



**ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL BOARDS'  
ASSOCIATION**

**Leading Education's Advocates**

**Ontario Public School Boards' Association**

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The Honourable Lisa Thompson  
Minister of Education

Dear Minister:

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) would like to take the opportunity to provide our recommendations for the 2019-20 Grants for Student Needs (GSN).

We understand the government's current fiscal environment. However, we wish to convey the real needs and pressures facing school boards. Our submission is based on feedback received from the OPSBA Board of Directors, input from senior staff, and contributions from our member boards through their senior business officials. These needs and pressures take into consideration the connection to the Association's overall priorities - our areas of focus to ensure student achievement and well-being.

In late August, adjustments were made to the GSN and a number of items were put on hold while the government conducted its line-by-line review of provincial spending. OPSBA has been monitoring education-related funding issues and have collated these items, which include:

- Truth and Reconciliation Curriculum Writing Sessions
- Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund
- School Mental Health ASSIST
- Trustee Honoraria
- Parents Reaching Out Grants
- Executive Compensation
- Education Development Charges
- Reduced Special Incidence Portion (SIP) Funding
- Capital Funding

School boards and trustees are eager for these to be resolved soon and respectfully request an early GSN announcement so that they will have the necessary time to make responsible budgetary decisions.

Earlier this week, we released a public statement concerning the government's announcement regarding Education Program Other (EPO) funding: *"We recognize the government's commitment to finding efficiencies across all sectors, including education, and although anticipated, the decrease, or in some cases the elimination of program funding is disappointing. These various programs had a positive impact for students in our system, and school boards are currently reviewing the local impact of this announcement. We continue to strongly advocate for stable public education funding that supports continuous achievement and well-being for all students."*

With regard to Labour Relations and Collective Bargaining, OPSBA recommends that all agreements are fully funded. As a result of the last round of negotiations, our member boards continue to cite cost pressures related to increased sick leave costs. This issue is not listed below as it is not a GSN matter, but it is a critical issue that negatively impacts the budgets for all boards by taking funds that could be used elsewhere to support students and urgently needs to be addressed.

When asked for their top funding concerns and pressures, our member boards overwhelmingly stated that the following three are of the highest priority:

- Special Education and supports for Mental Health
- Student Transportation
- Facilities/Capital-related costs

We would like to expand on these top issues and identify other funding areas that have been expressed to us through our consultation.

**Key Areas/Funding Lines of Advocacy**

Funding Line/Advocacy	Recommendation/Rationale
<p><b>Special Education Grant</b></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 and communities understand the funding elements of special education.</p> <p>Most boards continue to enroll newcomer and refugee students into their schools, with many arriving with very high needs that require additional resources that are not always part of a board's original budget.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated funding be developed outside of the special education envelope that reflects the ongoing specialized needs of these unique students, and that is available for students who arrive during the school year.</li> </ul>

	<p>It is overwhelmingly agreed that more funding needs to be directed to special education supports and programs in order for children and youth to reach their full potential.</p>
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<p><b>Student Transportation</b></p>	<p>Transportation, and all its many challenges, continues to be a complex part of education that does not appear to have a quick fix.</p> <p>OPSBA is aware of the impacts the complicated procurement process has had on small operators and drivers. The list of other transportation issues is extensive and indicative why many challenges remain. This includes: legal action involving consortia, the high turnover rate of bus drivers, low wages for split shift work, the additional funding provided to aid bus driver retention, declining enrolment in many regions, the recent consultations on the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline and Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline, the threat of strikes and service disruptions, and more.</p> <p>Both trustees and senior business officials agreed the top four service issues are: ride times, driver retention, funding, and school bus safety.</p> <p>Many boards continue to overspend their transportation budgets. One recent noteworthy decision affecting one of our member boards could have significant impacts for all other boards in the province. In Eastern Ontario, there was an unexpected increase to student transportation costs as the result of a recent imposed arbitration order. The order follows a review of the business contract between bus owners and the organization that coordinates transportation for both school boards, which is the service consortium known as Student Transportation of Eastern Ontario (STEO).</p> <p>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The ministry reconvene the 2017 working group led by Joan Green and Michel Paulin.</li><li>• Funding and support be given to school boards to meet the demands imposed by arbitration and the actual costs being incurred by school boards.</li></ul>
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<p><b>Capital Funding</b></p>	<p>OPSBA is pleased to see the creation of a working group reviewing the EDC regulation and to be part of stakeholder meetings discussing the issue. It is our hope that revisions to the regulation are made quickly and are reflective of our input.</p>
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	<p>With regard to overall capital and renewal funding there are many school board(s) dealing with very unique circumstances and as a result they are being challenged with capital and renewal costs for their aging schools.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Serious concerns have recently been expressed regarding capital projects being put on hold in cases where costs outside of benchmarks were expected to be funded through board surplus funds. In some cases, tenders may have expired and building costs increased. Where the evidence is clear, schools need to be built to accommodate future population and program growth, such as in French Immersion as well as the elements of a school building beyond classrooms that foster student achievement and well-being.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The ministry continue to consult with school boards regarding capital funding.</li></ul>
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<b>Indigenous Education</b>	<p>One of our Association's multi-year priorities is Advancing Reconciliation – First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sufficient funding be given to cover curriculum resources and staff training to support the implementation of a comprehensive Ontario curriculum. This should contain clear expectations that every Ontario student will acquire knowledge and understanding of Treaties and of the historical context that gave rise to residential schools, the impact on First Nation, Métis and Inuit children and their families, and the ongoing legacy that is the responsibility of all Canadians.</li><li>• The ministry continue to address closing the achievement and graduation rate gap between Indigenous students and non- Indigenous students to ensure success.</li></ul>
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<p><b>Children and Youth Mental Health</b></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 were the primary focus of the strategy in years one to three.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Ministry maintain the increased level of School Mental Health ASSIST infrastructure to support the continued development of evidence-based resources and to support school boards and their mental health leads in implementing effective strategies related to the full continuum of services that includes mental health literacy, promotion of positive social-emotional development, prevention of mental health problems, intervention services and clear pathways to care. For continuity and planning purposes, we recommend the annual funding for School Mental Health ASSIST be enveloped and rolled into the GSN for 2019-20. This will allow for better long term, incremental planning and sustainable impact to school based mental health support and services.</li><li>• Continued funding to effectively implement Mental Health Literacy supports for kindergarten to Grade 12, incorporating ongoing training for all staff working directly with children and youth in schools.</li><li>• Ensuring that in years five to 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>• Providing funding support for school-wide promotion of positive social and emotional development to strengthen mental health literacy among children and youth themselves.</li><li>• Providing 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.</li><li>• Continuing support for Working Together for Kids Mental Health in all communities in the province.</li></ul>
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<p><b>Skilled Trades and Apprenticeships</b></p>	<p>OPSBA sent a submission to the government's Bill 47, Making Ontario Open for Business Act, 2018 and stated our strong support for the amendments that changes the journey person to apprentice ratio for all trades (that are not to exceed one apprentice for each journey person.)</p> <p>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A targeted marketing and communications plan, specifically directed at parents, students, educators and employers, to further elevate skilled trades to an even more respected pathway. There is evidence-based research and data that should be shared that clearly shows there are, and will continue to be, many opportunities for well-paid skilled trade jobs in the future. This is a career pathway that needs to be part of a comprehensive and intentional career exploration strategy from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The earlier students and parents are made aware of these types of career opportunities, the more likely there will be an actual increase in the supply pipeline for apprenticeships in the skilled trades. Waiting until students graduate is too late and negatively implies that these are careers that should be considered only if other pathways are not attainable.</li><li>• The government strongly consider providing relevant opportunities for students, beyond the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), to begin to earn apprenticeship hours while in secondary school, which can then be continued upon graduation with an employer or at the community college level.</li></ul> <p>This will provide an early incentive for students to develop positive attitudes toward the trades, pursue an interest, develop a passion and begin in a very practical way to learn about safety in the workplace. An apprenticeship focus can easily be expanded and integrated into existing vocational school programs and through secondary school experiential and cooperative education programs, as well as Specialist High Skills Majors.</p> <p>This will involve balancing and/or shifting funding levels for commencing an apprenticeship to secondary schools rather than only in post-secondary and employment settings.</p>
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<b>Modern Learning for Today and Tomorrow</b>	<p>As pointed out in the most recent report of the Auditor General, there remain significant disparities in the availability of word up-to-date classroom technology across our province.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continuing investment through the technology and 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. This funding and future investments will allow school boards to ensure that technology in schools is current and relevant for the various student pathways.</li><li>• The government continue the work of the Broadband Modernization Program to ensure there is equity of access for all school boards across the province.</li><li>• Action and funding be based on a well-articulated vision rather than a “pilot project” approach. The ministry should coordinate efforts with other ministries to ensure an accessible, equitable technology infrastructure across the province.</li></ul>
<b>School Facility Operations and Renewal Grant</b>	<p>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.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The ministry remove the moratorium on school closures and release revised guidelines.</li></ul>
<b>Utilities</b>	<p>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 &amp; distribution rates.</p> <p>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The ministry monitor these costs and regularly connect with school boards and school board associations.</li></ul>

<b>Local Priorities Grant</b>	<p>Boards continue to stress the need for local flexibility in order to balance their operating budgets and meet unique local cost pressures and needs. 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>OPSBA recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li></ul>
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*The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public 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.*