



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

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April 24, 2018

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairpersons and Directors of Education
- All Catholic District School Boards

FROM: Stephen Andrews, Director of Legislative and Political Affairs

SUBJECT: Political Party Responses to Election Survey 2018

As you are aware, in early March OCSTA sent a survey to the Ontario Liberal Party, the Ontario NDP and the PC Party of Ontario. In that survey we asked the leaders of the parties to provide their policy positions on a number of education funding and policy issues reflected in our 2017 Finance Brief and OCSTA's Pre-Budget submission. These included:

- School board autonomy and flexibility
- Student transportation costs
- Student mental health support
- Special education funding.

To date both the Liberals and the NDP have responded. In summary, the Liberals provided detailed comments on each section of the survey outlining their investments and policy initiatives over the past several years. The NDP committed to an "overhaul" of the education funding formula.

The PC Party is still in the process of developing their policy platform under the new leader and will respond to us in early May once their election platform is completed. In a recent meeting with Mr. Ford attended by Pat Daly, Nick Milanetti and I, he stated his firm commitment to public funding for Catholic education.

For your information and reference, attached are copies of the responses received from the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party.

If you have any questions please contact Steve Andrews at sandrews@ocsta.on.ca.

Attachments

Dear Mr. Daly,

Thank you for your letter and for sharing OCSTA's important recommendations for further improving our education system. I am pleased to provide the enclosed response.

Ontario's publicly funded Catholic schools are examples of excellence in our education system. I appreciate that Catholic boards, and OCSTA as their advocate, have committed themselves wholeheartedly to improving student achievement, promoting well-being, ensuring equity and increasing public confidence in our schools.

Our government remains firmly committed to publicly funded Catholic education, and it is our ongoing pleasure to work with you toward reaching our shared goals in education.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Wynne

Responses to be embedded in the survey or provided separately

1. Autonomy and Flexibility

After inheriting an education system that was severely underfunded and in complete disrepair, our government has made historic investments in our publicly funded education system. This has enabled hiring more than 40,000 additional teachers and education workers into the system to support student success during a period of declining enrolment. It has also contributed to caps on K-3 class size, reduced average class size and the complete roll-out of full-day kindergarten for every four and five year old in Ontario.

These investments are contributing to the high school graduation rate reaching an all-time high of 86.5 per cent – and 91% in the English Catholic system – up more than 18 percentage points compared to the rate when we took office. Today, Ontario's students consistently rank amongst the highest in national and international student achievement results in reading, math and science. Now 71% of elementary students meet the standard in literacy and numeracy, up from 56% when we took office and have narrowed the achievement gaps significantly for English language learners, students with special needs and Indigenous students.

But we also know that there is more to do. Next year, the Grants for Student Needs will be increasing by another \$625 million to \$24.5 billion, further increasing per-student funding to \$12,300 – that's 9.4 per cent more than in 2012-13. This will support 2,000 additional teachers and education workers to advance student achievement and well-being.

In addition to providing greater funding to school boards and advancing provincial priorities for publicly funded education, the Ontario Liberal Party is committed to supporting local school

board autonomy and flexibility. In fact, the proportion of the Grants for Student Needs that is enveloped has decreased since our government took office in 2003. We work with our partners each year to review the education funding formula and make necessary changes that enable boards to respond effectively and efficiently to the unique challenges faced by communities across the province.

Examples of how our government invested in increased board autonomy and flexibility include:

- **Rural and Northern Funding:** We recognize the distinct challenges facing remote and rural schools. Our Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education invested an additional \$20 million in flexible ongoing funding through the GSN to support the local distinct needs of rural and northern students across the province.
- **Learning Opportunities Grant:** This year, we are providing over \$350 million through the Demographic Allocation of the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) where its intended purpose is to support school boards in offering locally-determined programs to improve the educational outcomes of students at greater risk of low academic achievement.
- **Local Priorities Fund:** This fund is providing approximately \$230 million for boards to address a range of local priorities needs. This may include more special education staffing to support children in need and students at risk of poor academic achievement.
- **Community Use of Schools Funding:** Approximately \$29 million is provided in flexible funding to support boards in reducing the rates for school space open after hours used by the community according to local priorities.
- **Well-Being Funding:** This year, flexible funding was doubled from \$6 million to \$12 million to support school boards in local needs and priorities to enhance well-being in the classroom and across the school, including safe, healthy, inclusive and accepting learning environments.

2. Transportation

More than two out of five Ontario students rely on student transportation services each day to get them to and from school safely and on-time. We recognize that this system is facing challenges, including the challenges that bus operators are facing in retaining qualified drivers.

That's why we took immediate action to provide \$60 million over the next two years to support the recruitment and retention of school bus drivers. Our government also provided additional assistance through the 2018-19 Grants for Student Needs to manage increased transportation costs by doubling our annual increase in transportation funding to 4 per cent next year. We also continue to work with school boards to move forward on the opportunities outlined in the Student Transportation Competitive Procurement Review (Campbell Report) when procuring student transportation services.

In addition, to support longer-term solutions, we began a broad engagement to develop a new vision for student transportation in Ontario. This engagement will provide advice on how transportation services can be improved to best support the goals of the education system now

and in the future, including a new transportation funding formula that reflects the needs of today's students.

3. Student Mental Health

We care deeply about student mental health and well-being, because we know how many of our young people are facing mental health challenges and need support both in their schools and broader communities. In fact, up to 70 per cent of mental health and addictions challenges begin in childhood or adolescence.

That's why we recently announced we are supporting quicker access to better care for mental health and addiction services for people of all ages through a historic \$2.1 billion investment over the next four years.

This is the largest provincial investment in Canadian history in mental health and addictions care. On top of the Mental Health Leads that we created in every school board, this investment means an additional 400 mental health workers to support every high school across the province dedicated to supporting continued and expanded mental health awareness and education, earlier identification and assessment, and improved timely referrals to community mental health services. This investment will also support enhanced mental health literacy for our educators and school staff, and social emotional learning skills embedded in the curriculum.

This is all in addition to our government's investment of \$49 million over the next three years to promote and support the well-being of Ontario's students, which includes doubling funding to school boards for locally-determined priorities including mental health.

4. Special Education

We believe that every student must have access to the supports they need to reach their full potential, including students with special needs. We continue to show our commitment to these students by investing in special education.

We recently announced we will add another \$300 million over the next three years, bringing special education funding to \$3 billion next year. This funding will help to eliminate the waitlists for special education assessments and means 600 additional staff forming multidisciplinary teams of social workers, psychologists, behavioural specialists and speech-language pathologists to build board capacity and help teachers, education assistants and other staff better understand and adapt to the unique needs of their students. It also includes an additional \$30 million per year through the Special Incidence Portion for up to 500 more Education Assistants who will support our highest needs students.

By adding more staff in classrooms and clearing special education assessment backlogs, this investment will support our school boards in providing much-needed additional support to our

students with special needs. We are committed to engaging with our education partners to continue reviewing the funding model for special education to ensure it is responsive to the needs of school boards, educators and students with special needs.

5. Sick Leave Costs

While each school board is responsible for managing and encouraging consistent staff attendance, we are committed to supporting school boards to adopt practices that support staff attendance and well-being.

Many boards have developed a number of strategies tailored to their individual needs, but we know there is still more to be done.

We will continue to promote a culture of safety and well-being in Ontario's schools. We are committed to working with all of our education partners to address our shared challenges, including ensuring provincial funding reflects school boards' costs.

Patrick Daly, President
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Dear Patrick Daly,

Thank you for reaching out to us on behalf of the Ontario Catholic Trustees' Association, and by extension, the over 545,000 students that you serve.

Frankly, decades of cuts, freezes, and underfunding by consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments has left our education system in crisis. Ontario's education funding formula, developed by the Harris Conservatives and left in place by the Liberals, has failed to strengthen publicly-funded education and has instead led the system to the breaking point. Too many students are going to school in buildings without proper heating or cooling, with leaky roofs or broken staircases, and the backlog of needed repairs has reached \$15 billion. Some schools boards are using special-education money just to keep schools safe and functioning, while children with special needs often have to cope with limited resources. Chronic underfunding has also led to increased classroom violence, putting teachers, students and education workers at risk. We also know that our kindergarten classes are often over-full and understaffed.

The underfunding has so been widespread that since 2011, the Liberal government has closed 270 schools and put another 300 schools on the chopping block — schools that were an essential part of their communities.

But the good news is, we know that it doesn't have to be this way. We don't have to settle for cuts and freezes, for underfunding and neglect, in our publicly-funded education system.

The NDP is committed to funding our schools – including publicly-funded Catholic schools – properly. An NDP government will work with parents, front-line educators, students, and educational experts to overhaul the education funding formula starting with a comprehensive public review based on two key principles: equity and quality. We know that a new funding formula will allow us to curb class sizes, and address issues of classroom violence. It will mean boards, teachers, and education workers will have the resources they need to ensure the well-being and safety of all learners, and all educators. We will also invest \$16 billion in a 10-year capital plan to specifically tackle the repair backlog in our schools. For our students with special needs, we commit to basing special education funding on actual needs, not overall populations, with timely needs assessments.

We know that with these critical changes and investments, Ontario's education system will be one that students, education workers, boards, parents and caregivers can all be proud of.

Sincerely,

Ontario's New Democrats