

'Supervision isn't necessary': York's Catholic school board tells Ontario's education minister it can deal with its problems

Minister of Education Paul Calandra, who threatened provincial takeover of the board, is reviewing YCDSB's response.



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The York Catholic District School Board, in a special meeting on Feb. 10, discussed a threat by Ontario's education ministry to place the board under direct provincial supervision. The board's written response to the ministry was not released. Mike Barrett Metroland file photo

We're fine now, so there's no need for the province to intervene, the York Catholic District School Board told Ontario Education Minister Paul Calandra and its own supporters Tuesday night.

On Jan. 28, Calandra put the YCDSB "on notice" the ministry will seize control of the board if it doesn't respond "appropriately" to its financial and governance concerns within 14 days.

As the deadline loomed, the board responsible for 50,000 students held a special meeting on Feb. 10 to assure Calandra, parents and staff its future is well in hand.

"Supervision isn't necessary," Jennifer Sarna, interim director of education, said.

The YCDSB promised its trustees would receive more governance training by June, but did not present any change to its latest financial recovery plan, which chief financial officer Calum McNeil said is on track to wipe out the board's accumulated deficit by 2031.

McNeil also said the YCDSB has contingency plans to balance the budget that were not previously requested by the ministry.

Calandra, however, has included the recovery plan — submitted last August and still not approved by the ministry — in his "serious financial concerns" about the board.

"High-risk financial assumptions in the board's financial recovery plan, along with an alarming revolving door in leadership and ongoing governance issues, have raised doubts about the YCDSB's ability to balance its budget and put students first," the ministry's Jan. 28 announcement stated.

Calandra threatened to have a provincial supervisor take over the board's operations and sideline elected trustees, as the ministry has done with several other boards.

The board sent a written response to Calandra before the meeting, but did not release it or allow trustees at the meeting to discuss its contents.

This is because the response contains confidential information the YCDSB cannot release without the ministry's consent, spokesperson Mark Brosens said in a statement Wednesday.

Board chair Maria Iafrate acknowledged the quick turnover of previous YCDSB education directors, but said Sarna has 35 years of experience and the trust of board staff.

Sarna and Iafrate said the board continues to produce academic excellence, with test scores and a graduation rate among the best in Ontario.

"Catholic school trustees are essential for keeping Catholic schools Catholic," Iafrate said.

"This is not work you can outsource or replace with ministerial oversight."



Children and staff of the York Catholic District School Board were featured in a video screened during a special board meeting on Feb. 10, 2026. The board was responding to criticisms from Ontario's education ministry which could place YCDSB under provincial supervision.

Screengrab York Catholic District School Board

Calandra received the YCDSB's response and is reviewing it to determine next steps, his press secretary, Emma Testani, confirmed on Wednesday.

Some observers at the Catholic Education Centre in Aurora thought the board had announced nothing that would result in a significant change.

"I left feeling like last night was quite performative and for appearances only," said Anna DaCosta Martini, unit president for the board's professional student services personnel.

"They didn't address governance issues and concerns publicly."

She said she expected the ministry to step in.

“I am a big fan of democracy,” said Mike Totten, president of the York Catholic Teachers, part of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association, “but locally, we need our trustees to go away because they don’t understand that role.”

In an interview, Totten, who represents 4,000 YCDSB teachers, said trustees are often involved in operational matters that should be left to staff and have engaged in legal battles which took money out of classrooms.

But a provincial takeover of the board wouldn’t fix its issues either, he said, arguing the government shares blame for YCDSB’s situation because it isn’t investing enough in education.

The ministry should send someone to work with trustees rather than choosing supervision, said Totten, adding, “if our trustees stay, I hope this is a learning lesson for them.”