



For Immediate Release  
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# York Region District School Board Repeats Ford Autism Cuts

## Specialized School to Close — Students to Lose Therapy

The York Region District School Board, on an initiative by Director Louise Sirisko, has announced its intention to close Giant Steps, a school that delivers a unique combination of teaching, therapy, and inclusion for children with autism.

The students who attend the specialized school will be moved to regular special needs classrooms where they will no longer receive life-changing therapy as a regular part of their school day routine. This move echoes the Ford government's 2019 cuts to services for children with autism, which moved to a one-size-fits-all scheme which fails to meet the needs of children at the high-needs end of the autism spectrum.

The Board continues to ignore a Freedom of Information request filed by the school community in March 2020, which asked for documentation of any studies or assessments that would support such a move. After six months of stonewalling on the request, parents have concluded that the delay constitutes a refusal to respond to the request and have appealed to the Privacy Commissioner.

"The Board failed to make any attempt to communicate concerns," said Martin Buckingham, Chair of Giant Steps' Board of Directors. "They actually said that closing the school fulfilled their policy of 'Empowering Ethical Leadership' ...feel free to connect the dots on that if you can. They didn't even consult with the school board's own Special Education Advisory Committee. They said 'bang, you're done,' just like that."

"The school board told us this had something to do with 'equity' and that's ridiculous," says Alex Repetski, whose daughter attends Giant Steps. "We should be lifting kids up, not knocking them down to the lowest common denominator. My daughter is at Giant Steps because the regular placement didn't work for her, and I'm really scared for her future if she has to go back to that."

Parents will try to change the school board decision in a deputation to the Board of Trustees on Tuesday, September 22. The meeting will be streamed online, and parents will be available for comment afterward.

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