

OPSBA Submission to the 2026-27 Pre-Budget Consultation

January 27, 2026

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) is appreciative of the opportunity to share its education funding priorities and recommendations with the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We sincerely value the opportunity to share our thoughts and recommendations for the province's budget directly with members of provincial parliament in writing and through public hearings across the province.

OPSBA normally shares its funding submission as part of the Ministry of Education's Core Education Funding consultation process, which did not occur this year. This was unfortunate as this consultation has been the established process by which education experts have provided their evidence-based data and local information to the government. In turn, public education's funding formula has been continuously refined, which ultimately provides the best conditions for our students locally.

This annual consultation is something we take very seriously to help inform the government about education priorities. Our submission includes feedback from our trustee consultation work groups (trustee representatives from all five geographical regions across the province, as well as representatives from the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Trustees' Council [FNIMTC], the Black Trustees' Caucus [BTC], senior staff, and our education partners (the Council of Senior Business Officials [COSBO], the Council of Ontario Directors of Education [CODE], and the Ontario Student Trustees' Association [OSTA-AECO]).

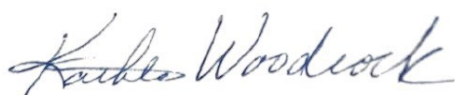
In addition to the education funding areas we detail below, OPSBA has identified specific actions that can be taken by the Ministry of Education to address funding challenges and allow school boards to be even more fiscally responsible and support public education. These include:

- **Providing compensatory funding to match current and future federally mandated Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and Employment Insurance (EI) contribution rates.**
- **Providing funding to address the full cost of running classrooms in schools –this includes supply staff. School boards are increasingly challenged to cover the actual cost of replacing absent staff.**
- **Addressing the special education funding formula to ensure funding is meeting the needs of students and families.**

As the [gap between the funding](#) provided by the provincial government and the growing demands and inflationary pressures faced by local school boards continues to exist, **it is increasingly challenging to avoid impacting the classroom experience of our students.** It is vital to ensure that we preserve and enhance the quality of education our students, parents, and local communities deserve.

Finally, with all current collective agreements set to expire on August 31, 2026, it is worth noting that teachers and education workers deeply influence a positive and productive learning environment for students. They are supported in this role through the peace and stability engendered by successfully negotiated collective agreements. It is OPSBA's goal to negotiate fair and equitable collective agreements through the collective bargaining process. We look forward to working collaboratively with all stakeholders while remaining focused on our shared priorities: the improvement of student achievement and well-being.

As local democratically elected and appointed trustees, we thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Kathleen Woodcock'.

Kathleen Woodcock
OPSBA President

Special Education

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 are experiencing such increased demand in the area of special education that they are forced to spend significantly more on special education than they [are funded for by the provincial government](#). In addition, there has been a 54% increase in requests for Special Incidence Portion (SIP) funding over the past four years and the process is time-intensive and antiquated. We need to serve and support our students with adequate staff, efficient processes, and ongoing training.

OPSBA Recommends:

- A review and revision of the present funding model regarding 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 of Education 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.
- Funding for professional development. This is key to enhancing educator understanding.

Mental Health and Well-Being

Mental health continues to be a significant concern for children and youth in Ontario schools. Their parents and caregivers also require support. While the work of [School Mental Health Ontario](#) has been laudable, continued and increased supports are required. School attendance remains a challenge and is often linked to mental health issues; students are at risk of isolation and of not graduating. The lack of system co-ordination with other ministries and community partners also sets up barriers for effective and timely intervention. [The Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health](#), coordinated by OPSBA, continues its collaborative efforts by bringing together, at a common table, the many voices that speak for the mental health and well-being of children and youth across the diverse linguistic and cultural context of Ontario.

OPSBA Recommends:

- Increased funding to expand access to meaningful mental health resources for students, parents, and caregivers, with consideration for diverse populations and those in priority neighbourhoods.
- Enhanced in-school supports and summer programs to address mental health barriers that impact well-being and academic success while ensuring that students are attending and that they feel supported by their schools.
- Additional investment in professional development and School Mental Health Ontario curriculum support for teachers.
- Additional funding, leadership, and system co-ordination to support the effective implementation of [Right Time, Right Care](#) in partnership with community agencies.

- Providing specific directed funding to support Student Nutrition Programs for infrastructure, equipment, and staffing.

Intertwining Human Rights, Inclusion, and Accessibility Standards

Ontario's publicly funded education system requires sustained, systemic investment to fully integrate inclusive education, human rights, and accessibility obligations. Findings from the Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC) [Dreams Delayed](#) and [Right to Read](#) reports, alongside individual school board experiences, demonstrate that inequitable outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and racialized students, and students with disabilities persist due to inconsistent standards, limited data infrastructure and inconsistent implementation capacity.

School boards are required to meet obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA), yet lack consistent funding, aligned definitions, and standardized data systems to operationalize these responsibilities. Variability in disability definitions, learning disability classifications, and race-based data collection limits comparability, accountability, and the ability to address intersectional barriers. While targeted initiatives – such as Black and Indigenous Graduation Coach Programs – have demonstrated positive impacts on student engagement and outcomes, access remains uneven across the province.

OPSBA Recommends:

- Fund staff and infrastructure to implement policies that align OHRC human rights standards with AODA requirements across all boards.
- Support province-wide adoption of consistent disability definitions aligned with DSM-5 classifications and the Accessible Canada Act (2019), ensuring no hierarchy of disability and enabling consistent application across boards.
- Expand Black and Indigenous Graduation Coach programs to all school boards, prioritizing community connected professionals with demonstrated expertise in addressing systemic barriers.
- Sustain dedicated human rights, anti-hate and anti-racism roles, invest in standardized race-based and disability related data systems and fund in-school professional learning aligned with OHRC recommendations, including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and inclusive instructional practices.
- Support provincial data standards, public reporting and monitoring mechanisms that strengthen accountability while respecting local governance and community context. Training and supports are required to achieve this.

Supporting Local Democracy

OPSBA and its members are extremely concerned about recent changes to school board governance (Bill 33, *Supporting Children and Students Act*, and other statements by the Minister of Education) that will further weaken the important role of local democratically elected and appointed trustees. Trustees are a community's voice in public education. Trustees work 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.

OPSBA has been supportive of the resources and advocacy work done by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario in preparation for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Elections. This includes the [Lead Where You Live Resource](#) and [Running for Municipal Office - Everything You Need to Know as an Underrepresented Candidate](#).

OPSBA Recommends:

- Continued funding for school board/trustee associations to create resources leading up to the 2026 Municipal Council and School Board Elections to attract excellent candidates to lead in their communities.
- Continued funding for OPSBA to deliver governance training to Chairs, Vice-Chairs, and all trustees.
- Continued funding for the [Ontario Education Services Corporation](#) (OESC) to develop new “good governance” modules.

Truth and Reconciliation

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 and 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 ensure that Indigenous students are provided with a culturally relevant, quality education that meets the unique needs of the Indigenous students of the board.
- Support for the critical priority of Indigenous language revitalization, including a review of the Native Languages curriculum, Language teacher certification, and funding flexibility that allows for innovative, localized approaches to language revitalization.

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*

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.

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.

OPSBA Recommends:

- *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).

Student Transportation

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 coterminous 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 inflationary pressures, or the amounts included in contractual agreements and those contracts that are soon up to be renegotiated. This will put school 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 and the 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.

School Facilities and Capital Projects

All school boards have professional and dedicated staff who are tasked with supporting the new construction and ongoing maintenance of schools and planning Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategies to address their changing student populations and communities. Boards need the flexibility to manage their buildings and properties, so they remain safe and accessible, and continue to meet required municipal and environment standards. This must be done while facing increasing costs of materials and dealing with approvals.

OPSBA Recommends:

- Releasing sufficient Capital Priority project funding on a consistent planning cycle to accommodate population growth.
- Increasing the funding for school facility renewal and improvements to address significant deferred maintenance issues.
- 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.

Cyber-Security

- Many boards across the province were affected by the PowerSchool cyber-security incident in late 2024 and early 2025 that involved the unauthorized external access of student personal information and private records. The sector worked with the Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (OSBIE) in the development of some resources and capacity building and there was a small one-time amount of funding provided last year to boards to implement foundational security tools. However, a need for consistent funding remains to allow boards to reduce the high risks and address the increasing costs associated with cyber-security.
- School boards are increasingly targeted by cyber-criminals due to the volume of sensitive data under their control, the number of board users with access to this data, and inadequate dedicated funding to support strong cyber-security environments in school boards. Without targeted dedicated cyber-security funding, school boards face increasing likelihood of service disruption, financial losses, legal exposure, and compromised student and staff data. The Ministry of Education can show support to school boards through stable, dedicated cyber-security funding.

OPSBA Recommends:

- The Ministry of Education recognize cyber-security as a core operational requirement for school boards.
- The Ministry of Education provide dedicated stable funding to support the costs associated with cyber-security – staffing, professional development, and supporting resources.
- The Ministry of Education work collaboratively with the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement in a review of the information and commentary

collected from the current regulatory proposal that is seeking to establish cyber security requirements for broader public sector organizations.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this provincial budget discussion and provide our recommendations to help the system achieve success. At a time when students are navigating a complex and rapidly changing world, Ontario's school boards remain focused on advancing both student achievement and well-being, recognizing that success today requires academic excellence alongside mental, social, and emotional supports. School boards are responsive to the realities facing students, families, and communities, and are actively preparing young people to be engaged, resilient citizens equipped for Ontario's future and an interconnected global society.

OPSBA stands ready to continue working collaboratively with the province toward our shared goals of student success, strong communities, and a publicly funded education system that fosters cohesion, opportunity, and belonging for all. When we work together, Ontario students benefit.



Ontario Public School Boards' Association

