



**ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION**

Leading Education's Advocates

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January 16, 2018

To: Ann Hoggarth, MPP (Barrie), Chair- Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Eric Rennie, Clerk - Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Re: OPSBA 2018 Pre-Budget Consultation Submission

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.

This document has been also shared with the Ministry of Education as part of our Association's submission to their 2018-19 Education Funding Engagement Guide / Grants for Student Needs (GSN) consultation. Our consultation process included receiving input from trustees, senior OPSBA staff, our Policy Development Work Team, and our Indigenous Trustees Council. In addition, we routinely seek feedback from the Senior Business Officials within our member boards and review funding related advocacy letters and individual submissions from member boards. We continue to request the re-establishment of the Local Priorities Grant to allow school boards the flexibility to support specific local board initiatives and funding challenges.

We believe our recommendations and funding concerns should be discussed among the committee members as they conduct their pre-budget consultations.

Sincerely,

Laurie French
President of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association

OPSBA would like to identify several areas of advocacy that have been expressed to us through our consultation with school boards and school authorities:

Key Areas/Funding Lines of Advocacy

Funding Line / Advocacy	Recommendation / Rationale
<p>Local Priorities Grant</p>	<p>Boards continue to stress the need for local flexibility in order to balance their operating budgets and meet local unique cost pressures and needs. Boards also emphasized that they did not support any additional enveloping of current funding in the GSN.</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> <p>Boards support transparency and accountability and see the re-establishment of this fund as an opportunity to engage with communities and build public confidence.</p>
<p>Special Education Grant</p>	<p>Special Education continues to be an area in which boards request more supports and resources given the complexities of student needs. This is even more significant where 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>It is overwhelmingly agreed that more funding needs to be directed to special education supports and programs.</p>

<p>Children and Youth Mental Health</p>	<p>OPSBA continues to support Ontario's 10-year Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. There needs to be a continued focus on maintaining and expanding the resources and supports to children and youth that are the primary focus of the strategy in years 1 to 3. 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">• continue to provide funding to effectively implement Mental Health Literacy supports for K-12, incorporating on-going training for all staff working directly with children and youth in schools;• 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;• maintain the increased 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, registered nurses in schools and community supports for sufficient pathways to care across the province, especially in northern and remote areas; and• continue to support Working Together for Kids Mental Health in all communities in the province <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 developed outside of the special education envelope that reflects the on-going specialized needs of refugees.</p>
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School Board Administration and Governance Grant	<p>Boards continue to express concern about pressures caused by increased demands for data and information from administrative staff. There is a need to assess the sufficiency of administrative funding. On two specific matters:</p> <p>OPSBA recommends that additional funds be directed to this line to deal with the impact of the <i>Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act</i> and the frameworks that have been created. This will result in funding changes for Directors of Education and Superintendents.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends an increase in the allotment for trustee compensation. We have provided specific feedback to the government through the governance consultation.</p>
Professional Development	<p>Boards highlighted the need for funding of professional development related to new initiatives such as the early learning curriculum and grade 9 de-streaming. Professional development funding should be aligned with new initiatives.</p>
Capital Funding	<p>OPSBA recommends the ministry review the current education development charges regulation to allow boards more flexibility in terms of capital funding. OPSBA recently sent a letter to the Minister of Education asking her to conduct a provincial review of Education Development Charges, to convene a working group to review the current regulation and suggest changes to make it fairer for those boards with pockets of growth that are being unfairly penalized.</p> <p>In terms of overall capital and renewal funding there are school board(s) dealing with very unique circumstances and as a result are challenged with capital and renewal costs related to their aging schools. Many schools have serious and urgent needs that are 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>

School Facility Operations and Renewal Grant	Many boards have noted their struggles with the complete elimination in top-up funding and delays caused by the current PARG review. This has caused additional pressures on school board operating budgets.
Utilities	OPSBA is concerned about cost pressures as a result of an expected increase in rates related to Ontario Power Generation (OPG) and generally increasing transmission & distribution rates.
New Generation Education	<p>OPSBA recommends the continued investment through the technology & 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, OPSBA 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.</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>
French As A Second Language (FSL)	<p>OPSBA is currently leading the FSL Labour Market Partnership Project to research and provide workable solutions for FSL teacher supply and demand issues. OPSBA continues to recommend that 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">• significant accommodation pressures causing multiple boundary changes leading to a lack of predictability for families;• inability to recognize French Immersion as a rationale for Capital projects;• significant transportation costs not recognized for this "optional program";• 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;• limiting Core French to only 600 hours of instruction which begins in Grade 4 rather than starting earlier in Grade 1;• maintaining English track viability in dual track schools; and• relocating English track students out of neighbourhood schools to accommodate French immersion <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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