

“Education for Success”

A Brief to the Minister of Education

December, 2015



**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 237 elected Catholic trustees who collectively represent 29 English-language Catholic district school boards. Collectively, these school boards educate approximately 545,000 students from junior kindergarten to grade 12 and adults in continuing education programs province-wide.

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.

Recommendation 1

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.

School Board Administration and Governance Grant

In 2014 the Ministry implemented a new funding model for the School Board Administration and Governance Grant based on the advice of the School Board Administration and Governance Advisory Group (BAAG). The new funding model had a redistributive funding effect on school boards, particularly larger boards. The new model is based on ten core functions which does not reflect some of the administrative requirements of large, urban boards. While the impact of the changes is being phased in over four years the significant funding reduction to the School Board Administration and Governance Grant of some boards has a direct impact on the administrative capabilities of the board and, ultimately, the classroom. OCSTA is appreciative of the positive adjustments for smaller boards who had previously been under-funded for administration. Any future adjustments should not result in a reduction for those school boards. In addition, the requirement not to exceed the funding envelope can negatively impact a school boards' ability to service schools. Boards require flexibility to address local needs and provide appropriate administrative support to schools.

Recommendation 2

OCSTA recommends that the Ministry of Education review the recommendations from BAAG and the redistributive impacts of the funding on boards, with a view to recognizing the administrative and governance requirements of large boards and maintaining funding at current levels in this area.

Programs and Services for Students with Differing Abilities, Diverse Learning Needs and Mental Health Needs

The changing framework for Special Education and Support Services is internationally and provincially aligned with the Ministry's mandate to promote success for all students with differing abilities including students with diverse learning and mental health needs. The principles of the draft Ministry resources Learning for All: K-12, the aligned Inter-Ministerial Provincial Transition Framework and commitments to supporting successful transitions for all students (PPM 156) are founded on beliefs that all students can succeed and that student well-being, achievement, student voice and engagement need to be supported in an inclusive learning environment.

Boards continue to be challenged in their design of effective school and system improvement plans when funding and other pressures may arise in delivering a Ministry mandated criterion-referenced curriculum with related expected practices while adhering to a universal design for learning approach which honours success for all through personalized instruction. Building capacity of staff through professional learning in support of all diverse learners is critical to student well-being and student achievement; recognizing the need to have adequate time for consolidation and practice of new learning as relates to mental well-being and mental health.

The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Child and Youth Services and Ministry of Health mental well-being strategy will need sustainable commitments to keep pace with changing needs and societal demands in equitable and transparent ways.

Recommendation 3

- a) OCSTA recommends that the Ministry of Education review on-going equitable and sustainable funding for all students including those facing mental health challenges. In addition, OCSTA requests a review of other commitments including aligned supports for student well-being, voice, achievement, and engagement for all learners with differing abilities.**
- b) OCSTA recommends that the Ministry of Education continue to address the changing nature of student needs including needs identified through a variety of student transitions as evidenced in the need for on-going enhanced prevention/intervention supports for students with mental health challenges.**

Funding Gap Between Ministry Construction Benchmarks and Actual Cost of Construction

The Ministry of Education funds school capital construction costs and has established construction benchmarks with geographical adjustments. Construction costs can significantly exceed the Ministry of Education construction benchmarks, depending on market and geographic circumstances. In some parts of Ontario certain trades are not locally available. Northern Ontario has additional challenges in constructing schools of appropriate size and amenities.

Recommendation 4

OCSTA recommends that the Ministry of Education review the construction benchmarks in Northern Ontario to adequately reflect the higher construction costs.

Cost of Travel for Trustees from Northern Ontario

School boards are allocated funding through the Grants for Student Needs to accommodate all trustee expenditures, however, the cost to travel differs in the different geographic areas of Ontario.

The cost to travel to critical meetings and conferences which are normally held in Toronto is significantly higher for Northern Ontario than travel from other areas of Ontario. For example, the estimated cost for one trustee to travel to Toronto is \$1,400 from Kenora via Winnipeg, Manitoba. This is common among the northern Ontario communities and requires school boards to top up the trustee allocation to accommodate trustee travel to meetings and conferences in different areas of the Province.

Recommendation 5

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association recommends that the Ministry of Education review the Grants for Student Needs allocation for trustees and revise it to reflect the cost of travel for trustees from Northern Ontario.

Educational Assistant Funding

In 2014-15 the Ministry introduced a new component to the High Needs Amount (HNA), a component of the Special Education Grant. This new component, the Special Education Statistical Prediction Model, was developed by Dr. J. Douglas Willms and was intended to provide greater equitable distribution of the HNA. The model draws from 2011–12 Ontario Ministry of Education student data and the 2006 Canadian Census data, to estimate the number of students predicted to require special education programs and services in each of Ontario's district school boards. The model uses socioeconomic data of all students enrolled in a school board such as occupation, parent level of education, income level, unemployment rate, percent of Aboriginal families, percent of recent immigrants, etc.

This new model has some redistributive impacts on school boards, therefore it is being phased in over a four year period beginning 2014-15. While OCSTA has no immediate concerns, and applauds the government for addressing the issue of special education funding, there is concern that the redistribution of special education may result in unintended consequences for some boards.

Recommendation 6

That the Ministry monitor the High Needs Amount funding during the 4 year transition to the new model to ensure the redistribution of funds is equitable and reflects the actual costs of providing adequate supports for students with special needs.

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 had significantly hampered organizations in their identification and analysis of the demographic makeup of the constituents they serve. OCSTA applauds the federal government's commitment to reinstate the long-form census.

Recommendation 7

OCSTA urges the Ministry of Education along with its' education partners to ensure the Federal Government maintains its commitment to reinstate the mandatory long-form census.

Information Technology

The integration and effective use of technology is vital to enhancing student success, yet appropriate internet access is not available to all schools in the province. In addition, in order to function effectively and efficiently and to meet both internal and external reporting requirements, school boards, as with most organizations, have become more reliant on information technology in both administrative and academic areas.

A number of years ago technology funding was reduced by \$25 million and that funding has not been reinstated. In addition, there is no specific recognition of administrative IT needs in the GSN. Computer hardware and software quickly become obsolete and must be refreshed in order to maintain efficiency and effectiveness. Although the cost of hardware has generally decreased over the years, the costs of sophisticated software programs, support and training have increased.

In the past the GSN has not provided any one-time funding for the upgrading of the foundation ICT infrastructure for either academic or administrative purposes (e.g., servers, network switches and network communications), which have a maximum life cycle of seven-to-ten years. Consideration needs to be given as to how these replacement needs are best addressed in the future. OCSTA recognizes that the backlog of technological needs is so great that the Ministry will not be able to fund all that is required in a single year. It is critical, however, that the Ministry of Education signal its intention to address this pressing need.

Recommendation 8

- a) That the Ministry of Education begin to address needs in administrative technology, including aging technological infrastructure, over a period of three to four years.**
- b) That the Ministry develop a strategy to provide adequate internet access to all schools in the province.**

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

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