

Submission to the
Standing Committee on Finance
& Economic Affairs

Pre-Budget Consultation

February 6, 2003



The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA) represents all twenty-nine English Catholic district school boards and five English Catholic school authorities in the province, which together, educate over 600,000 students from JK to Grade 12/OAC. The Association appreciates this opportunity to contribute to the province's pre-budget consultation process.

OCSTA's recent submission to the Education Equality Task Force, entitled [Student Focused Funding: Adequacy is the Issue](#), outlined the current needs, expectations and concerns of Ontario's Catholic school boards in regard to funding of elementary and secondary education. A copy of our brief is attached and forms the basis of our submission to the 2003 pre-budget process.

The engagement of Dr. Rozanski and the Education Equality Task Force in the review of education funding was a timely initiative on the part of the government. The Report of the Task Force provides a clear blueprint for addressing the funding needs of the province's education system.

OCSTA appreciates Dr. Rozanski's recognition of the constitutional rights and unique mandate of Ontario's four publicly funded school systems. We strongly agree with his conclusion that the basic structure of the funding formula is sound and must continue. For the first time in history, Ontario's education funding system promises every student in Ontario access to equality of educational opportunities. We reiterate the position of Catholic school boards; the Education Act's legal requirement for "fair and non-discriminatory funding" and the foundation of equality of educational opportunity for all children upon which the funding model was built **must** be maintained. On-going refinements to funding of education must not in any way weaken the commitment to equity.

OCSTA has long maintained that, to be acceptable, the mechanisms for the funding of education must respond to the four essential principles of equity, adequacy, autonomy/flexibility and accountability. Many positive steps have been taken since the inception of student-focused funding to realize these principles, particularly in regard to equity. There is much that remains to be done, however, in the area of adequacy.

OCSTA commends the government for its quick and positive response to three key aspects of Dr. Rozanski's report. The \$610 million in permanent funding allocated to school boards in the current fiscal year will help school boards to meet some of their immediate financial challenges. Further investments are required, however, in order to address the fiscal challenges ahead for Ontario's school systems.

OCSTA sees the Report of the Education Equality Task Force as a roadmap of specific actions that must be taken now to ensure adequate funding.

OCSTA has identified several priority items within Dr. Rozanski's recommendations. We urge the government to do the following:

- update all benchmark costs for all components of the funding formula to match 2003 costs;

- establish a process for the annual review and updating of the benchmark costs;
- allocate additional funding to cover costs resulting from provincial educational initiatives and regulatory requirements over the past five years;
- allocate additional funding for special education and early childhood education programs;
- adjust the School Renewal Grant to reflect increases in the cost of construction, changes to building codes and higher costs associated with older school buildings;
- implement immediate changes to the credit-load factor within the teachers' qualifications and experience grant to cover costs of employing the additional teachers that are required; and
- develop a student transportation grant based on need, with adequate funding.

OCSTA urges the government to move ahead quickly to address these recommendations made by the Education Equality Task Force. We reiterate our position that meaningful consultation with provincial education stakeholders throughout this process is essential. Any future initiatives flowing from the report must ensure equitable distribution of funding and protection of the constitutionally guaranteed rights of the Roman Catholic system.

The OCSTA will continue to strongly oppose any return to a locally determined tax levy as a means of providing local flexibility. As noted by Dr. Rozanski, such a move would inevitably create inequity among school boards.

OCSTA shares the government's goals of high quality educational programs and high student achievement. Improvement in both of these areas will be fostered by providing adequate resources to school boards. Coupled with adequate resources, reliable multi-year funding will enable school boards to engage in effective long-term planning and will ensure increased flexibility in meeting student needs. OCSTA is pleased to have been able to assist the government and our other provincial partners in education to realize the improvements in education funding that have been achieved to date. The Report of the Education Equality Task Force now affords the opportunity for all of us committed to publicly funded education in Ontario to build upon the strong foundation provided by the student focused funding model. OCSTA pledges its cooperation and support for all initiatives that strengthen equity and ensure adequacy in the funding of education.