



ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL BOARDS'  
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

**Ontario Public School Boards' Association**  
439 University Avenue, 18th Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 1Y8  
Tel: (416) 340-2540  
Fax: (416) 340-7571  
webmaster@opsba.org  
www.opsba.org

Laurie French  
President

Gail Anderson  
Executive Director

**Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) Brief  
to the Ministry of Education  
re: 2017-18 Education Funding Engagement Guide / Grants for Student Needs**

**January 11, 2017**

Dear Minister Hunter,

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) appreciates the opportunity to share with the Ministry of Education our perspective and comments as the ministry develops the 2017-18 Grants for Student Needs (GSN). Education Funding is one of our Association's multi-year strategic priorities and as such, OPSBA has consulted with our members extensively and sought their input in preparation for this submission.

In November 2016, OPSBA attended the Provincial Education Event that included a specific day dedicated to Education Funding. OPSBA's Director of Finance attended that session as did many other school board representatives, including trustees, business officials and additional board staff. Similar to previous years, OPSBA created its own survey to receive comments and feedback from senior business officials from our member boards. The questions posed included some from the ministry consultation guide but we also asked about local board pressures and specific funding lines. This feedback can be found in Appendix A.

In addition, OPSBA gathered feedback from regional meetings, senior OPSBA staff, trustee work teams, the Indigenous Trustees' Council, community hub leads and funding related matters derived from member boards' advocacy letters.

A consistent message delivered at each of our consultation opportunities was the following: *school boards need more flexibility in order to balance their operating budgets and meet local needs.*

We look forward to discussing this brief with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

Laurie French  
President of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. Together our members serve the educational needs of almost 70% of Ontario's elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA believes that the role of public education is to provide universally accessible education opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds, social or economic status, individual exceptionality, or religious affiliation.

**OPSBA 2017-18 Education Funding Grants for Student Needs (GSN)**

There are consistent and repeated requests that we make annually as part of the GSN consultation. This includes an early announcement of the 2017-18 GSN and Education Program Other (EPO) funding to give boards the necessary time to make responsible budgetary decisions. In addition, we remind the ministry to consider funding requirements for any new legislation or regulation affecting school boards. OPSBA continues to advocate for a full review of the current funding model involving consultation with all stakeholders to ensure that the model meets the current & future needs of all students in the province. With that in mind, we have identified several funding lines or areas of advocacy that we believe require immediate attention.

**Key Areas/Funding Lines of Advocacy**

<b>Funding Line / Advocacy</b>	<b>Recommendation / Rationale</b>
<b>Local Priorities Grant</b>	<p>Boards continue to stress the need for local flexibility in order to balance their operating budgets and meet local unique cost pressures &amp; needs.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends that the ministry re-establish the Local Priorities Grant. This local priority funding allotment could be used to support specific local board initiatives and funding challenges.</p>
<b>Labour Relations / Collective Bargaining</b>	<p>OPSBA recommends all agreements to be fully funded, including any provision included in contract extensions.</p>
<b>Special Education Grant</b>	<p>Special Education continues to be an area that boards continue to request more supports and resources given the complexities of student needs. This is even more significant in rural and remote areas given geographical distances and the fact that community services and supports are not readily available or easily accessible.</p> <p>OPSBA and its member boards continue to monitor and track the impact of the phased-in Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount (formerly High Needs Amount) to ensure adequate supports and services for all special education students. OPSBA recommends the ministry assist school boards to continue to help parents/communities understand the funding elements of special education.</p> <p>Boards indicated that Special Incidence Portion (SIP) claims are not fully funded. OPSBA recommends this be investigated by the ministry.</p> <p>All boards have taken Syrian refugees (and other newcomer students) into their communities. These students often arrive with very high needs that are taking a toll on existing resources. It is recommended that dedicated funding be</p>

	<p>developed outside of the special education envelope that reflects the on-going specialized needs of refugees.</p> <p>Boards have also requested more special education funding supports for those in rural and remote areas as community resources are scarce or non-existent.(see above)</p> <p>Concern has been expressed by member boards that there are too many specific grants under this broad category. Boards would like the flexibility to move dollars to meet local challenges. It is overwhelmingly agreed that more funding needs to be directed to special education supports and programs.</p>
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<p><b>Children and Youth Mental Health</b></p>	<p>OPSBA is strongly supportive of the government's 10-year Comprehensive Provincial Strategy on Mental Health and Addictions. In addition, OPSBA has and will continue to provide feedback to the consultation regarding the province's Well-Being Strategy for Education.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends the ministry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continue to provide funding to effectively implement Mental Health Literacy supports K-12, incorporating on-going training for all staff working directly with children and youth in schools;</li> <li>• continue to ensure that in years 4-10 of the government's comprehensive strategy, the gains and funding for children and youth mental health are sustained and expanded as required;</li> <li>• maintain the ASSIST coaching support to continue to support all school boards with mental health leads;</li> <li>• provide funding support for school-wide promotion of positive social and emotional development to strengthen mental health literacy among children and youth themselves;</li> <li>• provide a core of sustainable funding to Kids Help Phone for children and youth mental health;</li> <li>• provide an increase in the number of mental health workers and registered nurses in schools across the province especially in northern and remote areas; and</li> <li>• continue to support Working Together for Kids Mental Health in all communities in the province.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>French As A Second Language (FSL)</b></p>	<p>OPSBA recommends the government undertake a comprehensive provincial review of FSL opportunities with a focus on teacher availability issues in an effort to alleviate significant school board pressures and to more accurately reflect the current reality of parent/guardian choice in a plurilingual society.</p> <p>School boards have been struggling with providing opportunities for student and parent choice for FSL options that the Ministry still categorizes as "optional". Issues relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• significant accommodation pressures causing multiple boundary changes leading to a lack of predictability for families;</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inability to recognize French Immersion as a rationale for Capital projects;</li> <li>• significant transportation costs not recognized for this "optional program";</li> <li>• a lack of sufficient numbers of qualified French teachers at both the elementary and secondary level as well as French language ECE's and support staff;</li> <li>• limiting Core French to only 600 hours of instruction which begins in Grade 4 rather than starting earlier in Grade 1;</li> <li>• maintaining English track viability in dual track schools; and</li> <li>• relocating English track students out of neighbourhood schools to accommodate French immersion.</li> </ul> <p>These issues are leading school boards to make decisions that limit access to the programs that parents want for their children and creating unnecessary tension between parents and school boards. This is leading to solutions that no one wants, (e.g. caps, lotteries, changes to the percentage of instructional time for French Immersion classes), but have become necessary for the benefit of all students and their families.</p>
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<p><b>New Generation Education</b></p>	<p>OPSBA recommends the continued investment of \$36.4 million through the technology &amp; learning fund to enrich the classroom experience for students through access to tools and software, and to strengthen professional learning for educators who will use technology and digital resources to enhance student engagement, learning and achievement. These monies and future investments will allow school boards to ensure that technology in schools is current and relevant for the various student pathways.</p> <p>Regarding broadband, OPBSA recommends the government continue the work of its Broadband Modernization Program to ensure there is equity of access for all school boards across the province. More comments on this can be found in Appendix A.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends that action and funding be based on a well-articulated vision rather than a “pilot project” approach and that the ministry coordinate efforts with other ministries to ensure an accessible, equitable technology infrastructure across the province.</p> <p>OPSBA released a document entitled A Vision for Learning and Teaching in a Digital Age in 2013. This document was a call to action regarding the development of a provincial vision.</p> <p>OPSBA supports the recent CRTC announcement that it “has established a universal service objective that Canadians – in rural and remote areas as well as in urban centres – should have access to voice services and broadband Internet access services on fixed and mobile wireless networks.” The CRTC also announced that “it is setting up a fund to for projects in areas that don’t meet these targets.” OPSBA will be encouraging the Ministry of Education to explore the details on this fund that can be shared with member boards.</p>
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<p><b>First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education Supplement</b></p>	<p>OPSBA recommends the government consult with the sector, including OPSBA's Indigenous Trustees' Council, on appropriate qualifications for Indigenous teachers and support staff (including teachers and instructors of Indigenous languages), and the recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends that the FNMI Education Supplement be reviewed to ensure that it can adequately support the needs of Indigenous students, while also meeting its stated objective of increasing the knowledge and awareness of all students about Indigenous cultures, histories, traditions, perspectives and contributions.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends that the calculation of fees regulation that determines the per-pupil amount to be paid by First Nations in tuition agreements be revised to take into account provincial revenues received from Indigenous taxpayers living on reserve.</p> <p>OPSBA is committed to our Indigenous students, their families and our schools by supporting the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).</p>
<p><b>Student Transportation Grant</b></p>	<p>OPSBA recommends the ministry establish a working group to thoroughly review the issues expressed by school boards. This could follow the findings from the current formal investigation being conducted by the Office of the Ombudsman.</p>
<p><b>School Board Administration and Governance Grant</b></p>	<p>OPSBA recommends that additional funds be directed to this line to prepare for changes as a result of the <i>Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act</i> and the frameworks that are to be created. This will result in funding changes for Directors of Education and Superintendents.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends a modest increase in the allotment for trustee compensation. We are currently reviewing the regulation governing honoraria and will be suggesting amendments to make it more equitable and respectable.</p>
<p><b>Before-and-After-School Programming for 6-12 year olds.</b></p>	<p>The expansion of before-and-after school care from JK to Grade 6 will be a significant undertaking for school boards and the number of students involved will dramatically increase. Early Learning Leads at school boards have been working with their municipal counterparts but this requires additional time and possibly more staff. Some school boards have a dedicated Superintendent (and perhaps staff) for this portfolio while many other boards have staff with many areas of responsibility.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends additional funding be directed to school boards for the implementation and management of this expansion of before-and-after-school</p>

	<p>care.</p> <p>This expansion has already sparked discussions concerning shared space and extra costs incurred by the increase in the use of common spaces by multiple groups. OPSBA recommends the government establish a working group to review shared space to highlight opportunities and remove barriers.</p>
<p><b>School Facility Operations and Renewal Grant (including top-up funding)</b></p>	<p>Many boards have noted their struggles with the complete elimination in top-up funding. This seems to be putting extraordinary pressure on boards to close all “excess” space and even remove some programs from having dedicated space in schools.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends the ministry review the current plan which is to completely eliminate top-up funding.</p>
<p><b>Capital Funding</b></p>	<p>OPSBA recommends the ministry review the current education development charges regulation to allow boards more flexibility in terms of capital funding.</p> <p>In terms of overall capital &amp; renewal funding there are school board(s) dealing with very unique circumstances and as a result are challenged with capital and renewal costs for their aging schools. Many schools have needs that are serious and urgent impacting the ability to meet current program requirements including funding to adapt or change classrooms that are no longer relevant or being used. Action must be taken to best serve the interests of students.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends the ministry continue to consult with school boards regarding capital funding especially in view of developments with respect to community hubs.</p>
<p><b>Community Hubs</b></p>	<p>OPSBA recommends that six regional “community hubs coordinator” positions be created across the province to support and facilitate local public organizations, including school boards, in finding suitable partners. The coordinators would be knowledgeable regarding the types of agreements, policies and committees that come into play in the development of successful hubs across the province.</p> <p>Our feedback has recommended that proactive pre-planning and a multi-year funding stream would make the greatest impact. Valid costs for recovery should include cleaning, maintenance, and facility renewal, tied to square foot allocation.</p> <p>The best sort of synergy occurs when school boards and partners are able to pre-plan space and layout in new school builds, or potentially in concert with additions to existing buildings. This kind of planning would require reliable multi-year capital and operational funding and leadership from the government.</p>

<b>Northern Boards</b>	<p>Minister Hunter met with representatives from OPSBA's Northern Boards on December 2, 2016 to discuss supports for student graduation as this is a significant issue for these school boards.</p> <p>In our letter (dated December 9, 2016), OPSBA identified several specific recommendations for consideration concerning the North (some of which, may be of benefit to all boards.) These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funding to provide a graduation coach in every secondary school in the North</li><li>• The ministry address the loss in "top up" dollars in the North where schools cannot be closed due to severe community impacts</li><li>• Differentiated staffing formulas for Northern school boards to lower classroom ratios</li><li>• Increase in-school specialized supports for students (social workers, child and youth workers, special education staff, mental health workers etc.)</li><li>• Dedicated early intervention teachers and support staff to close the literacy and numeracy gaps</li><li>• Transportation subsidy to support experiential learning opportunities for students in the North</li><li>• Continued and increased support for education programs for indigenous students in the North</li><li>• Continued and increased support of transitions for students (e.g. students in care, in poverty)</li></ul>

## **Appendix A – Summarized feedback from Senior Business Officials**

### ***Q. What are your top 3-5 budget pressure areas that you feel are not currently addressed in an adequate fashion through the GSN?***

The most common areas highlighted by our member boards were: Special Education, Benefit Trust transition funding, Sick Leave/Supply Staffing Costs, Transportation Capital Funding (including facility operations and maintenance) and Professional Development opportunities. Other areas mentioned included: AODA standards and IT Infrastructure.

### ***Q. In recent years OPSBA has advocated for increased special education funding and also a full review of student transportation funding, we want to confirm that these are still significant priorities for our school boards.***

Responses from our member boards indicated that these remain significant budget pressure areas.

### ***Q. Is your board struggling with the implementation of the Board Administration and Governance Funding?***

Most boards have made adjustments to the funding change while some boards commented that they are still adjusting to the phased-in implementation. Many boards have stated that the workload for this group has grown with the increased reporting, committees, reviews etc. Boards also indicated that additional costs for changes to executive compensation must be included.

### ***Q. Is your board struggling with the implementation of the changes to the Special Education High Needs Amount?***

The majority of boards are exceeding the cost of their special needs funding the number of students with significant needs increases. Many boards indicated that the Special Incidence Portion funding was inadequate and needed to be addressed.

### ***Q. Do the majority of your schools have space for new child care rooms? What are the main implications for this?***

This question provided mixed results with some boards indicating that the majority of their schools would not have additional space without an addition to the existing building. Other boards have many schools below capacity and would have room for retrofits. Boards (and their Early Learning Leads) continue to work with their municipal counterparts to plan child care and family needs at the community level. These strategies need to be long term and sustainable.

### ***Q. Do you agree with expanding Specialist High Skills Major programs? Is your board in a position to support the government's plan to improve flexibility and access for Adult Education?***

Boards were supportive of expanding the Specialist High Skills Major programs but were adamant that this was done equitably to ensure all students had access. These programs require a multi-year commitment and staffing. With regards to Adult Education, boards are supportive but would like to see a more defined provincial strategy. Schools boards' focus continues to increase with child care centres in schools, before and after school care and adult education. Any funding to increase Adult Education should not compromise funding for K-12.

### ***Q. Do you have schools that lack broadband capacity? How would you like to see the Technology and Learning Fund (TLF) funding be used?***

Some boards indicated they did have broadband capacity issues in their more remote schools. Boards indicated that they wanted to make their funding decisions locally. Boards would also appreciate acknowledgement for the work done previously, with their own resources, to provide appropriate bandwidth to their schools. Those boards with schools not part of the Wave 1 pilot (or future waves), should be compensated with funding to support local IT needs.