



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association

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Cathy Abraham
President

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November 27, 2020

To: Amarjot Sandhu, MPP Brampton West and Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Julia Douglas, Clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
comm-financeaffairs@ola.org

Re: Bill 229, Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020

Dear MPP Sandhu and Members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs,

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) would like to briefly address this legislation and its relation to the contents of the provincial budget. Bill 229, Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020 contains one change to the *Education Act* and that is to consider a regulation to reduce the education portion of certain property subclass taxes and we are reassured by the commitment of the government that this will not have a financial impact on school boards. The recent provincial budget, [Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover](#) delivered by Minister of Finance Rod Phillips did include other items that have an education impact that have generated comments and feedback from our membership. These include:

- The continuation of the "Support for Learners initiative" - These payments are to provide parents and families with funding to support their children during the pandemic with \$200 per child up to 12 years old and \$250 per child and youth with special needs up to 21 years old. Trustees have indicated that not all families are aware of these payments or how to access them. Other challenges for some have been the perception that the steps that are involved in accessing the funds are complicated, and the relatively small amount of the grant. Any process used should be accessible and barrier-free. We would recommend there be work done to increase awareness and access to this initiative.
- The creation of Supply Ontario, a new centralized procurement agency dedicated to sourcing supplies and equipment. We know that this was used early on in our sector for the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the safe return to school. We agree that a centralized procurement could result in cost savings when bulk buying, but feedback from our members includes the need for better distribution processes, especially the ability to service northern Ontario. We would also request to be part of continued dialogue about what supplies and services make sense to purchase centrally and what local contracts should remain in place. The Ministry of Education currently has a Student Transportation Advisory Group and its next area of focus is to be procurement – this has been an area of great discussion in the recent past as it

relates to local communities. We would encourage this consultation to resume as soon as possible, while understand the additional challenges resulting from the pandemic.

- Continued focus on Ontario's Skilled Trades Strategy to promote and modernize Ontario's skilled trades and apprenticeship system. OPSBA supports work that would help break stigmas, simplifying the system and encouraging employer participation. We look forward to the initiatives proposed to attract and retain youth in the skilled trades including support for the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program and the Specialist High Skills Major programs. Our members would like to see more done to break accessibility and equity barriers for students with special needs.
- Investing in the Black Youth Action Plan (BYAP) with additional funding. In particular, OPSBA will follow up with the latest consultation results and the goal of "enhancing educational outcomes for Black children and youth and increasing labour market participation through entrepreneurship and trades."

We have been working with the Ministry of Education and have been informed that a formal engagement regarding next year's Grants for Student Needs (GSN) will soon be shared with the sector.

OPSBA has begun to solicit feedback from its members and we are aware that many boards continue to experience unexpected costs due to COVID-19 and the safe return to school for both students and staff. These costs have included: additional staffing for both teachers and education workers; IT devices for staff and students; HVAC and air ventilation; PPE and cleaning – supplies and caretaker costs; student transportation, and others. OPSBA looks forward to a continued dialogue about these additional costs, as well as the relatively modest growth in Education sector investment projected over the next three years.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cathy Abraham
President
Ontario Public School Boards' Association

cc.

Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister
Jeff Brennan, Director of Stakeholder Relations

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents English 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 is seen as the credible voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.