



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

Michael Barrett
President

Gail Anderson
Executive Director

January 21, 2015

Soo Wong, MPP and Chair
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Katch Koch, Clerk
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
E-mail: kkoch@ola.org

Dear Ms. Wong and Mr. Koch,

Re: 2015 Pre-Budget Consultations

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents the province's 31 public district school boards. Together our members serve the educational needs of almost 70% of Ontario's elementary and secondary students. In addition to advocacy on behalf of Ontario students, our Association provides services to school boards and to school trustees who are elected to public office through Municipal elections or are appointed as First Nation trustees. We are an organization that has a strong history of advocacy for student achievement and well-being and take pride in the contributions we have made to the shaping of education policy in Ontario.

The following submission has also been shared last month with the Ministry of Education as part of our Association's brief regarding their consultation process for the 2015-16 Grants for Student Needs (GSN).

OPSBA would like to bring to the attention of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs these additional comments and concerns with respect to the funding model.

School boards would appreciate an **early announcement** of the 2015-16 GSN to allow them to make effective local decisions.

OPSBA recognizes that in recent years the Ministry has reviewed and updated several components of the funding model such as board administration funding and special education funding. 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 needs of all students in the province.

OPSBA anticipates that any **collective agreements will be fully funded**.

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Submission re: 2015 Pre-Budget Consultations

Special education funding continues to be one of the primary areas of concern for our school boards. It continues to be important that the special education funding model demonstrate that it is taking into account the growing number of special education students in our schools. Many school boards continue to spend over the enveloped funding levels.

OPSBA recommends that the Ministry of Education continue its work in refining special education data collection.

OPSBA recommends that the Ministry of Education continue to monitor and track the impact of the 4-year phased in high needs amount to ensure adequate supports and services for all special education students. Boards are struggling with gains and losses in funding, as well as the lag between students with special needs being present in the classrooms and being captured under implementation of the Special Education formula. This is particularly noted in FDK.

Funding of **First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education** continues to be a priority. OPSBA appreciates the efforts to ensure that additional funding (outside of the GSN) is provided in the context of an overall Board Plan for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education. It is also recognized that while the collection of demographic data through the voluntary, confidential self-identification policies in boards continue to grow, it is still not close to capturing the full range of information across all boards. In terms of the extra funding, there should be caution about not weighting funding too heavily towards data derived from self-identification until there is a more universal experience with school boards' ability to provide this data.

Funding for Native Students and Native languages is a specific issue that connects to the Grants for Student Needs. OPSBA has frequently heard from First Nations who have Education Services Agreements with school boards, indicating that it is illogical that Native Studies and Native languages are not part of the regular tuition fee but must be paid for by the First Nation over and above the cost of the basic tuition fee. This provision seems at odds with the intent and principles of Ontario's First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education framework and clarity is needed to address this anomaly.

In terms of provincial-federal relations, we would like to see Ontario continue to advocate for the resolution of inequities in federal education funding for First Nation communities.

A key priority for OPSBA continues to be advocacy for **children and youth mental health**, which aligns with the expectation for school boards of "promoting student achievement and well-being" and is strongly reflected in the Ministry of Education's renewed vision for education. OPSBA is strongly supportive of the government's continued implementation of the Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. OPSBA understands the need for an initial phased in implementation plan to support the full continuum of services for students and families that includes mental health literacy, promotion of positive social-emotional development, prevention of mental health problems, intervention services and clear pathways to care. It is vital to recognize that investing in children's mental health and well-being is an investment in Ontario's future sustainability and prosperity.

OPSBA recommends that the Ministry of Education continue to include in the GSNs or EPO grants provision for the multi-year phased-in approach to support a full continuum of mental health supports and services. OPSBA's submission strongly supports the various elements of the existing implementation plan and requests that the Ministries involved:

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Submission re: 2015 Pre-Budget Consultations

- continue to provide funding to effectively implement Mental Health Literacy support K-12 incorporating training for all staff working directly with children and youth in schools;
- ensure that in year's 4-10 of the government's comprehensive strategy, the gains and funding for children and youth mental health are sustained and expanded as required;
- maintain the ASSIST coaching support to continue to support all school boards with mental health leads;
- provide funding support for school-wide promotion of positive social and emotional development to strengthen mental health literacy among children and youth themselves;
- provide a core of sustainable funding to Kids Help Phone for children and youth mental health
- provide an increase in the number of mental health workers and registered nurses in schools across the province especially in northern and remote areas;
- Continue to support Working Together for Kids Mental Health to all communities in the province.

Mental Health Literacy Support K-12 must continue to align with the Student Support Leadership Initiatives (SSLI) and climate work in each Board to continue to build a culture of caring for all students and to deepen local partnerships with mental health and health organizations to facilitate timely and responsive access to care. It is vital as well that mental health promotion be integrated into existing curriculum in addition to school-wide and community efforts to build resiliency in our students.

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. OPSBA appreciated that this document became a resource to the development of the government's *Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*. The Plan of Action in the *Renewed Vision* calls for a number of progressive steps including investment in the classrooms of the future, in innovative teaching practices and instructional methods enabled by technology, and in increasing opportunities for e-learning. In late summer the government announced its intention to invest \$150 million in learning technology 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.

Our GSN brief to the Ministry last year recommended this kind of action, backed up by funding, and we look forward to consultations with the school board sector on how an integrated funding model will reflect this commitment on the part of the government on a go forward basis. We would further emphasize 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.

The Ministry of Education should monitor **new legislation and regulations** for possible funding implications.

OPSBA continues to hear concerns from many school boards about **student transportation**. The concerns with respect to student transportation include transportation funding, consortia governance, consortia operation and procurement of transportation services. OPSBA is of the view that the concerns with respect to student transportation warrant the establishment of a working group to thoroughly review the concerns expressed by school boards.

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Submission re: 2015 Pre-Budget Consultations

OPSBA continues to hear concerns from school boards about the need for capital funding in the sector. Additionally there are concerns about the current regulation regarding education development charges. We note the commitment to additional capital funding that is detailed in the mandate letter for the Minister of Education which details more than \$11 billion in capital grants over the next ten years. We encourage the Ministry to further consult with school boards regarding capital funding and review the current education development charges regulation.

Finally, we note the commitment in the mandate letter for the Minister of Education to work with other ministries to consult with stakeholders and develop a policy that supports the development of community hubs. The development of community hubs is a matter that is of significant importance to our school boards and OPSBA looks forward to being involved in this consultation and supporting the Ministry in the development of a provincial policy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Barrett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Barrett,
President of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association