, parents, staff, and community members in the province, all of whom stand to lose a local trustee representative and advocate. This loss of advocacy and voice means that these constituents and the school boards serving them will have no recourse or ability to share meaningful input on directives issued by the Ministry of Education at the local level.

The importance of locally based decision-making that is reflective of the unique needs of the community cannot be understated and warrants further discussion. Any proposed governance model changes should be evidence-based and only occur following comprehensive consultation with a diverse range of voices and partners. This is especially critical in a rural and geographically vast board such as ours, where some of our most vulnerable students have benefitted greatly from the advocacy of local trustees. In addition to removing these long-standing vital links between trustees and their communities, public meetings that promote government transparency and accountability would also be eliminated should this decision move ahead.

We welcome the opportunity to engage and collaborate with you and your government to ensure a path forward that is reflective of the best interests of our students. Thank you in advance, and we eagerly await your response on this timely matter.

Sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Jane Thomson.

Jane Thomson  
Chair

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Jan Johnstone.

Jan Johnstone  
Vice-Chair

cc: The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario  
Abram Benedict, Ontario Regional Chief  
Paul Vickers, MPP, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound  
The Honourable Lisa Thompson, MPP, Huron-Bruce  
Alex Ruff, MP, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound  
Ben Lobb, MP, Huron-Bruce  
Ontario Public School Boards' Association  
All English Public School Boards in Ontario  
Local Municipal Councils  
Local Chiefs and Councils  
School Council Chairs

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