

Submission to  
The Minister of Education  
**Partners in Excellence, Equity and Well-Being**

December 4, 2017



Ontario Catholic School  
Trustees' Association



## **Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association**

### **Mission Statement**

Inspired by the Gospel, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association provides the provincial voice, leadership and service for elected Catholic school trustees to promote and protect publicly funded Catholic education in Ontario.

### **Vision Statement**

Ontario is enriched by a publicly funded Catholic education system, governed by locally elected Catholic school trustees who serve with faith, commitment and compassion.

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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. Together, 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. In some cases, they represent on-going concerns of our Catholic school boards. 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.

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## **Student Transportation**

OCSTA welcomes the Ministry of Education’s initiative to re-examine the student transportation policy framework, including its funding formula. It is key to ensure that school boards have adequate financial resources reflected in the GSN to manage this important service boards provide to students and families.

Recent proposed changes to the Employment Standards Act, 2000 (“bill 148”) increases the minimum wage to \$14/hour on January 1, 2018 and by the end of 2019 \$15/hour. Coupled with other costs associated with the proposed amendments in bill 148 including vacation pay, equal pay for equal work for part-time employees and increases in personal emergency leaves, school board budgets will face increasing pressures to meet existing program and service obligations. Especially in respect of student transportation, these costs could be significant for school bus operators which will negatively impact school board transportation budgets.

As you know, many school boards are currently running significant deficits in funding student transportation. The structure and funding of student transportation is not based on the needs of a school board. The funding model is based on a “historical amount—each boards’ 1997 spending level with annual adjustments for enrollment and inflation, and other minor adjustments. The most important influences on a school boards student transportation costs are not factored into the model such as enrollment density, geography, the number of special needs students and safety hazards.

In addition, the current competitive procurement process that school boards must follow in securing transportation has resulted in significant cost increases. In one case of a large urban transportation consortium, costs increased by roughly 18% that had to be absorbed by the affected school boards.

### **OCSTA Recommendations**

- **That the student transportation funding formula be restructured to reflect the actual needs of school boards;**
- **That the competitive procurement process be restructured to restore school board autonomy and flexibility following the recommendations of the Campbell Report.**
- **That the Ministry of Education ensure that any new costs associated with the amendments to the Employment Standards Act that impact student transportation are reflected in annual adjustments to the GSN.**

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## **21<sup>st</sup> Century Programs and Services for Students with Differing Abilities Including Diverse Learning Needs**

### **Student Mental Health**

Recent research from Centre for Addiction and Mental Health shows that roughly 328,000 children in grades 7-12 report moderate to serious psychological distress (2016). The Provincial Centre for Excellence in Children and Youth Mental Health state that schools need to develop comprehensive mental health supports and strategies to address the growing challenge. In addition, with the legalization of recreational use of cannabis, many school boards anticipate greater demands on mental health resources and supports, with the potential increased use of cannabis products and accompanying impacts on student mental health and well-being.

The province has developed a mental health strategy “Open Minds, Healthy Minds” and is currently consulting on a “Well-Being” strategy to guide school boards as they develop student mental health and well-being programs. Catholic school boards have developed comprehensive mental health strategies to build awareness/organizational capacity, reduce stigma, use evidence based best practices for promotion and prevention strategies and partner with community based organizations.

Rural and northern school boards face unique issues with fewer professional resources to support student mental health services. Boards need more resources to expand promotion and prevention programs at the elementary and secondary school level. Key program areas include: suicide prevention, anxiety issues, behaviour problems, addictions.

### **OCSTA Recommendations**

- **That the Ministry of Education ensure funding for student mental health needs is equitable and sustainable for all students.**
- **That the Ministry of Education continue to support funding of a board level “Mental Health Lead” into the Grants for Student Needs structure. We also encourage the government to monitor and update the financial supports to boards to support local mental health initiatives.**
- **That the Ministry of Education continue to address the changing nature of student mental health needs as evidenced in the need for on-going enhanced prevention/intervention and aligned staff professional development supports for students with mental health challenges in transition.**

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## Special Education

Currently 28 of 29 of Ontario's Catholic school boards are running deficits in meeting the educational, psychological and support needs of its exceptional students. More sophisticated diagnostic techniques related to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), have resulted in significant increase in identifying this segment of the student population and led to increases in demand on special education services in Boards.

Additionally, with the introduction of full-day kindergarten and various social factors, school boards must reallocate funding between different program areas to ensure students receive the educational services and supports they require. In many cases, school boards are having their special education grant reduced due to phased in changes to a key part of the grant structure. The "high needs" amount of the grant is being replaced by the Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount (DSENA). This new model is composed of the Special Education Statistical Prediction Model (SESPM), Measures of Variability Amount (MOV) and Base Amount for Collaboration and Integration. This new grant structure has redistributive funding impacts across all boards, some gaining and some losing funding.

This inequity is placing a significant strain on many boards and presents unfairness to their special education students. A recent report from the Elementary Teachers Federation states:

The change from identified needs to the statistical model (DSENA), which the government has now finished phasing in, gave rise to significant shifts in funding among boards. In 2016-17 (the last year for which both high needs amounts and statistical amounts were reported), the biggest losers were the two Toronto boards – Toronto public and Catholic – and Halton public, with losses of \$8.6 million, \$6.5 million and \$7.6 million, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount formula is partly premised on the idea that boards have declining student enrollment in general; however, this does not mean that a board's enrolment of students with special needs has or will decline. This could negatively impact allocation a board receives as part of their overall Special Education grant.

Currently the Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount is \$1.065 billion in 2017-2018. However, it will decrease now that the four-year phase-in is complete.

A significant concern with the Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount formula is its' reliance on limited demographic data in the "Measures of Variability" component. This statistical funding model underlying the DSENA breaks away from a "needs based funding allocation" for high needs exceptional students and underestimates incidences of autism and various behavioural disorders many students in this high needs category have. This negatively impacts the allocation boards receive.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shortchanging Ontario Students: An Overview and Assessment of Education Funding in Ontario, August 2017, p. 4. <https://www.ett.ca/etfo-media-release-etfo-issues-seven-recommendations-to-fix-ontarios-education-funding-formula/>

<sup>2</sup> See Ibid, p. 42-44 for a critical analysis of the DSNEA funding model and its dollar impact on school board special education funding.

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## OCSTA Recommendations

- **That the Minister establish a Special Education Working group with a stakeholder advisory board to review the adequacy of special education funding, including the structure of the DSNEA;**
- **That the Ministry of Education review “needs based” funding models for high needs special education students to supplement the overall Special Education Grant structure.**

## Information Technology Infrastructure

In order to function effectively and efficiently and to meet both internal and external reporting requirements, school boards have become more reliant on information technology in both administrative and academic areas. A portion of the Foundation Grant (reduced in 2009-10 and 2010-11) provides funding for the latter, however there is no specific IT grant for administrative needs. 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 cost of sophisticated software programs, support and training have escalated. These costs must be funded from the board administration envelope and have contributed to expenditure increases over the past few years.

In the past the GSN has not provided any one-time funding for the upgrading of the foundation ICT infrastructure (e.g., servers, network switches and network communications), which has 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.

In 2016, the Ministry announced a Broadband Modernization Program project to support school boards to ensure that barriers to achieving adequate broadband connectivity are addressed. This program intends to address, in a systematic, phased approach, closing the broadband connectivity gaps that schools may face and promises to be a key enabler to supporting student outcomes. OCSTA welcomes this initiative and looks forward to working with the Ministry as it supports our school boards to ensure sufficient broadband access and funding to support digital learning in our schools.

## OCSTA Recommendations

- **That the Minister of Education consult with OCSTA to ensure appropriate funding and resources are made available to fully implement Broadband Modernization.**
- **That the Minister of Education ensure that the GSN allocation be adjusted to incorporate funding to support school board’s ICT Infrastructure needs.**

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## Renewed Math Strategy

In 2016, the Ministry of Education announced “The Renewed Mathematics Strategy” and funding model to focus on improving student achievement in mathematics. The strategy intends to provide new forms of support to all schools, increased support to some schools and intensive support to a select group of schools with the greatest needs in mathematics. The strategy will also focus on students with special needs and high school students taking compulsory courses in applied mathematics. The total amount of funding allocated to support the renewed math strategy is roughly \$53 million.

Some of the supports for school boards include:

- dedicated blocks of mathematics instruction time;
- teaching math lead teachers
- professional support programs for teachers and principals;
- funding for facilitators and extra support for special education students.

The funding model is based on EQAO results in grades 3, 6, and 9 mathematics, and information from students and board staff. Some flexibility is built into the model that recognizes the unique circumstances of some school boards, for instance, where a board has a shortage of occasional teachers or very small schools. Further, it is noted that “transfer payment agreements” will be made with each board based on their project funds to support the renewed Mathematics Strategy.

The funding model, however, is not equitable in respect of its impact on Catholic school boards. Generally speaking, Catholic boards have been achieving higher math scores as measured by EQAO tests and therefore receive less funding overall. In order to achieve the goals for mathematics knowledge, Catholic boards may have to allocate funds from other parts of the Grants for Student Needs and thus negatively impact student achievement in those non-mathematics areas.

The Mathematics Strategy, also may have program planning and assessment challenges. At this stage, it is not clear how teaching and learning practices are to be monitored in the classroom; furthermore, some of the resources used by the Ministry to support teachers are outdated and program requirements lack cohesion and consistency. Another challenge is the teacher training and hiring regulations. These present barriers to the implementation of the renewed Mathematics Strategy by making it difficult for school boards to find or hire the most qualified mathematics teachers available.

### OCSTA Recommendations

- **That the Ministry of Education provide EPO funding on an equitable basis to all school boards to support the Renewed Mathematics Strategy;**
- **That the Ministry of Education collaborate with Catholic school boards to make funding adjustments to compensate for the erosion of funds for other program areas;**

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- **That the Ministry of Education continue to collaborate with school boards and other education partners to improve the Mathematics program and planning components and facilitate access to the most qualified mathematics teachers available.**

### **Education Accessibility Standard**

Since the passage of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, (“AODA”) and its key regulations O. Reg. 429/07 and O.Reg. 191/11 providing schools with specific requirements in customer service and standards for accessibility, Ontario’s 29 Catholic school boards have worked diligently to provide an environment in all of its facilities that fosters independence, dignity and respect for all students and staff with disabilities. Our school boards are fully committed to providing services that are free of barriers and biases to students, parents and the broader school community.

Our boards strive to ensure that the principle of equal opportunity is reflected and valued in our learning and working environments. Our boards are committed to ensure that people with disabilities have the equal opportunities to access services, programs and educational experiences that are available to all others they serve.

Catholic school boards in Ontario have continued to meet all targets and timelines in respect of the implementation of accessibility requirements in employment, information and communication and student transportation. In addition, Ontario’s Catholic school boards have developed multi-year accessibility plans, as required by O. Reg. 191/11 on Accessibility Standards. In general, these plans describe the measures each board will take, over several years, to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who work, learn and participate in the school community, primarily in the areas of employment, information and communication and student transportation.

In terms of an Education specific accessibility standard, the key issues are costs and timelines. Based on our boards’ experience with the requirements in meeting customer service and standards for accessibility described in O. Reg. 191/11, the financial costs are significant. The Ministry of Education currently does not fund via the GSN or EPO specific program dollars to assist boards in meeting the requirements of the regulation. This problem will be exacerbated with an additional Education Accessibility Standard regulation, assuming no new money is attached to its implementation. This means boards will have to adjust existing accessibility plans and priorities and this will likely impact the timelines for full implementation of the education accessibility standard.

### **OCSTA Recommendation**

**That the Ministry of Education transitional funding be attached to any new regulations related to an Education Accessibility Standard.**

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## Capital Funding

School boards benefitted from previous capital allocation programs in a number of ways. Paramount among these were the predictability and flexibility afforded to school boards to plan, on a district-wide basis, for the most effective and efficient means of addressing their various capital requirements.

The continuing needs of school boards include the following:

1. Old schools need to be re-built;
2. Some schools need to be consolidated due to declining enrolment and this often requires some capital upgrades;
3. Deferred maintenance needs still exist in all school boards;
4. Ultimately all schools will need to meet AODA accessibility standards, but there are no funds earmarked to address these needs; and
5. Even with overall decreases in enrolment, new schools need to be built in boards', growth areas that are sometimes far from existing schools.

The Ministry of Education now issues calls for applications for capital projects. Each of these calls gives the appearance of being a one-off call, with no certainty about whether or when there will be another. As a consequence, many boards have treated these calls as though there will be no other. A multiplicity of different projects, which under the previous system were streamed into specific capital programs, is now herded into a single funding stream. This makes it difficult for boards to assign priorities and difficult for Ministry officials to make decisions that are fair and equitable.

In addition, the current approvals process under this single funding stream for capital projects is administratively burdensome. Streamlining this process will go some distance to increasing efficiency and lessening the administrative burdens for school boards.

The current situation would also benefit from the creation of a multi-year program to address capital needs. This would add an element of predictability to the system and would make it possible for school boards to plan and clearly articulate those plans to the Ministry. It would also make it easier for the Ministry to review applications and make allocations in an orderly and transparent manner that reflect the priorities of both the Ministry and school boards.

## OCSTA Recommendations

- **That the Ministry of Education establish a multi-year capital funding process in order to restore the ability of both the Ministry of Education and school boards to plan for future capital needs.**
- **That the Ministry of Education streamline the capital approvals process for school boards to reduce administrative costs.**

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## Sick Leave Costs

The financial costs associated with the sick leave provisions contained within the central terms of our boards' collective agreements are becoming an increasingly significant issue. Currently, all employee groups are able to access up to 11 days payable at 100% and up to 120 days payable at 90%, for a combined total of up to 131 paid days of sick leave per year. Cost increases associated with these provisions, combined with the indirect costs associated with replacement staff, occasional teachers, and increased administrative burdens associated with managing higher utilization, are leaving many of our school boards struggling to meet obligations.

While OCSTA continues to collect absenteeism data from its member boards, in 2016, SBCI conducted a study of 54 school boards (inclusive of certain Catholic, public, French Catholic and French public school boards) which highlighted the growth of average sick leave utilization across the sector as a whole and the associated financial magnitude of the problem. According to publicly available reports<sup>3</sup>, absenteeism rates have, on average, risen from less than 9 days in 2010-11 to over 11 days in 2015-16, with an associated cost of approximately \$1.0 billion. Over the 2010-11 to the 2015-16 period, sick leave utilization grew significantly in every employee category:

- Elementary teachers: 29% increase in sick days, >11 days
- High school teachers: 26% increase in sick days, <10 days
- Educational assistants: 41% increase in sick days, 16 days
- Custodians: 23% increase in sick days, >16 days
- Early childhood educators:\* 37% increase in sick days, > 13 days

(\* period for ECEs ranged from 2013-14 to 2015-16)

There can be little debate that the exponential growth in sick leave utilization is directly linked to the sick leave plan modification that was introduced to the sector in 2012. While attendance support programs are one tool to assist in curbing growing costs, these types of programs alone are insufficient to address the magnitude of the increase in utilization. Additional funding to enable boards to build and maintain robust attendance support programs is required. Government must also be committed to working with school boards and Trustee Associations to negotiate meaningful changes to the central sick leave collective agreement provisions. Failing this, funding for absences attributable to the changes in the sick leave plan within the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) must be adjusted to reflect actual costs and absence rates across all employee groups.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.therecord.com/news-story/7316863-jump-in-teachers-sick-days-affecting-students-report-warns/?S=E>

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## OCSTA Recommendations

- **That Boards be supported and funded by the Ministry of Education in implementing attendance support and disability management programs.**
- **That the Government work with trustee associations and school boards to negotiate meaningful changes to the central sick leave collective agreement provisions.**
- **That funding for illness absence within the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) be adjusted to reflect actual costs and absence rates across all employee groups.**

## School Board Flexibility and Autonomy

Catholic district school boards in Ontario face increased budget pressures in the delivery of educational programs and services required by the Ministry of Education. As part of an expanding list of programs and services, the ministry continues to reduce boards' flexibility and autonomy in designing and delivering these programs that meet local needs and conditions. In addition, the ministry continues to reduce boards' flexibility in developing specific policies for students or implementing ministry policy directives. The recent proposed revisions to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline is one example.

The ministry has also placed increased restrictions on how school boards spend their capital and operating funds. For example, the increased number of areas in the GSN that are "enveloped" reduces school boards' budget flexibility along with more targeted EPO grants. These restrictions on school boards have reduced their capacity to plan for, fund and operate specific education programs that serve the unique needs of their local constituents.

In essence, then, Ontario's publicly funded school boards require sufficient flexibility and autonomy to realize their distinct missions and unique mandates.

## OCSTA Recommendations

- **That the Ministry of Education develop new regulations/policies to restore school board autonomy and flexibility:**
  1. **In overall school board planning/program design and the implementation of ministry policy directives;**
  2. **Remove restrictions (enveloping) on operating funds that reduce school board flexibility.**

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## Summary of Recommendations

### Student Transportation

- That the student transportation funding formula be restructured to reflect the actual needs of school boards;
- That the competitive procurement process be restructured to restore school board autonomy and flexibility following the recommendations of the Campbell Report.
- That the Ministry of Education ensure that any new costs associated with the amendments to the Employment Standards Act that impact student transportation are reflected in annual adjustments to the GSN.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Programs and Services for Students with Differing Abilities Including Diverse Learning Needs

#### Student Mental Health

- That the Ministry of Education ensure funding for student mental health needs is equitable and sustainable for all students.
- That the Ministry of Education continue to support funding of a board level “Mental Health Lead” into the Grants for Student Needs structure. We also encourage the government to monitor and update the financial supports to boards to support local mental health initiatives.
- That the Ministry of Education continue to address the changing nature of student mental health needs as evidenced in the need for on-going enhanced prevention/intervention and aligned staff professional development supports for students with mental health challenges in transition.

#### Special Education

- That the Minister establish a Special Education Working group with a stakeholder advisory board to review the adequacy of special education funding, including the structure of the DSNEA;
- That the Ministry of Education review “needs based” funding models for high needs special education students to supplement the overall Special Education Grant structure.

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## **Information Technology Infrastructure**

- That the Minister of Education consult with OCSTA to ensure appropriate funding and resources are made available to fully implement Broadband Modernization.
- That the Minister of Education ensure that the GSN allocation be adjusted to incorporate funding to support school board's ICT Infrastructure needs.

## **Renewed Math Strategy**

- That the Ministry of Education provide EPO funding on an equitable basis to all school boards to support the Renewed Mathematics Strategy;
- That the Ministry of Education collaborate with Catholic school boards to make funding adjustments to compensate for the erosion of funds for other program areas;
  - That the Ministry of Education continue to collaborate with school boards and other education partners to improve the Mathematics program and planning components and facilitate access to the most qualified mathematics teachers available.

## **Education Accessibility Standard**

That the Ministry of Education transitional funding be attached to any new regulations related to an Education Accessibility Standard.

## **Capital Funding**

- That the Ministry of Education establish a multi-year capital funding process in order to restore the ability of both the Ministry of Education and school boards to plan for future capital needs.
- That the Ministry of Education streamline the capital approvals process for school boards to reduce administrative costs.

## **Sick Leave Costs**

- That Boards be supported and funded by the Ministry of Education in implementing attendance support and disability management programs.
- That the Government work with trustee associations and school boards to negotiate meaningful changes to the central sick leave collective agreement provisions.

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- That funding for illness absence within the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) be adjusted to reflect actual costs and absence rates across all employee groups.

### **School Board Flexibility and Autonomy**

- **That the Ministry of Education develop new regulations/policies to restore school board autonomy and flexibility:**
  1. **In overall school board planning/program design and the implementation of ministry policy directives;**
  2. **Remove restrictions (enveloping) on operating funds that reduce school board flexibility.**

**Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
**2017-18**

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<b>Region 10</b>	Algonquin & Lakeshore CDSB CDSB of Eastern Ontario Renfrew County CDSB	Todd Lalonde <i>CDSB of Eastern Ontario</i>	2019
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Nick Milanetti, Executive Director  
 Bishop John Boissonneau, ACBO Liaison to the OCSTA Board of Directors  
 Father Patrick Fitzpatrick, Chaplain







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