

## Delegation to Bruce County Council

### Re: Bluewater District School Board Correspondence – Review and Formal Consultation

Good morning, Warden Charbonneau and Members of County Council,

My name is Jan Johnstone. I serve as Vice Chair of the Bluewater District School Board and as the English-language public school trustee representing the Municipality of Kincardine and the Township of Huron-Kinloss.

I have had the privilege of serving as an elected trustee for more than 20 years. My three daughters attended school in Ripley, and two graduated from Kincardine District Senior School. Like many families across Bruce County, public education matters deeply to me. It is not only something I represent professionally — it is something I have experienced as a parent and remain strongly committed to as a member of this community.

I also serve as First Vice-President of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. OPSBA represents 31 English public district school boards and 10 public school authorities across Ontario, serving nearly 1.4 million students — about two-thirds of students in Ontario's publicly funded education system.

Under the current *Education Act*, the provincial government is required to consult with school board associations on matters affecting public education legislation. However, proposed changes in Bill 101, the *Putting Students First Act*, would significantly restructure aspects of school board senior administration, shift important financial accountability responsibilities away from elected trustees, and could affect the ability of provincial associations like OPSBA to continue representing school boards and school authorities collectively in that consultation role.

Like many public systems, education governance can always improve. But meaningful reforms should be shaped by the people they affect. A province-wide consultation — including students, parents, educators, municipalities, and community partners — would help ensure governance modernization reflects both current realities and future needs.

Specifically, I am asking that Bruce County Council support the important role of elected school board trustees and request legislative committee hearings, as well as a province-wide consultation process before decisions are made about changes to trustee responsibilities.

On **February 20, 2026**, municipal clerks across the Bluewater District School Board region received correspondence from **Chair Jane Thomson and myself as Vice Chair** requesting municipal awareness and support regarding this issue.

I would also like to acknowledge the Town of Saugeen Shores and the Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula, which have already passed resolutions supporting this request. Their leadership — along with that of many municipalities across Ontario — helped ensure trustees continue to serve as locally elected representatives in their communities. Bruce County's voice would be an important regional addition.

Residents across Bruce County rely on elected trustees to advocate for students and reflect the priorities of our diverse rural communities. Trustees help maintain accountability, transparency, and strong local representation for families within Ontario's publicly funded education system.

Legislation recently introduced at Queen's Park continues to recognize this advocacy role for trustees. It does not eliminate trustees, but it does establish a framework that could significantly reshape their responsibilities. That is exactly why meaningful consultation must occur before further changes are considered.

The role of the elected school trustee predates Confederation in this country. I would not suggest that the system is perfect, or that change should not occur. However, thoughtful consultation would allow us to address emerging challenges together and strengthen public education governance for the students still to come.

Your support would help ensure Bruce County residents are included in this important provincial conversation.

Thank you for your leadership and your service to residents across Bruce County. I would be pleased to answer any questions.