

OPSBA Submission Regarding 2022-23 Education Funding and the GSN (Grants for Student Needs)





ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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Cathy Abraham
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December 1, 2021

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Dear Minister:

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Ministry of Education's 2022-2023 Education Funding Guide, and to share key areas of funding to support student achievement and well-being. Our submission reflects feedback from students, trustees, the OPSBA Indigenous Trustees' Council, member board business officials, and senior OPSBA staff. Similar to past practice, we have also connected with the Council of Senior Business Officials (COSBO) and are aligned in our Guide recommendations.

Many boards continue to face funding pressures that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and we want to acknowledge our appreciation for the recent release of the second half of the federal COVID-19 funding. This funding will allow school boards to continue to responsibly plan for safe and effective mitigation measures for the remainder of the school year. Some boards will continue to need a degree of flexibility to manage in-year deficits resulting from the COVID crisis and we are asking again for the government's support in permitting those boards to prepare plans that lead to balanced budgets.

Of note, we have included a comprehensive section in our submission to reflect our suggestions regarding student mental health and re-engagement. This is an area of great importance to our Association, which has been underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic. The suggestions align and support the feedback from OPSBA's [Transitioning from the COVID 19 School Experience](#) discussion paper and the meetings held by the Education Partners Discussion Table. This group, which has over 30 organizations represented, has met monthly to identify key education priority areas and has begun to propose recommendations for transformative change in schools to enable all students and staff to thrive. Some of the co-created recommendations are included in this GSN submission related to Mental Health Supports, Technology and Bandwidth and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

As part of our internal consultation process, OPSBA recently conducted a survey among our Board of Directors. Nearly 67% of responding member boards said they will require additional funding to cover areas for COVID-19 support. Respondents noted that long-term commitments of dedicated funding would be appreciated to ensure students and staff are supported when

addressing the burgeoning mental health and learning support needs in all schools. If it is determined that school boards will continue enacting public health protocols in the near-term, support for additional PPE will be required.

School boards noted the following additional COVID-19-related funding needs: mental health resources for staff and students, early intervention and learning gap supports, additional school-based staff, technology and broadband for students who were unable to connect in a reliable manner, virtual school administration, sick leave and replacement staffing, pandemic management/reporting expectations, ventilation and filtration costs, and supports for school administration to reflect demands placed on them. Many of these supports will be required even if the pandemic subsides.

The survey also showed that the top four post-pandemic areas of funding concern noted by school boards are Special Education, Mental Health Supports (including Student Learning Supports), Student Transportation, and Capital Funding.

In addition, at the last OPSBA Annual General Meeting, two policy resolutions were approved that we wish to share for funding considerations:

- 1) Research Funding – OPSBA is seeking additional funding for the equivalent of two full time Research Officers, per school board, to support the new Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP) and the collection of identity-based data on educational outcomes, as directed by the Ministry of Education.
- 2) Funding for Indigenous Trustee Positions in School Boards – OPSBA is requesting that the ministry revise Ontario Regulation 462/97, First Nations Representation on Boards, or provide an alternative mechanism, in order for boards to have a process to add an additional, funded designated Indigenous Trustee. (This would be to support those school boards that do not meet the threshold of identified Indigenous students or have local agreements.)

Finally, below are unique funding areas that we also ask the ministry to consider:

Labour Relations: All current collective agreements expire on August 31, 2022, and OPSBA will be bargaining for fair, inclusive agreements, which will require full funding and will need to reflect the changes in program delivery resulting from the pandemic. We would also encourage the government to extend the availability of any unspent funding contained in the current collective agreements that boards have been unable to use because of COVID-19.

Executive Compensation: With a virtual freeze on broader public sector executive compensation for over ten years now, we are seeking adjustments for this group on a go-forward basis. It is critical for recruitment and retention, with the freeze having already resulted in very significant turnover in key roles.

Accessibility: OPSBA responded to the K-12 Education Standards Development Committee's development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education standards and the related initial recommendations report in October 2021. Many of our comments concerned a lack of funding to meet the expectations of the proposed recommendations, as well as the 2025 deadline under the AODA. Our response can be found on our [website](#).

OPSBA appreciates the government's responsiveness regarding the TVO mandate allowing school boards and TVO to continue to do what they each do best and to work collaboratively to grow and enhance the quality of online learning credit courses. To support the implementation of the two online credit graduation requirement, beginning in 2022-23, OPSBA recommends the Ministry of Education establish a steering committee to prioritize the development and revision of course offerings and to regularly review and respond to implementation progress as required. The composition of the ministry committee would include OPSBA representation, school board leaders, school board online experts, OeLC and TVO leadership.

OPSBA has, for many years, advocated for the education system to be "fully-funded." A fully-funded system is one in which school boards receive sufficient funding to cover the costs of the programs they deliver and reflects inflation and other cost increases.

In closing, school boards require strong, predictable and equitable education funding in order to set the conditions that promote and sustain improved student achievement and well-being. We always want to stress that education funding is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Every community and school board has its own local context that needs to be considered to maximize student outcomes and therefore school boards require local flexibility.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name.

Cathy Abraham
President
Ontario Public School Boards' Association

cc.

Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister (Education)
Andrew Davis, Assistant Deputy Minister (Education)
Dasha Androusenkov, Deputy Director, Stakeholder Relations (Minister's Office)

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.

2022-23 Education Funding Guide

OPSBA has connected with the Council of Senior Business Officials (COSBO) and we are aligned in many of our recommendations on the areas of discussion proposed in the Ministry of Education's 2022-23 Education Funding Guide.

Mental Health Supports

Please see our recommendations for mental health supports that are referenced on page 7.

Reducing Administrative Burden and Red Tape

Public education has regular and transparent reporting with many accountability measures in place. We recognize that the government has introduced several pieces of legislation (i.e. Bill 13, Supporting People and Businesses Act, 2021) to address the issue of multiple and unnecessary reports and this has been appreciated.

We note that COSBO has specific recommendations for this including the reporting of occasional teachers, the use of consistent reporting templates for Priorities and Partnerships Funds (online vs. Excel), streamlining the funding source for the New Teacher Induction Program and High Skills Major Program (currently both in GSN and PPF), and duplicate reporting requirements for certain plans. We also support the request to include timelines within transfer payment agreements so that reporting expectations are known prior to due dates.

In addition, there are two significant policy/regulation changes that OPSBA recommends, which will significantly support the funding of needed capital projects in school boards:

OPSBA recommends:

- Lifting the moratorium on school closures and releasing the revised Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines (PARG).
- Amending the Education Development Charge (EDC) regulation to allow for flexibility for non-eligible boards to collect EDCs and increase the EDC rates to accurately match actual land purchase costs.

The Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG)

We continue to ask that the Ministry of Education use more current data sets than the 2006 Census information for the Demographic Allocation, which is used to determine the LOG amounts for each board. This information is very outdated and could significantly impact students at the local level.

OPSBA recommends:

- Using current data taken from the long-form census and also using authentic benchmarks for funding calculations.
- Considering demographic information as part of a Board Improvement and Equity Plan.

Urban and Priority High Schools

OPSBA understands that this funding has been provided to 40 high schools in 12 school boards in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, London, Ottawa, Waterloo, and Windsor. These are urban areas that are faced with challenges such as students experiencing poverty, students having conflicts with the law, academic achievement issues and the lack of access to community resources. Funding is driven by several socio-economic factors and selection is determined by a needs impact value.

OPSBA recommends:

- Updating the list based on the most recent data, which may result in additional boards qualifying for funding. Boards are currently collecting demographic data on staff and students and that data could support this update through a common reporting tool.
- Reporting on the allocation be done through the Student Success lead.

The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP)

OPSBA agrees that the first few years of teaching are a critical time for new educators and supports the resources dedicated to orientation, mentoring and professional learning. We are unclear about the value of a province-wide benchmark for this program as the number of new teachers entering each year varies significantly by board.

OPSBA recommends:

- Establishing standard learning opportunities in August or at the beginning of employment. Faculties of education could be potential partners in this work.
- Allowing for release time for mentors and mentees for coaching and check-ins.

OPSBA's Priority Funding Areas

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

OPSBA continues to support the implementation of a comprehensive and coordinated mental health and addictions strategy. With long-standing data indicating that approximately one in five children and youth in Ontario have a mental health challenge, early investments in school-based mental health and addictions services will yield long-term benefits for the health care system and the wellness of students and future generations. Currently, due to the circumstances surrounding COVID-19, the prevalence of mental health issues among students and staff has risen significantly.

A number of studies have documented the increased prevalence of mental health concerns among children and youth during the pandemic (e.g., Hospital for Sick Children, 2021). When coupled with a recent report by Children's Mental Health Ontario (2020) showing increasing wait times for mental health services, these data confirm the growing need for services provided by mental health professionals in schools and elsewhere. Similarly, there are recent reports from school boards suggesting a dramatic increase in the number and severity of mental health concerns. It is also important to emphasize the need for further efforts and strategies to support staff mental health at all levels in the education sector.

These realities necessitate the development of a staged three-to-five-year strategic "Grants for Student Needs" funding plan to support school boards, schools, educators, students, parents/guardians, and families as they transition from the COVID-19 school experience.

From a healthy classroom perspective there has never been more evidence to support the compelling need to balance and integrate curricular and mental health and well-being expectations into every classroom. School transformation over the next five to 10 years must incorporate this as a critical underpinning. Although the primary responsibility resides with the Ministry of Education, interministerial collaboration is essential to remedy a fractured and significantly underfunded continuum of care.

Mental health and equitable student outcomes are inextricably linked. A strong pre-condition for all school-based mental health services are school boards and schools that operate through an anti-racism, anti-oppressive stance. It is important to ensure that interventions are culturally responsive or can be transformed to meet the needs of the students served. For this work to be effectively incorporated into daily practice, there must be training and resources for all staff, which will require funding and resource development.

Appendix A lists all of the evidence-based resources and structures that are currently in place to support mental health in schools and that continue to require a concerted effort to have them consistently accessed, promoted and delivered within all 72 school boards.

All of the recommendations below reflect long-standing mental health and well-being needs at the school, system and community level, which were exacerbated during the pandemic, raising concerns over its longer-term impact. There needs to be a collective understanding that mental health and well-being requires a sustained predictable commitment of government funding to effectively address the increased need for supports and services for students, staff and families for the foreseeable future.

OPSBA recommends:

- The Ministry continue to annually increase the funding for School Mental Health Ontario's (SMHO) infrastructure that reflects current system needs and long-term sustainability.
- That the equivalent funding of a full-time position be implemented in all 72 school boards for each of the next three years for a designated School Board Staff Mental Health Lead to coordinate with the student mental health lead in support of healthy classrooms. Professional learning, training and provincial coordination should be integral to support this position (*see rationale below).
- A continued focus on expanding school-based resources, supports and services (e.g., mental health promotion, early identification, prevention and intervention) for children, youth and their families.
- Reviewing the already overcrowded Ontario curriculum to include and appropriately balance student mental health and well-being expectations with other learning expectations. Curriculum revisions require sufficient implementation time, resources, professional learning and training with an appropriate balance of expectations.
- Prioritizing funding to support sustained, ongoing, incremental, iterative professional development opportunities (e.g., job-embedded approaches, a coaching model) to eliminate the negative schooling outcomes associated with all forms of historic systemic discrimination. This is a precondition for culturally responsive, identity-affirming mental health support.
- A continued increase in the number of school-based mental health professionals (social workers, psychologists, guidance counsellors, child and youth workers, school mental health workers) to address the significant increase in the number and severity of students requiring support.
- A continued increase in community agency supports and services to eliminate wait lists for sufficient and timely pathways to care across the province, especially in northern, remote and rural areas.
- Investment in a system of care that includes community mental health, public health, hospitals, cultural/faith partners that has students and families at the centre, ensuring that community mental health centres focus primarily on intensive services and are staffed sufficiently for this role.
- Ensuring a focus on mental health supports for transitional youth, especially youth transitioning to post-secondary settings, with an even greater focus in this area due to the pandemic.
- Providing additional resources for attendance counsellor support and credit recovery/rescue support, especially to reengage students and families as a result of remote learning and COVID-19 as indicated through the increase in home schooling.
- The provincial government strongly advocate to the federal government for mental health supports and services in First Nations, band-operated schools, proportional to supports available in provincially funded schools.
- Marketing careers in the mental health sector.
- Pre-service teacher programs include mental health and well-being learning that is aligned with School Mental Health Ontario resources/supports being delivered in Ontario school boards.

*** School Board Staff Mental Health Lead Rationale**

In 2011-12, OPSBA proposed the staged implementation of school board mental health leads to support students in all 72 school boards. In conjunction with the leadership of School Mental Health Ontario, this successful strategy has been integral to creating coordinated school board and provincial mental health action plans, development of evidence-based resources, building staff capacity over time and facilitating key community connections.

There are no mentally healthy classrooms and students without mentally healthy school and board staff. Given the stressors linked to supporting students during the pandemic, there is an identified need to replicate this successful model by creating a similar position that designates a School Board Staff Mental Health Lead to support staff. Although an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a helpful staff resource, this position by comparison is designed as a proactive strategy to build capacity for healthy classrooms. Ideally, this Lead position would be a registered health professional with defined areas of competence related to adult mental health and workplace mental health.

Over the last number of years there have been many requests of the student mental health leads to support staff mental health, which is inconsistent with the original intent of the role and diverts key resources/supports away from escalating student-based mental health needs. Given the current realities related to staff mental health, it is recommended that the equivalent funding of a full-time position be implemented in all 72 school boards for each of the next three years. This staff mental health lead position would directly champion the priority of staff mental health, and work in tandem with the Student Mental Health Lead to coordinate, align and implement strategies and practices to build, maintain and sustain healthy classroom environments for students and staff. This dual-pronged approach will lead to improved, sustainable outcomes for both students and staff.

Implementing this strategy will demonstrate the incredible value that we collectively place on school and board staff. It will intentionally promote inclusive and productive learning and teaching environments needed for all members of the school community to thrive.

OPSBA would be pleased to be part of an education partner working group to further develop this strategy.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI)

Schools play a critical role in providing educational pathways that ensure equitable learning outcomes. As such, educators must have access to data, tools and resources for the purposes of achieving equitable student outcomes, including those identified in school board improvement and equity plans (BIEPs). This commitment relies on the continuous analysis of learning outcomes for all students in order to support constructive critique of past practices and promising new approaches.

The experiences of students' learning during the pandemic has shed a stronger light on the latent effects of historic patterns of discrimination. They have also underscored the urgent call to disrupt these systemic patterns and structures by transforming existing curricula, systems of support, and commitments to equity.

OPSBA recommends the Ministry of Education develop a three-to-five-year plan that:

- Funds the equivalent of two full time Research Officers, per school board, to support the new Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP) and the collection of identity-based data on educational outcomes, as directed by the Ministry of Education.
- Prioritizes sustained funding for ongoing, incremental, iterative professional development opportunities (e.g., job-embedded approaches, a coaching model) that support effective transformative instruction that results in equitable learning outcomes. Transformative instruction includes elements such as: identity-affirming classrooms; students' sense of belonging; and culturally relevant pedagogy.
- Recognizes the complexities of the transition to a de-streamed curriculum and dedicates funding for the development of appropriate learning resources and student supports that facilitate differentiated instruction.
- Incorporates supportive interventions in the early years that optimizes student and family engagement and sense of belonging, e.g., use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special Education continues to be an area that is underfunded given the prevalence and complexity of student needs. This is even more significant where community services and supports are not readily available or easily accessible and have been highlighted and exacerbated during COVID-19. These students could now potentially have even more significant learning gaps that need to be intentionally addressed.

OPSBA recommends:

- Predictable and responsive funding that reflects the ongoing specialized needs of students who require special education supports and/or services.
- Continued review of the special education grant components to ensure they are reflective of the current school board realities.
- A comprehensive review to fully understand the issue of assessment wait times, gaps in services and access to professional staff across the province in order to provide timely and relevant supports to students and their families. This is more acute in northern, rural, and remote communities.
- That special education and specifically autism supports and services continue to be reviewed and revised to meet the student and family needs, especially as it relates to the impact of COVID-19 on learning and well-being.
- Predictable and stable funding to ensure that all learning spaces, educational equipment and teaching practices are fully accessible, under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and associated regulations under the Act, for all students to engage and thrive in all aspects of school.
- Continued support for the valuable contributions that our school treatment centres offer to students and their families, and for locally seconded staff.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

OPSBA's Indigenous Trustees' Council continues to advocate for enhanced and focused funding for all First Nations students in publicly funded schools, and consistent with its identified priority of Advancing Reconciliation, believes support extends to ensuring gaps for on-reserve

and off-reserve Indigenous students. As part of its core belief in ensuring equity, funding must be targeted to allow all First Nations students the opportunity to achieve a provincial standard, regardless of where they live, and whether they are included under an Education Services Agreement/Reciprocal Education Approach (ESA/REA).

2021 has represented a pivotal change in Canada's relationship with all First Nations People, and First Nations communities. The ongoing discovery of the graves, mostly unmarked, of children who died while in the care of Canada's Residential School System and as part of government policy, has ushered in a new era of responsibility of understanding, teaching, learning, and accepting this country's shared history.

Supporting and strengthening Indigenous Education continues to be a priority for First Nations, for OPSBA, and for governments across the country. Advancing Reconciliation in support of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a major focus of OPSBA's Indigenous Trustees' Council and is one of OPSBA's key priorities. It must be understood that protecting and revitalizing culture, and recognizing that culture and language are inseparable, is necessary for reconciliation and history to be reclaimed.

A lack of broadband access is an issue for many Indigenous students, which has been even more problematic in the ongoing pandemic environment. Achievement gaps have the potential to widen between those who have technological access and those who do not. Investing in this is critical to the educational future of these students.

Annualized funding with a long-term commitment to supporting the development of First Nations educational leaders will provide a growing pool of talent and mentorship for Indigenous youth.

OPSBA recommends:

- The provincial government appropriately fund and demonstrate its commitment to accurately represent Canada's legacy of Residential Schools, by developing a mandatory "Residential Schools" Curriculum for all students to be required to be taught, as part of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). Included in such funding would be supports for teaching staff, curriculum support and professional development that allows for a provincially mandated credit bearing course, and also the ability for collaboration at the local level between First Nations and school boards to embed locally developed content, reflecting local history.
- Improved funding for dedicated Indigenous language instruction, taught by accredited Indigenous language speakers. Programming and staffing, such as graduation coaches, should be enhanced, particularly at the secondary level to support Indigenous languages, and land-based teaching.
- Investing and expanding broadband access for Indigenous students.
- Supporting the promotion and development of Indigenous people into teaching positions and teachers into leadership positions – such as school principals and vice-principals, supervisory officers, and directors of education – to advance reconciliation.

NORTHERN AND RURAL CHALLENGES

OPSBA's northern and rural members continue to identify the unique needs and challenges their communities face, which include difficulty attracting and retaining employees, limited specialized professionals and services (as they relate to filling board positions in the areas of

Mental Health and Well-Being, Special Education Resource, Experiential Learning and Trades, and Language teachers, specifically Indigenous Language teachers), limited and loss of community employers, and overall geography.

Student transportation continues to be a major issue when considering the availability and shortage of qualified drivers, length of routes, extreme temperatures, and the costs of ground and air transportation for Indigenous students from remote northern communities who attend public schools in urban communities.

Northern students also face many additional hardships and inequities in the area of access due to insufficient broadband capability and/or costly internet services. This continues to impact students and creates an even wider gap in areas such as e-learning access and virtual learning worlds.

The rising cost of capital projects due to the limited access to construction materials in all trades, combined with a lack of tradespeople and the soaring costs of energy resources and fuel in our northern, rural, and remote areas, continues to place major pressures on our systems.

There is a mental health crisis in northern communities that boards are also attempting to support as a point of first contact, and this has only been intensified by COVID-19. Flexible funding that each individual board can use to address local issues must be considered. Every effort must be made to address these issues to maximize student engagement, improve achievement, promote and support student mental health and well-being, and improve graduation rates and preparation for future endeavours.

OPSBA recommends:

- Consulting with northern boards and authorities when determining funding packages.
- Implementing board and authority-specific needs assessments as part of funding decisions.
- Allowing increased flexibility in the teaching qualifications for specialized staff in northern regions.
- Acting on the list of identified needs and short and long-term strategies and recommendations outlined in our [December 4, 2019 letter](#).
- Commit to an ongoing dialogue between northern government decision-makers and education leaders.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Building capacity for teachers, education workers and school administrators is an essential component for a successful provincial education system. When school staff participate in professional learning and training, it promotes professional dialogue and reflective practice and facilitates alignment of classroom and instructional practice with the school and school board improvement and equity plan. These important collaborative professional learning activities produce the necessary cohesion and synergy for improving student achievement.

OPSBA recommends:

- Delivering responsive, relevant professional learning and training that has direct application to improving learning and working conditions in classrooms and schools, while building staff confidence and maximizing engagement.

- Providing ongoing professional development in multiple formats – virtual, collaborative inquiry (TLLP), or job-embedded, so they are not just linked to Professional Activity (PA) Days.

FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (FSL)

OPSBA has recently completed a three-year Ontario Labour Market Partnership initiative with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development entitled *Meeting Labour Market Needs for French as a Second Language Instruction in Ontario*. This initiative was in response to concerns raised by OPSBA member boards about the growing gap between the number of students enrolling in French language programs and the recruitment and retention of sufficient numbers of FSL teachers and support staff. This issue has become an increasing challenge for all English language public school boards in Ontario. School boards continue to struggle with providing opportunities for student and parent choice for FSL options and this has been especially exacerbated during COVID-19.

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 language-proficient French teachers at both the elementary and secondary level as well as French language ECE's and other education workers
- 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
- Relocating English track students out of neighbourhood schools to accommodate French immersion.

OPSBA recommends:

- Continuing the proactive focus on FSL teacher supply and demand in an effort to alleviate significant school board pressures and to more accurately reflect the current reality of parent/guardian choice in a plurilingual society.
- Continuing to support innovative workable solutions as outlined in OPSBA's Labour Market FSL Initiatives to fund the ongoing collaborative work of the multisectoral FSL Labour Market Partnership to:
 - Mobilize the research findings from Phase I, II and III of the labour market partnership report with English-language publicly funded school boards in order to deepen understanding of the factors affecting FSL teacher recruitment, hiring, professional support and retention.
 - Facilitate the implementation of promising strategies and practices in English-language publicly funded school boards that directly affect the recruitment, hiring, professional support and retention of FSL teachers.
 - Implement the Specialized High Skills Major Non-Profit in Education stream dedicated to FSL Core, French Immersion and extended French students.

SKILLED TRADES AND APPRENTICESHIPS

OPSBA applauds the government's recent efforts to promote the skilled trades and apprenticeships. OPSBA would like to see even more focus at the provincial and local elementary and secondary school level to help students develop positive attitudes toward the trades and be provided with more "hands on" and experiential learning opportunities. An apprenticeship focus can easily be expanded and integrated into existing vocational school programs and through secondary school experiential and cooperative education programs, as well as Specialist High Skills Majors. This will involve balancing and/or shifting funding levels for commencing an apprenticeship to secondary schools rather than only in post-secondary and employment settings.

OPSBA recommends:

- Supporting continued funding for the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program and the Specialist High Skills Major programs, but also request that the government expand relevant opportunities for students to begin to earn apprenticeship hours while in secondary school and address the issue of a lack of skilled trades' education and apprenticeship options for Indigenous students in Indigenous communities.
- Providing dedicated funding for renovations in secondary school facilities and new construction to provide shop programs to support careers in the trades (Grades 7 to 12)
- Support for amendments that will change the journey person to apprentice ratio for all trades to increase student access to these career opportunities.
- A continued targeted marketing and communications plan, specifically directed at parents, students, educators and employers, to further elevate skilled trades to a respected and desirable pathway.

CAPITAL AND FACILITIES FUNDING

Boards spend considerable time and effort developing their Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy in a manner that balances student enrolment and equitable access to programming. They also take into consideration the use of schools by local child care partners and community groups. In many areas, schools remain community hubs and need to be supported for their widespread and after school usage.

It is important for capital projects (new builds, additions, and retrofits) to be announced regularly and predictably, and they need to reflect the local needs of the school board. Delays between approvals and funding flowing have led to increased costs for goods and services, particularly seen during the pandemic. These are typically absorbed by the board.

Any improvements to the Approval to Proceed process would be greatly appreciated and allow boards to keep students in their home school environments longer.

OPSBA recommends:

- Continuing to provide funding for capital maintenance for heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, as well as structural, mechanical and electrical repairs. This is even more critical in the COVID-19 era.
- Continuing to release Capital Priority project funding on a regular planning cycle.
- Providing transparency in the decisions for why capital projects are approved and denied.

- Increasing capital funding benchmarks to reflect the increased cost of construction (related to supply chain/material shortages/labour shortages).
- Review and amend Ontario Regulation 193/10: Restricted Purpose Revenues, to allow school boards more flexibility in how they use monies received from selling surplus board properties.

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

The main transportation issues for school boards continue to be ride times, driver retention, funding, and school bus safety. Many boards regularly overspend their transportation budgets to meet their own unique needs. OPSBA remains a member of the Ministry of Education’s Student Transportation Advisory Group (STAG). The last update (August 5, 2021) indicated that next steps included “a potential funding option centred on a needs-based funding approach which can incorporate a benchmark framework and a volume-based approach built on province-wide common reference standard to improve consistency in funding across the province, as well as a review of contracting practices.” The transportation funding benchmark has remained unchanged in two consecutive GSN announcements, disregarding the fact that tendered contracts have annual increases in costs that school boards have had to absorb.

OPSBA recommends:

- Providing regular updates as to the next steps of the STAG.
- Considering the unique student transportation circumstances and needs that each board (northern, rural and urban) faces. This would also include supporting student participation in field trips, sporting events and extracurricular activities.
- Committing to the investment of increased funding to attract and retain school bus drivers.
- Update the transportation funding benchmark to reflect increased costs.
- Convening a working group with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the Ministry of Transportation to discuss and develop shared busing options for students.

TECHNOLOGY AND BROADBAND

The pandemic has reinforced the importance of in-person learning and the role schools serve as hubs for learning, critical social interaction and community connection. It has also reinforced that technology can play an important supplementary role in student learning.

Investments need to continue for school boards to support the classroom experience for staff and students through access to computers and software. The ministry should also provide funding to allow school boards to provide students with quality devices and create equitable access to reliable, affordable internet bandwidth, which is needed beyond the school setting and currently lacking in many rural, remote, northern and Indigenous communities. Lack of this infrastructure across the province continues to create gaps in equitable learning opportunities for vulnerable and marginalized student populations. We are also aware of boards that are facing increased challenges associated with the costs and limitations of software licensing agreements, which were heightened during emergency remote learning.

OPSBA recommends:

- Implementing a predictable cycle of evergreen technology funding so that all students and staff have ready access to technology devices for individual use, as needed, to support learning and working.
- Ensuring corresponding funding for IT departments to meet the increased demand for technology support for staff, students and families.
- Continuing the work of the Broadband Modernization Program to ensure there is equitable and timely access to improved technology infrastructure for all school boards across the province by regularly connecting with school boards to identify areas where infrastructure gaps remain.
- Reinstating the dedicated funding for the procurement of licenses for educational software (previously coordinated by the Ontario Software Acquisition Program Advisory Committee [OSAPAC]).
- That the provincial government strongly advocate to the federal government for technology and broadband supports and services in First Nations, band-operated schools proportional to supports available in provincially funded schools.
- Prioritizing funding to support sustained professional learning opportunities (e.g., job-embedded approaches or a coaching model) to support effective pedagogical design for the integration of technology in the classroom.

2022 MUNICIPAL AND SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

In previous election years (2010, 2014 and 2018) OPSBA worked with the Ministry of Education's Governance and Leadership Branch and the Ontario Education Services Corporation on the creation of, and revision to, several resources. As we begin to prepare for the 2022 elections, our objectives will be:

- To promote and increase the awareness for the role of democratic locally elected school board trustee (and their contribution to public education)
- To encourage a more diverse group of individuals to consider becoming a trustee candidate
- To increase overall voter turnout for municipal and school board elections

OPSBA recommends:

- The Ministry of Education soon confirm secured funding to support the creation and/or revision of election resources.
- The Ministry of Education co-develop with school board and trustee associations orientation sessions for the next term of trustees.
- A coordinated strategy targeted at potential trustee candidates to learn about the role and responsibilities of school boards and elected trustees.
- Support for mandatory and consistent trustee governance orientation and Professional Development.

Appendix A: What are we currently doing to support student mental health?

Through School Mental Health Ontario and school boards, structures, systems, and programming have been created to support effective implementation of research-based, culturally responsive school mental health practices in schools. The listing below summarizes some of the tools and supports available to support student mental health through the pandemic and beyond. The key is to ensure sufficient time for continuing to build awareness of these resources, training of the resources, coordinate and implement the resources for the various identified audiences.

Audience	Sample Resources	Brief Description
Students	Student MH LIT	Four-lesson mental health literacy for secondary students. Watch the two-minute overview video here
	Anxiety Shareables	Set of social media shareables focused on coping with stress and anxiety, developed with ThriveSMH student reference group
	Equity and Allyship Shareables	Set of social media shareables focused on equity within mental health, developed with ThriveSMH student reference group
	Grounding Shareables	Set of social media shareables focused on grounding techniques, using acronyms like SOLID with associated prompts
	ThriveSMH Instagram	A student-led Instagram account developed by SMH-ON's student reference group, ThriveSMH
	Guided Video Series	Series of videos that students can use to help with relaxation techniques like visualization and calm breathing
	Help-Seeking Resources	Set of tools to promote student help-seeking, reduce stigma, and articulate pathways to support (pocket and screen reader versions)
	Topics in mental health	Information sheets on topics that may be relevant for secondary school students
	Tools for Adult Allies	Set of tools to support adults who encourage and facilitate student voice and leadership in the mental health promotion space
Parents / Caregivers	Suicide Prevention Resources	Tools to help parents understand, identify, and respond to signs of suicidal ideation and behaviour (in multiple languages)
	Early identification resources	Tools to help parents recognize signs of a mental health problem
	Topics in mental health	Information sheets on topics that may be relevant for parents and caregivers (e.g., substance use prevention, digital technology use, wellness promotion at home)
	Back to school resources	Series of tip sheets and web-based information to support parents with the return to school during COVID-19 (in multiple languages)
	Tools for school staff	Tip sheets to support compassionate and helpful conversations about mental health with parents and caregivers
Audience	Sample Resources	Brief Description
Educators	MH LIT	Six-module online learning about mental health designed for the educator role, available on the VLE
	Everyday Mental Health Practices	Series of everyday mental health practices compiled in collaboration with ETFO, OECTA, OSSTF, and AEFO

	Virtual Field Trips	Series of lesson plans and virtual field trips, K-12, focused on strategies for coping with stress. Watch a sample video here .
	HPE Lesson Plans	Series of lesson plans, K-8, with minds-on activities and mentor texts aligned with mental health in HPE curriculum
	Read Alouds	Series of read alouds that can accompany the HPE lesson plans or may be used more generally in the classroom or at home (currently in EN, FR, and Inuktitut)
	SEL posters	Series of posters that serve as reminders related to everyday practices that support social emotional skill development
	Reflection Tools	Tools to help educators build and maintain mentally healthy classroom settings for every student
	Back to school resources	PD Day slide decks and videos, First 10 Days resource, conversation starters, etc. to support wellness promotion with return to school. Many resources are packaged within this guide for easy access.
	Early identification resources	Tools to help educators to notice and respond to student mental health problems, in-person and during remote learning
	Equity and mental health resources	Information sheets to help educators plan for safe and supportive conversations related to anti-racism, anti-oppression and the intersection with mental health
Child and Youth Support Staff	Rising to the Challenge Workshops	Workshop created with and for child and youth workers, chaplains, and other school staff who are engaged in class-wide and small group mental health promotion services
	Kids Have Stress Too!	Training and four-unit resource for child and youth support staff to implement alongside educators in the classroom to support student learning about stress and coping
	Emotion Coaching	Series of modules and resources to support the use of emotion coaching as a strategy for helping to validate and support students
Principals / Vice-Principals	MH LIT	Six-module online learning about mental health designed for the school leader role, available on the VLE
	Leading Mentally Healthy Schools	One stop reference for school leaders related to creating the conditions for good student mental health, updated release in 2022
	Equity and mental health resources	Resources to support school leaders in their efforts to advance equity and mental health outcomes
Audience	Sample Resources	Brief Description
Principals / Vice-Principals	Decision Support Tools	Tools to help school leaders in selecting mental health awareness and promotion activities
	Supporting Student Mental Health Series	Series of webinars and podcasts co-developed with OPC, CPCO, and ADFO
SMH Professionals	Training in early intervention protocols	Synchronous and recorded training, and ongoing coaching/consultation for implementation of evidence-based stepped care protocols like Brief Digital Interventions (Harvard/McMaster), Brief Interventions for School Clinicians (Washington U), and Supporting Transition Resilience of Newcomer Groups (National Center for School Mental Health).

	Suicide Risk Assessment Training	Three-session workshop series with McMaster Children's Hospital on suicide risk assessment for the school setting
	Workshops on critical topics in SMH service delivery	Workshops with expert speakers on topics like eating disorder prevention, gaming addiction, measurement-based care, substance use and overdose prevention, complex issues in virtual care
	Centering Black youth well-being certificate course	Four-week certificate course offered in partnership with YouthRex for regulated SMH professionals to learn ways to centre Black student well-being and to combat anti-Black racism
	Culturally-adapted Cognitive Behaviour Therapy	Online course in development alongside the CAMH Office of Health Equity
Mental Health Leadership Teams	Implementation Coaching	Every board has a SMH-ON coach who provides guidance related to the development and implementation of the board mental health and addictions strategy and related initiatives, helps with contextualizing provincial guidance to the local setting, and offers assistance with critical incidents, etc.
	Regional and provincial community of practice	Regular meetings designed to facilitate cross-board sharing, common messaging, and alignment with the provincial school mental health action plan
	Tools and templates	Board mental health leadership teams have access to a Leadership Portal that houses a range of tools, templates, slide decks, videos, and resource repositories that they can draw upon to create board-specific professional learning, resources, etc.



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