



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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The Honourable Charles Sousa
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
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Dear Minister Sousa,

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) represents the province's 31 public district school boards. Together our members serve the educational needs of almost 70% of Ontario's elementary and secondary students. In addition to advocacy on behalf of Ontario students, our Association provides services to school boards and to school trustees who are elected to public office through Municipal elections or are appointed as First Nation trustees. We are an organization that has a strong history of advocacy for student achievement and well-being and take pride in the contributions we have made to the shaping of education policy in Ontario.

The following submission has also been shared with the Ministry of Education as part of our Association's brief regarding their School Board Efficiencies and Modernization Consultation, which also served as the consultation process for the 2014-15 Grants for Student Needs (GSN).

OPSBA would like to bring to the attention of the Ministry of Finance these additional comments and concerns with respect to the education funding model.

School boards would appreciate an **early announcement** of the 2014-15 GSN to allow them to make good local decisions.

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.

OPSBA recommends that the Ministry of Education **continue to monitor and fund the cost pressures resulting from the various Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)** that are currently in place. OPSBA anticipates that any collective agreements will be fully funded. OPSBA will work with the government to identify the costing to support collective bargaining activities as contemplated by proposed Bill 122, *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2013*.

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OPSBA continues to hear concerns from school boards related to the **Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program**. The concerns focus on over enrolment of students during the implementation phase of the program and the funding shortfall for some school boards related to the actual salary rate for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) employed in the program.

Special education funding continues to be one of the primary areas of concern for our school boards. In particular, some boards have expressed concerns regarding inequities in the allocation of the Special Education High Needs Amount (HNA).

It is 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 struggle with underfunding of special education needs.

OPSBA recommends that the Ministry of Education continue its work in refining special education data collection and ensure that special education funding is adequate and allocated equitably to meet the needs of all students.

Funding of **First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education** continues to be a priority for OPSBA. OPSBA continues to recommend that:

- (a) the Ministry of Education work with partner Ministries across Canada and with First Nation organizations with a view to discussing with AANDC ways to resolve the inequities in education funding for First Nation communities; and
- (b) Continue to support, through sustained First Nation, Métis and Inuit education funding, the needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students who attend Ontario schools, whether they are from on-reserve communities or from the local population of the board.

Funding for Native Students and Native languages is a specific issue that connects to the Grants for Student Needs. OPSBA has frequently heard from First Nations who have Education Services Agreements with school boards. They are often astonished to learn that Native Studies and Native languages are not part of the regular tuition fee but must be paid for by the First Nation over and above the cost of the basic tuition fee. This provision seems at odds with the intent and principles of Ontario's First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education framework and much goodwill in terms of supporting First Nation students would be gained by addressing the issue.

A key priority for OPSBA continues to be advocacy for **children and youth mental health** which aligns with the expectation of "promoting student achievement and well-being" and is among the accountabilities of a school board. OPSBA strongly supports the government's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy and 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 that 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.

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OPSBA's submission strongly supports the various elements of the existing implementation plan and requests that the Ministries involved:

- (a) 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;
- (b) embed the funding for the Mental Health Lead in the GSNs going forward for sustainability in years 4 to 10 of the comprehensive strategy;
- (c) maintain the ASSIST coaching support in year 4 to continue to support all school boards with mental health leads;
- (d) provide funding support for school-wide promotion of positive social and emotional development to strengthen mental health literacy among children and youth themselves;
- (e) provide a core of sustainable funding to Kids Help Phone for children and youth mental health
- (f) provide an increase in the number of mental health workers and registered nurses in schools across the province;
- (g) expand and support Working Together for Kids Mental Health to all communities in the province.

Mental Health Literacy Support K-12 must continue to align with the Student Support Leadership Initiatives (SSLI) and climate work in each Board to continue to build a culture of caring for all students and to deepen local partnerships with mental health and health organizations to facilitate timely and responsive access to care. It is also vital that mental health promotion be integrated into existing curriculum in addition to school-wide and community efforts to build resiliency in our students.

OPSBA has released a document entitled ***A Vision for Learning and Teaching in a Digital Age***. This document is a call to action regarding the development of a provincial vision. With Ontario positioned as a leader in education, it is incumbent on the government to place an emphasis on technology beyond simply a pilot project approach to encompass the use, application, development and integration of 21st century skills into student learning and instructional practices.

OPSBA continues to recommend that the Ministry:

- (a) re-establish the technology budget line to enable school boards to continue to adequately implement a staged plan to provide reasonable and equitable access to current technologies and applications;
- (b) expand the funding of exemplary practices to all boards of education in the province;
- (c) provide professional development funding to support a range of capacity building opportunities for teachers to integrate technology and 21st century skills into their instructional practice, and
- (d) ensure adequate levels of funding for *elearning* courses.

The Ministry of Education should monitor **new legislation and regulations** for possible funding implications, some examples are:

- New Occupational Health and Safety Awareness Training regulation, which will take effect July 1, 2014. This regulation mandates basic occupational health and safety awareness training for all workers and supervisors

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- Bill 143, *Child Care Modernization Act, 2013*. This proposed legislation would require schools to ensure before and after school programming for children ages six to 12 years where there is sufficient demand.
- Future PPM regarding Concussions. This may require school boards to provide communications and training.

OPSBA continues to hear concerns from many school boards about two specific areas of the current funding model, **special education and student transportation**. The concerns with respect to student transportation go beyond funding to areas such as consortia governance and operation and procurement of transportation services. OPSBA is of the view that the concerns with respect to special education and student transportation are sufficiently significant to warrant the establishment of working groups to thoroughly review the concerns expressed by school boards.

Finally, OPSBA would like to provide feedback with respect to the **Capital Priorities Review Process**. There is a significant need for capital infrastructure dollars and OPSBA appreciates the fact that the Ministry of Education has established the *Capital Priorities Review Process* to provide consistency of information from school boards to help Ministry staff analyze many, often diverse requests for funding to support the Ministry's and boards' capital priorities. However, the current need for capital funding in the sector is much greater than the amount of recent allocations. Additionally there are concerns regarding the current regulation regarding education development charges. OPSBA is of the view that it is time to have a conversation with the sector about additional sources of capital funding to meet the backlog of infrastructure needs in our sector.

Sincerely,



Michael Barrett, President
Ontario Public School Boards' Association