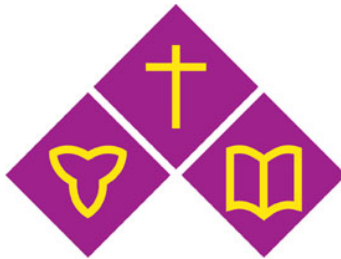


Partners in “Achieving Excellence”

A Brief to the Minister of Education

December, 2014



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

OUR MISSION

Inspired by the Gospel, we provide leadership, service and a provincial voice for Catholic School Boards in promoting and protecting Catholic education.

OUR VISION

In keeping with our Mission, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association:

OPERATIONAL VALUES

- ✦ **Embodies** and promotes the values and traditions of our Catholic faith in all Association activities.
- ✦ **Respects** the principles of democratic and accountable governance.

POLITICAL ADVOCACY

- ✦ **Protects** the constitutional right of the Catholic community to govern, control and manage Catholic schools.
- ✦ **Promotes** education in our province that reflects the Catholic principles of social justice.
- ✦ **Advocates** for government recognition of the distinctive nature of Catholic education.
- ✦ **Advocates** for provincial policy, legislation and funding support that enable Catholic boards to provide quality Catholic education.
- ✦ **Influences** the strategic and political direction of the Ontario government and opposition parties regarding issues that impact Catholic education.

INFORMATION & SERVICES

- ✦ **Provides** faith formation and professional development resources and opportunities for its members.
- ✦ **Provides** to member boards information and services that recognize their diverse circumstances and needs.

COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC RELATIONS

- ✦ **Develops** effective structures that enhance communication and working relationships among OCSTA and its member boards.
- ✦ **Communicates** with member Boards and Catholic partners regarding relevant educational issues and OCSTA activities.
- ✦ **Promotes** public understanding of and support for Catholic education.
- ✦ **Celebrates** and **highlights** Catholic education's significant and continuing contribution to Ontario society.

PARTNERSHIPS

- ✦ **Stimulates** ongoing visioning of how Catholic education partners can collaborate to serve the interests of Catholic education.
- ✦ **Builds** significant partnerships within and beyond the Catholic community in support of Catholic education.

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Introduction

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA) was founded in 1930. It represents 29 English-language Catholic district school boards. Collectively, these school boards educate approximately 600,000 students from junior kindergarten to grade 12.

Inspired by the Gospel, the Mission of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association is to provide leadership, service and a provincial voice for Catholic school boards in promoting and protecting Catholic education.

Annually, OCSTA submits a brief to the government with recommendations for improvements to the funding of education. Recommendations are made on the basis that the education funding system in Ontario must respond to four essential principles:

Equity: A funding formula must distribute education dollars equitably among all Ontario school boards and their students;

Adequacy: The level of funding for education must be adequate to ensure quality education for today's students;

Autonomy/Flexibility: The model must allow school boards the autonomy and flexibility in spending they require to achieve the distinctive goals of their system, and to meet local needs; and

Accountability: The educational funding model must include mechanisms that ensure the appropriate degree of accountability for all parties and transparent processes and reporting mechanisms to support efficient and effective use of educational resources for students.

The recommendations contained in this brief were approved by the members of OCSTA and are important issues to the Catholic school community in this province. We trust that the Minister of Education will consider our comments as part of the government's on-going commitment to consultation. As always, we would be pleased to meet with representatives of the Ministry to discuss any of the following items in more detail.

Funding of Central Collective Agreements

In April 2014 the government passed the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act*. The Act requires that all school boards participate in a two-tier teacher collective bargaining process where the first tier is bargaining at a provincial level with their respective teacher federation and the Crown as a participant. Similarly, school boards are required to bargain, as part of a council of trustee associations, with non-teacher unions represented by a designated employee bargaining agency. The Act also states that an agreement cannot come into effect until the central terms are ratified by the parties and agreed to by the Crown. Since the Crown is required to agree to the issues addresses in the central terms, and the Crown is a participant in the negotiations and the only source of funding for school boards are government grants it is OCSTA's position that any increase in costs to school boards arising from the central terms of collective agreements should be funded by the government.

OCSTA also believes that all employee groups should be treated equitably including non-union employees. Our management and administrative staff are key to our student achievement initiatives and our fiduciary responsibilities and are integral to the success of our school boards.

Recommendation 1

- a) **OCSTA recommends to the Minister of Education that any increase in costs to school boards arising from the central terms of collective agreements be funded by the government.**
- b) **OCSTA urges the Ministry to ensure that all employee groups are treated equitably with respect to adjustments in compensation and other terms and conditions of employment.**

Pupil Accommodation Review Process

Catholic school boards in the province of Ontario are responsible for providing schools and facilities for their students and for operating and maintaining those schools to support academic achievement and provide a clean and safe environment for learning. The Ministry of Education developed the Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines to provide direction to school boards who were considering the closure or consolidation of a school or group of schools which lacked sufficient enrolment or did not meet the standards required by the school board. The Guidelines require the involvement of the local school community or communities.

Assistant Deputy Minister Gabriel Sekaly advised boards in his memorandum 2014:B04 that, as a result of the School Board Efficiency and Modernization consultations, the Ministry of Education would be revising the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) to make the process more effective for boards and the community. We have had the opportunity to discuss the first draft of the revised guidelines with Ministry staff. OCSTA appreciates the Ministry's commitment to assisting school boards with this challenging task. We look forward to reviewing

the final draft of the revised guidelines before they are issued. The following is the recommendation approved at the OCSTA Annual General Meeting last April.

Recommendation 2

OCSTA recommends that the Ministry of Education review the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline to ensure a process that is effective, efficient and timely, and supports constructive discussions between the Board and the public and supports meaningful community engagement with outcomes that will benefit current and future students.

Capital Funding Formula Reductions and the impact on Aging Facilities

Ministry of Education memorandum 2013: B18 advised school boards that joint use capital projects and other collaborative capital solutions between school boards will be given first priority. There are many older schools in Ontario requiring major repairs, upgrading and improvements to address changes in educational programs. Facility Renewal Grants are insufficient to address the existing and future needs of the aging infrastructure.

Each school system and each school board needs the autonomy and flexibility to use capital funding to address the needs of their specific schools and meet the distinct mission of their system. Considering a collaborative project may be advantageous to boards with a need for new space or where a joint renewal project is feasible but those projects may not be the more pressing issues. Safety of students and student achievement are the priority and boards are in the best position to determine the priority for their community.

Recommendation 3

OCSTA recommends that the Ministry of Education reassess the practice of prioritizing capital funding for “growth” schools or establish an alternative source of funding to address aging infrastructure in aging schools.

Native as a Second Language Funding

One of the goals in the province's renewed vision "Achieving Excellence" is "Ensuring Equity". The "Achieving Excellence" document states "It is particularly important to provide the best possible learning opportunities and supports for students who may be at risk of not succeeding. This often includes, but is not limited to, some of our Aboriginal students,.....". In addition, the First Nations, Metis and Inuit Policy Framework outline that, as a measure of success, school boards will strive to develop and implement programs and services that are supportive and reflective of First Nations, Metis and Inuit cultures and languages. However, the funding to support elementary NSL programs is based on enrolment at October 31 which does not recognize new program offerings subsequent to October 31. While it is desirable to have such programs in place at the beginning of the school year, finding staff with appropriate qualifications is difficult and may not be available at that time. The lack of funding for programs commencing after October 31 is a barrier to boards providing such programs.

Recommendation 4

OCSTA recommends that the Ministry of Education amend the GSN to recognize NSL enrolment at the March count date in addition to the October 31 count date for funding purposes, and that the NSL program be funded on an ADE basis, the average enrolment of the two count dates.

Apprenticeship Programs

Ontario has over 150 trades eligible for apprenticeship of which 22 require specialized certification. The Government has recognized the importance of Trades as vital to maintaining a robust economy and to providing good stable employment for its citizens. To support skills training the Province has increased the focus on Programs that will expose more young people to the opportunities available in the Trades. (Ontario Youth Apprenticeship, Dual Credit, Specialist High Skills Major). A key component of skills training is access to Apprenticeship placements. While there are a number of government programs that provide financial assistance and incentives to employers and College / University students, these are lacking for secondary school students. This gap in support has a two-fold impact on secondary school apprenticeships: students who would otherwise continue in an apprenticeship withdraw to seek paid employment, employers are reluctant to invest in apprenticeship training without direct financial incentive.

Recommendation 5

OCSTA urges the Government of Ontario to provide for enhanced financial support for apprenticeship learners and for more incentives for employers to hire apprentices wanting to pursue the skilled trades.

Accessibility and Continued Funding for Mental Health Initiatives

In June 2011, the Ministries of Education, Health and Long-Term Care, Children & Youth Services released the seminal document “Open Minds, Healthy Minds”. The document provides a comprehensive long-term strategy and vision in addressing the challenges of mental health in the Province. The first years of the program placed a focus on children and youth, with early identification, support and intervention. This strategy clearly places schools at the vanguard of implementation of the strategy.

Recommendation 6

- a) OCSTA urges the Ministries responsible for children to further enhance the relationships between Ministries to ensure a coordinated strategy is maintained.**
- b) OCSTA fully supports the embedding of the Mental Health Lead funding into the GSN and encourages the government to monitor and update the financial supports to insure the objectives articulated in the Open Minds, Healthy Minds document are met.**

Programs and Services for Students with Diverse Learning Needs including Special Education Needs

The changing framework for Special Education and Support Services aligns with the Ministry's mandate to promote success for all students. The principles of the "Learning for All" document are founded on the beliefs that all students can succeed and that student well-being, achievement, voice and engagement need to be supported in an inclusive learning environment. Boards are challenged in addressing their mandate to design effective school and system improvement plans when funding and other pressures arise that hamper personalized program delivery that honours success for all. Critical to the successful programs to all diverse learners is capacity building of staff through professional learning and appropriate time to incorporate into practice.

The Open Minds, Healthy Minds document outlines a long term strategy that will require long term policy and financial commitments from the Ministry to insure that changing student needs are met.

Recommendation 7

- a) That the Ministry of Education review on-going equitable and sustainable funding.**
- b) That the Ministry of Education review commitments including aligned supports for student well-being, voice, achievement and engagement for all learners with special education needs.**
- c) That the Ministry of Education continue to address the changing nature of student needs, including needs identified through a variety of student transitions as identified in on-going prevention, identification, and intervention supports for students with mental health challenges.**

Comprehensive Federal Government Census Data and/or Aligned Enhanced Enumeration Data is Required to Support an Equitable and Inclusive Public Funding Model for Ontario

In June 2010, the Federal Government removed the long form census, which provided detailed enumeration data on the Canadian population. Census data was extensively and effectively used for key data elements on the Canadian population. The census provided invaluable demographics that was used by a host of agencies and boards in designing educational, social and health services and programs in communities. Effective provincial and board improvement plans require accurate, current student/family demographics. The elimination of the long form census has significantly hampered organizations in their identification and analysis of the demographic makeup of the constituents they serve.

Recommendation 8

OCSTA urges the Ministry of Education along with its' education partners to petition the Federal Government to review the enumeration censuses and/or alternative demographic data sets that are more reflective of Ontario students and families by providing demographic data that is current.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

- a) **OCSTA recommends to the Minister of Education that any increase in costs to school boards arising from the central terms of collective agreements be funded by the government.**
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Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
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Ontario Catholic School
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P.O. Box 2064, Suite 1804, 20 Eglinton Avenue West, Toronto, Ontario M4R 1K8
Tel: 416-932-9460 Fax: 416-932-9459 Email: ocsta@ocsta.on.ca Website: www.ocsta.on.ca