

Advocacy Day Brief

November 24, 2025



The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve nearly 1.4 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.

OPSBA believes that strong, predictable, and equitable education funding is a foundational factor in setting the conditions that promote and sustain improved student achievement and well-being.

Top Funding Priorities

What's the Issue?

Special Education

Key Data/Information:

There continues to be a lack of funding and adequate resources to effectively support special education needs given the increased demands. In fact, 73 of 74 Ontario school boards and school authorities have special education deficits and struggle to meet the needs of students – provincially there is a \$ 300 million deficit. In addition, there has been a 54% increase in requests for Special Incidence Portion funding over the past 4 years and the process is time intensive and antiquated. We need to serve and support our students with adequate staff, efficient processes, and on-going training.



OPSBA recommends:

- A review and revision of the present funding model re: special education.
- Additional funding for positions, such as Educational Assistants (EAs), Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), and Child and Youth Workers (CYWs). These roles are crucial for creating inclusive classrooms and effective learning environments
- A revisioning of the SIP process to streamline administrative burden, protect sensitive student information, and reflect actual costs required to support students; more accurate salary benchmarks are needed. The Ministry should consider a board attestation for SIP.

- Board support for creating and implementing plain-language policies around identification, placement and review committees (IPRC), individual education plan (IEP), and appeal processes to ensure accessibility for all families.
- Support for professional development. This is key to enhancing educator understandings.

What's the Issue?

Student Transportation

Key Data/Information:

The Student Transportation Fund (STF) provides school boards with funding to transport students to and from home and school, including students with special needs. However, it is much more than that. Student transportation includes school field trips, sporting events, other extracurricular activities, and perhaps additional service for before-and-after school care. It may also include students who use public transit operated by their local municipality and working with co-terminus boards (shared routes) and the local consortia for common policies (bell times.)



Many boards overspend their transportation budgets to meet their own unique local needs. Transportation, with its many complex challenges, continues to be an area in which the ministry and school boards have struggled to find solutions. With several sectoral discussion papers, special reports, advisory groups, consultations, and more having been produced by consecutive governments over the past 10 years, the government must commit to finding a way to adequately fund this important aspect of the public education system.

In 2023-24 the Ministry of Education announced a new transportation funding model that did establish some common standards across the province, but the model did not address ongoing significant inflation pressures or the amounts included in contractual agreements and those contracts that are soon up to be renegotiated. This will put boards in difficult positions to provide full transportation services.

OPSBA recommends:

- Extending the transition funding period to allow boards to continue to adjust to the new formula, achieve more stability, and collect data from specific regions (northern, rural, and urban).
- Working collaboratively with the Council of Senior Business Officials (COSBO) and the Ministry of Education to address funding formula gaps and challenges.
- Committing to engaging with other ministries (Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing) to share leading practices and successful partnerships with local municipalities on shared busing. A specific request is for the Ministry of Transportation to expedite school bus driver testing to ensure any bottlenecks to recruitment are removed.

What's the Issue?

Truth and Reconciliation

Key Data/Information:

OPSBA develops and strengthens relationships to facilitate access to programs, resources, and supports for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students that reflect the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

Indigenous education is a beneficial investment for all students, especially as we look to prepare today's students for participation in Ontario's future workplaces and community settings. Indigenous students represent the fastest growing demographic in Canada and are therefore, a demographic that can have a significant, positive impact on economic prosperity. All students require the skills the knowledge that will enable them to build and engage in respectful relationships with Indigenous communities and partners in their future roles.



OPSBA Recommends:

- Ensuring that the input and engagement of First Nation trustees are appropriately included in decision-making regarding the education of tuition-paying First Nation students.
- Support for the development of educational programs and initiatives that honour local Indigenous perspectives, voices, and experiences, and ensures that Indigenous students are provided with a culturally relevant, quality education that meets the unique needs of the Indigenous students of the board.
- Resources to support the critical priority of Indigenous language revitalization, including review of the Native Languages curriculum, Language teacher certification, and funding flexibility that allows for innovative, localized approaches to language revitalization.

What's the Issue?

Anti-Black racism as outlined in The Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC) *Dreams Delayed: Addressing Systemic Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario's Public Education System* report.

Key Data/Information:

Dreams Delayed highlights persistent systemic anti-Black racism across Ontario's publicly funded education system. It calls for urgent, outcome focused action by all duty holders,

including the Ministry of Education, school boards, Trustees, educators, unions and Faculties of Education, to eliminate discrimination and ensure equitable outcomes for Black students.

The report identifies three core areas for action: Accountability and Transparency, Monitoring and Evaluation and Student Well-Being.

OPSBA recommends:

Achieving the *Dreams Delayed* outcomes will require dedicated, multi-year funding streams to ensure boards have the capacity, expertise and infrastructure to implement sustainable changes. These include:

- Data Infrastructure and Training: Investment in technology systems and staff training to support standardized race-based data collection, analysis and reporting across all boards (Action #16).
- Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity: Funding for a provincial accountability framework including analytics expertise and public reporting mechanisms (Action #18).
- Graduation Coach Program and Student and Family Advocate Program Expansion: Additional funding to expand programs to all boards, ensuring adequate staffing, mentoring resources, professional development, community partnerships and ongoing evaluation (Actions #24 and #25).
- Curriculum Development and Implementation: Investment in the creation and rollout of Black-affirming curriculum, resource materials, educator training and partnerships with community experts and scholars (Action #28).

Additional Funding Recommendations:

In addition to the recommendations identified above, OPSBA has identified specific actions that can be taken by the Ministry of Education to address funding inadequacies and allow school boards to be even more fiscally responsible and support public education. These include:

- Providing compensatory funding to match federal current and future Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance Contribution rates.
- Replacing Absent Staff. A significant area of underfunding continues to be the increasing cost of supply staff. School boards struggle to cover the actual cost of replacing absent staff. Lifting the moratorium on school closures to effectively use capital resources with exceptions for remote and rural schools.
- Removing the rate cap on Education Development Charges (EDC) to allow the rates to accurately match actual land purchase costs as highlighted in school board EDC background studies.



The Importance of Local Voice

Since its introduction, Bill 33, Supporting Children and Students Act, has generated significant concern from stakeholders across the province. The changes to the *Education Act* will significantly expand ministerial oversight, further centralize decision making, and shift control over school boards away from the communities they serve. It would effectively lessen the democratically elected role of public school board trustees across the province.



Bill 33 brings in three key changes impacting the K-12 education sector:

1. It will provide the Minister of Education the authority to supervise any school board for any matter in the public interest.
2. It will provide authority for the minister to be the final approval for the naming or renaming of any school.
3. It directs school boards to work with police services who wish to have a school resource officer program in place in schools.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association is concerned that these changes will further weaken the important role of democratically elected trustee. Trustees are a community's voice in public education. Even if someone has never called their trustee, they are working every day to make sure local schools meet the needs of students and families. Trustees listen to diverse voices, make decisions in the best interests of all students, and ensure that every perspective is considered at the board table.

Trustees are often the first point of contact for families with questions, concerns, or challenges. They connect families with resources, advocate for equitable access to programs, and ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed.

Democracy is not outdated. Ontario's public school boards give families a real voice in education. Now, that voice is at risk. Beyond the concept of local democracy, there are many other reasons to support local voice in the public education system:

Advocacy for Students, Parents and Families

Elected trustees are directly accountable to students, parents, and families, including parents of children with autism and other special needs. Unlike appointed trustees, who answer to the government rather than the community, elected trustees must respond to parents' concerns and ensure local programs meet students' unique needs. As the Ontario Autism Coalition has noted, eliminating trustees risks cutting students out of critical services—something appointed boards are less likely to prevent.

Early results from the Coalition's 2025 Special Education Survey show that:

- 28.4% of survey respondents reported contacting a trustee for advocacy, for their child or youth, for one or more issues, during the 2024-2025 school year alone
- This represents approximately 102,051 children/youth with disabilities who were helped by a trustee during the 2024-2025 school year alone

These numbers, from across 64 of Ontario's 72 school boards, show that trustees are not a symbolic layer of governance, they are a vital contact point for families, ensuring schools are held accountable to children/youth who too often fall through the cracks.

Direct Accountability to the Public

Elected trustees serve as the community's voice in public education. Unlike appointed trustees and board members in other publicly funded Ontario institutions, they are reachable, responsive, and answerable to families every day. They handle questions, concerns, or challenges when all other avenues are exhausted, connect families to resources, and ensure that diverse perspectives are considered at the board table. Appointed trustees lack this ongoing, direct accountability, as they are only accountable "upwards" to the government.

With appointed trustees, MPP offices would see many of these local, school-based issues coming their way.

Voter Turnout

Ontarians' voter turnout for trustees is at roughly the same level as for mayors, reeves, regional chairs, and councillors, which was 36% in 2022 across 301 of 444 municipalities, according to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, down slightly from 38.3% in 2018. School board elections occur at the same time as municipal elections. This is not that far off from Ontario's provincial elections – the February 2025 election saw turnout of around 45%, and the 2022 provincial election was slightly lower, at 44%. The 2025 federal election saw a turnout of 68%, with the average of 65% over the past five elections. Clearly, provincial voter turnout is much closer to municipal and school board election turnout than federal.

Transparency and Oversight

Elected trustees ensure transparency because their decisions are visible, public, and open to scrutiny. Appointed trustees, by contrast, can operate with little public oversight, which reduces confidence that decisions are fair, equitable, or aligned with local needs. Elected trustees create a system where the public can observe, question, and influence policy, protecting the integrity of the education system.

Without elected trustees, school boards risk becoming opaque and distant from the public—similar to what we've seen with some hospital boards—leaving families frustrated and directing their concerns and ire toward local MPPs instead of having a clear, accountable advocate at the board table.

Local Decision-Making Produces Better Outcomes

While no system is perfect, elected trustees consistently deliver decisions informed by local knowledge and community priorities. Appointed trustees are more likely to follow provincial directives without adapting policies to local contexts. Elected trustees balance competing interests, advocate for tailored solutions, and ensure that programs reflect the realities of the communities they serve—something appointed boards rarely achieve.

Positive Impacts and Innovation

Many of Ontario's most successful education policies—full-day kindergarten, safe schools, Indigenous education initiatives, concussion protocols—originated as locally driven trustee initiatives. Elected trustees champion innovation because they are accountable to their communities, whereas appointed trustees often lack the incentive or insight to push for programs that address local priorities. Removing elected trustees risks losing the creative, locally-informed leadership that has historically strengthened Ontario's schools. These initiatives and programs have included:

- Full-day kindergarten
- Parent involvement models
- Safe schools' policies
- Indigenous education
- Concussion policies
- Guidelines on vaping and cell phone use

For more information, please connect with the relevant OPSBA staff person below:

Stephanie Donaldson, Executive Director

sdonaldson@opsba.org

Shane Gonsalves, Managing Director, Government and Public Affairs

sgonsalves@opsba.org

Jennifer McIntyre, Director of Policy

jmcintyre@opsba.org

Erin Kelly, Director of Program Policy

ekelly@opsba.org

Michelle Rodney-Bartalos, Director of Education Equity

mrodney@opsba.org

Alicia Cameron, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Trustees' Council Liaison

acameron@opsba.org

T.J. Goertz, Manager of Strategic Communications

tgoertz@opsba.org

[**www.opsba.org**](http://www.opsba.org)



Ontario Public School
Boards' Association

