



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

A Brief to the Ministry of Education

Re: 2016-17 Education Funding
January 27, 2016

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Brief Re: 2016-17 Education Funding

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) would like to provide our perspective and comments as the Ministry of Education undertakes the task of developing the 2016-17 Grants for Student Needs (GSN) and consults the education sector. OPSBA thanks the Ministry of Education for consulting with the sector on these important funding issues.

OPSBA appreciates the Ministry of Education's commitment to consultation with the sector and we note that Ministry staff have met with school boards across the province and held face-to-face discussions with school board association staff. We appreciate as well the face-to-face session that included First Nation trustees. Within OPSBA, we have connected with trustees through our Policy Development Work Team, Executive Council and Board of Directors. In addition, for comprehensive feedback we also independently surveyed our member boards' senior business officials about key questions contained within the consultation guide and questions tied to our education priorities.

A consistent message that we hear from senior business officials is that funding should be stable or at least predictable from year to year and that the GSN should not include surprise reductions that have not been anticipated by the sector for budget planning purposes. Boards continue to stress the need for local flexibility in order to balance their operating budgets and meet local needs.

OPSBA recently sent a letter to the Federal Government supporting the decision to reinstate the mandatory long form census. We realize that the data from the 2016 census will not be available for some time and our suggestion would be to wait for future accurate data before implementing changes to any one funding line (i.e. LOG). We do, however, appreciate that the fastest growing segment of the population for some time has been First Nation communities; if a reliable source of more current data can be identified for this group this should be considered.

The first part of our brief is an overview of the comments and feedback we received from senior business officials with regards to the 2016-17 Education Funding Consultation Guide

Part 1 - 2016-17 Education Funding Consultation Survey

Q. OPSBA's submission last year requested funding commitments for collective agreements, special education, FNMI, children and youth mental health and learning technologies. Do you agree with the continued support for these areas?

Boards' responses indicated continued support for these priorities and emphasized the need for any central collective agreements to be fully funded.

Q. OPSBA also requested a separate working group to review student transportation funding. Would you continue to support this request?

Responses indicated a strong desire to have the current funding formula reviewed with emphasis on the need for adequate funding for transportation to special education programs. OPSBA recommends that the ministry establish a working group to review the transportation funding model that would also include consideration of the findings in the recent Auditor General's report and the pending transportation procurement report.

Q. Last year, all boards balanced their budgets. What were the top 3-5 pressure areas that your board had to reduce their funding for in order to balance the budget?

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Brief Re: 2016-17 Education Funding

Although most areas of expenditure were mentioned, the most common areas of reduction were special education, board administration and school operations. Instructional technology was also highlighted as an area of reduction by some boards.

Q. Does your board struggle with capital funding?

The responses highlighted the varied needs of school boards. Most boards highlighted renewal needs as still a high priority. New capital needs seemed to be dependent on whether a board was experiencing growth. The most common response referenced the fact that boards are still playing catch-up on ongoing capital needs.

Q. Would your board support a change to the Ontario Regulation 20/98 - Education Development Charges that will allow funds to be directed to repairs and other capital needs?

Responses indicated mixed support for changes to the current regulation. Comments emphasized that whatever changes may happen that EDCs should only be used for capital needs.

Q. What are the main ways your board is finding efficiencies and savings?

Responses highlighted automation of processes, closure of surplus school space, joint purchasing consortia, energy conservation, redesign of programs and alternative revenue sources.

Q. Should a new facility utilization rate be developed to include both school and community use of space?

Responses were mixed. Some boards wish to have a more explicit identification of "community use" so as to better understand the impact on facility utilization rate. OPSBA recommends that this be part of the community hubs discussion.

Q. Has your board updated its ARC process to reflect the new Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline?

All responses received indicated that boards have updated their process and policy.

Q. The government has suggested a possible need to revisit the demographic component of LOG through a technical advisory group -- Do you agree?

Responses indicated a need to update the LOG calculation based on current census data. Boards also emphasized the need to maintain flexibility in the use of LOG funding.

Q. What other data sources should be available for education funding calculations?

Responses referenced FNMI self-identification, social-economic data and emphasized the need to keep data current.

Q. Can reporting back to the ministry be more streamlined?

Responses indicated ongoing concern with reporting requirements related to EPO funding and other Transfer Payment Agreements. There were comments that indicated a good level of dialogue between board and Ministry staff on this matter and the fact that some progress is being made in terms of streamlining reporting processes.

Q. Are there opportunities for Education Program – Other (EPO) funding to be bundled to help reduce reporting requirements? Are there opportunities to move any of this funding into the GSN?

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Brief Re: 2016-17 Education Funding

Responses referenced the timing of EPO funding announcements and that boards should be notified of all EPO funding in advance of the fiscal year. Also ongoing multi-year EPO funding should be folded into the GSN.

Part 2 - GSN Consultation

Key Recommendations:

- **Early announcement.** School boards would appreciate an early announcement of the 2016-17 GSN to allow them to make effective local decisions.
- **Full review of the current funding model.** 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.
- **Fully Funded Collective Agreements.** OPSBA expects that new collective agreements will be fully funded.
- **Funding for New Initiatives.** The Ministry of Education should monitor new legislation and regulations for possible funding implications.
- **Student Transportation Working Group.** OPSBA is of the view that the concerns with respect to student transportation warrant the establishment of a working group to thoroughly review the issues expressed by school boards.
- **Capital Funding.** We encourage the Ministry to continue to consult with school boards regarding capital funding especially in view of developments with respect to community hubs. We also encourage the Ministry to review the current education development charges regulation to allow boards more flexibility in terms of capital funding. In terms of overall capital & 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.

Specific Issues:

Special Education

Special Education 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 to meet student needs.

OPSBA recommends:

- the Ministry of Education continue its work in refining special education data collection and advocate for and adapt to the return of the federal long form census.

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Brief Re: 2016-17 Education Funding

- the Ministry of Education continue to monitor and track the impact of the 4-year phased in high needs amount (HNA) 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 an issue in FDK.

Children and Youth Mental Health

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 ten year Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. As the government moves forward with the strategy, OPSBA reinforces the focus on sustainability and continuity of the programs, services and resources implemented in the first three years of the plan for children, youth and their families. 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:

- 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 strongly supports the various elements of the existing implementation plan and requests that the Ministries involved:
 - 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; and
 - continue to support *Working Together for Kids Mental Health* to all communities in the province.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education

There is still a lack of support for self-identification and a funding allocation model that increases reliance on it would not be seen as the best direction. There is also the problem of 2006 census data and the unreliability of the 2011 household survey. The restoration of the long form census will not provide updated data any earlier than 2017. In the meantime, the FNMI population remains the fastest growing segment of our student population so a formula based on 2006 data is inadequate. OPSBA suggests as an

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Brief Re: 2016-17 Education Funding

interim measure, that the Ministry apply an increase to 2006 data based on the best information the Ministry can get on population increase since 2006.

OPSBA recommends:

- the Ministry consider a funding allocation for a dedicated FNMI Leader in every board similar to the model implemented for the Mental Health Lead.
- the Ministry continue to monitor tuition fee agreements between school boards and First Nation to ensure that any extra costs charged by school boards are reasonable and cannot otherwise be accommodated within the per pupil amount.
- the Ministry consider the merits of enveloping the FNMI supplement.

French As A Second Language (FSL) Working Group

OPSBA recognizes the Ministry of Education efforts in the creation of *"A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12"* and the most recent document, "Including Students with Special Education Needs in French as a Second Language Programs". These documents acknowledge the success of school board's FSL programs including French Immersion and Extended French. Current research recognizes the cognitive, social and academic benefits of second language learning. Early access to FSL programs lead to greater retention, confidence, language proficiency and fluency. Over the past 15 years there has been a significant uptake of French Immersion by families. At the JK entry point the uptake in some boards is as high as 40% in some areas of the board and averages out close to 30% of the total enrolment at JK, signifying the high level of interest in French Immersion.

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:

- 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

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 % of instructional time for FI classes), but have become necessary for the benefit of all students and their families.

Every school board in one way or another has been examining this issue, conducting FSL reviews and trying to solve a larger provincial issue through a single school board lens and approach.

OPSBA recommends:

- a comprehensive provincial review of FSL opportunities, teacher availability and funding levels in an effort to alleviate the significant pressures and more accurately reflect the current reality of parent/guardian choice in a plurilingual society.

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Brief Re: 2016-17 Education Funding

New Generation Education

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.

OPSBA recommends:

- the continued investment of \$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.
- 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.

Community Hubs Implementation

OPSBA has been a longstanding advocate of the concept of community hubs, as we believe that through community partnerships we can work collaboratively to improve the social, emotional, mental and physical well-being of children, youth and the wider community. We are committed to supporting any plan that will provide high-quality and accessible services by adapting existing schools into community hubs, provided school boards' concerns and challenges are taken into account. We are also in support of the concept of community hubs as it applies to new school builds.

OPSBA recommends:

- the Ministry participate in the emerging cross-ministerial effort to break down funding silos. We fully support this initiative and would recommend that this process ensures potentially divergent funding timelines/paths from various Ministries are avoided at the local level.

A remaining barrier to the creation of community hubs is often that capital funding can be used for new schools and maintenance, but not to repurpose facilities; e.g. to renovate an elementary school for adult education or alternative secondary education. In addition, smaller boards, in particular, do not have large planning departments or the resources to coordinate the community development and ongoing maintenance of substantive hubs.

OPSBA recommends:

- the government provide school boards and local partners with funding for renovations and site management when a community hub is located within a school board site. Boards should receive funding to hire a community hubs manager to coordinate implementation and management of established hubs. We also recommend that any community hubs partners receive adequate funding to cover maintenance and custodial service costs incurred by the boards throughout the year.
- the government should consider changes to the formula that provide resources for potential growth in a community's service needs, where identified by a local integrated planning process.

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Brief Re: 2016-17 Education Funding

The need for local capital resources should be assessed from an inter-ministerial level to more effectively identify varied uses for empty school buildings that serve the unique needs of each community. For example, based on the changing demographics of a region or municipality, the best use of an empty elementary school might be to convert it into a nursing or convalescent home if the costs are not prohibitive, with shared services for the needs of youth.

Other Considerations

We are also aware of future initiatives or requirements that could have significant impacts to the operations and finances for schools boards. These include:

- Costs associated with the delivery of 6-12 before and after school programming
- Health and Safety requirements as a result of recent inquest recommendations
- Recently passed legislation including the Police Records Check Reforms Act and the recent reviews focusing on municipal election reform.

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.