"Better Call Paul" Campaign

Parents and disability advocates are saying that recent provincial takeovers of several Ontario school boards are making it harder for students with special learning needs to get the support they require.

In June, Education Minister Paul Calandra placed four school boards, including the Toronto District School Board, under supervision, citing concerns about financial mismanagement. While the province says the move is about restoring accountability, families say it has removed an essential advocacy channel for students with disabilities.

Speaking at Queen's Park, Julia Evangelisto, co-founder of Ontario Parents for Education Support, described the impossible position families are now placed in: "For years now, parents of students with disabilities have been stuck in the middle of conflicting messages," she said. "School boards say the province isn't giving enough money…The province says boards are getting more than ever, and families like ours, we're standing in the crossfire, forced to fight for our kids' basic rights."

With trustees suspended, many families say there is no one left within the system who can intervene when a student falls through the cracks. Trustees have traditionally played a critical role in solving urgent problems brought forward by parents.

Bruce McIntosh, board member and founding president of the Ontario Autism Coalition, said the change has handed unprecedented control to the minister.

Advocates have now launched a new campaign urging parents who are struggling to get help in their school to contact Calandra directly, coining the phrase "You better call Paul." As McIntosh explained: "Tell him how your school is not meeting your child's disability-related learning needs. Tell him what to order your school board to do to fix this."

The province maintains that supervision is necessary, arguing that trustees "failed to listen to parents and communities." Calandra's office noted that special education funding has risen by 36% over the past seven years, with more than 4,000 new education assistants hired since 2018.

However, advocates stress that funding is separate from representation. Evangelisto said parents are now left to navigate an overwhelming system with no structural support, resulting in more children being left unsupported in the classroom.

Source:

1. https://www.ctvnews.ca/toronto/politics/queens-park/article/better-call-paul-advocates-say-students-with-special-learning-needs-left-behind-by-school-board-takeovers/

For more information on the topics discussed or questions, please contact us at info@nydp.ca

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