



**North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce**

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Via E-mail  
May 27, 2009

Dear School Board Trustee:

As you are aware, the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce is very concerned about the decision to commence the upcoming 2009-2010 school year prior to Labour Day. We are also very concerned about the fact that, even after repeated requests to meet with the four boards beginning in April 2009, we were denied the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the issue prior to your submissions being made to the Ministry of Education.

Along with numerous other Ontario groups and organizations, the Chamber of Commerce believes that the decision to begin the school year prior to Labour Day weekend will negatively impact an already fragile tourism industry in Ontario. In fact, several southern Ontario hotel associations have had an opportunity to provide input, thus leading to the decision by school boards in their areas to begin school following Labour Day. Additionally, the Bracebridge Chamber of Commerce was also provided with the opportunity to meet with their school boards to voice their concerns. Subsequently, the school board in their area reversed its initial decision and chose to begin school following Labour Day. It is also my understanding that the Ministry of Education has written each board in the province, requesting that boards reconsider their decision with respect to a pre-Labour Day school start date. Moreover, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation supports the Ministry's position and opposes an early start, for reasons set out in this letter. At the root of the concern surrounding a pre-labour day school start date is a belief that such a decision would have a deleterious impact on Ontario's tourism industry and its operators.

With numerous precedents throughout the province, the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce finds it tremendously discouraging, given the pivotal role played by tourism in our region, that, to this point, our requests to meet, in an effort to find some resolution to this situation, have been roundly rebuked by the four school boards in Nipissing. At the risk of reemphasizing the obvious, the economy at present is very fragile, and tourism - a discretionary spending item - is clearly one of the most vulnerable sectors of the economy. To refuse to meet to discuss the concerns of the Chamber of Commerce is distressing to tourism operators, who are effectively, as a result of your scheduling decision, being asked to forfeit at least a portion of revenues from one out of

only four long weekends throughout the summer season. Given the current economic challenges, the Chamber of Commerce is at a loss to understand why our repeated requests to meet with respect to this issue were ignored.

I would like to provide you with a timeline of our communications leading up to the writing of this letter:

- April 9 - The North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce, representing almost 900 member businesses and more than half of the entire labour force in our area, unanimously passed a resolution requesting that our local school boards reconsider their decisions regarding the school start date and initiate a proper consultation process to investigate alternatives.
- April 21 - The North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce sent a letter to the four area school boards requesting a meeting to discuss the issue.
- April 29 - Since we had not received a response to our letter from any of the boards, we sent a follow up email requesting some form of communication from the boards.
- May 12 - Again, since we had not received a response to our letter or our April 29 email from any of the boards, we sent a follow up email requesting that the Boards at least call to discuss the issue.
- May 13 - We received a letter from the Chair of the Nipissing Parry Sound Catholic School Board indicating that they had met with their coterminous boards and had decided to maintain the current Ministry-approved calendar for the next school year.
- May 13 - We received an email from the Director of Education of Conseil scolaire public du Nord-Est de l'Ontario, indicating that they didn't feel it would be to the students' advantage to make changes at this point.

As I am sure you can appreciate, this process was quite frustrating and confusing. The Chamber of Commerce wanted to meet with a group of elected officials to discuss an issue of importance and we were not provided with the opportunity. In fact, our request for a meeting was completely ignored by all four boards. This in and of itself is cause for concern. After all, this type of consultation and input should be, in our view, the hallmark of a democratically-elected, local government.

However, putting that aside for a moment given the importance of the issue at hand, let us remember that other boards throughout Ontario have elected to change their initial decisions regarding school start dates or, alternatively, boards had previously set a school start date following Labour Day.

In an effort to find some resolution to the current impasse, on May 17, the Chair of the Near North District School Board contacted me and offered to call a meeting to discuss the issue. Following a conversation held on May 26 with the Director of Education for the Near North District School Board, a meeting has been scheduled for June 3 at 1:00 p.m. at the NNDSB office. To my understanding, the Chair has invited the Directors of Education and Chairs of each school board. The Chamber of Commerce will also be represented.

Given the importance of this issue and given the unfortunate manner in which the issue has been handled to date, I am writing to request that you personally avail yourself of the facts with respect to how this scheduling decision is anticipated to impact our tourism industry. I respectfully request that you consider the information contained in this letter and other information available to you. Moreover, I would encourage you to communicate your position on this matter to your Board Chair at your earliest possible convenience, and most preferably in advance of the June 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of Chairs and Directors. Given the number of perfectly acceptable options available to deal with the board scheduling conflicts, it would be inappropriate and unfair for our tourism operators to singlehandedly shoulder the burden from the almost certain fallout that will emanate from this scheduling decision, should the *status quo* be maintained.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (705) 497-8991, should you wish amplification or elaboration of any of the foregoing.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Regards,  
NORTH BAY AND DISTRICT  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Sean Lawlor  
President

cc: Ministers Smith and Wynne