

Submission to
The Minister of Education

**Student Transportation Discussion Paper –
“New Vision for Student Transportation in Ontario”**

March 28, 2018



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.

Background

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 elected Catholic school trustees who seek to promote and protect publicly funded Catholic education in Ontario.

Summary

OCSTA welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Ministry of Education's discussion paper on a New Vision for Student Transportation. OCSTA has long advocated for an initiative to re-examine the student transportation policy framework, including its funding formula with the goal of providing a safe, affordable responsive pupil transportation system that recognizes the needs of the communities our school boards serve.

Our submission responds to the 4 Ministry pillars, guiding values and themes, that are defined in the discussion paper:

- Responsiveness to Student Transportation Needs
- Equity in Transportation
- Transportation Safety and Well Being of Students
- Accountability in Transportation Service Delivery

Policy and Funding Context for Student Transportation

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.

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 board's 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% and had to be absorbed by the affected school boards.

Overall Policy and Funding Recommendations

Overarching all of our recommendations in this brief is that school boards have adequate financial resources reflected in the GSN to manage student transportation services boards provide to students and families. Adequate funding for existing transportation services and costs should be acknowledged and addressed appropriately before new initiatives are implemented by the Ministry. In addition, it is critical that boards maintain sufficient the autonomy and flexibility in order to manage their student transportation budgets to meet local needs and conditions. Further, any new initiatives must reflect the real costs and long-term funding commitments to our boards.

OCSTA supports the “New Vision” initiative and is participating in the “Student Transportation Reference Group” led by Co-Chairs Michelle Paulin and Joan Green. We provide the following comments for consideration by the Ministry.

Discussion Paper Recommendations

Accountability in Transportation Service

- The student transportation funding formula is restructured to reflect the actual needs of school boards;
- That any transportation policy expansion of services boards may offer as a result of these consultations be fully funded through the appropriate grant structure;
- The competitive procurement process is restructured to restore school board autonomy and flexibility following the recommendations of the Campbell Report.

Responsiveness to Student Transportation Needs

- The Ministry provide support to boards for transportation services to address needs of students who are required to travel to specialized programs not available within the jurisdiction of their home school;
- Secondary students require flexible bus scheduling to allow for participation in before or after school and employment experience opportunities.

Municipal Transit & Planning

- Municipal transit to coordinate and cooperate with board transportation consortia to develop integrated transit services and scheduling in a cost-effective manner;
- Support for Active and Safe Routes to School, including a designated funded position at all municipalities and school boards and enhanced funding to support pedestrian travel;

-
- Greater requirements in the municipal planning process and incentives for “walkable” communities. For example, crossing guard programs and school traffic zone enforcement.

Enhanced Technology

- Provide support to boards to incorporate WIFI enabled busses to allow students to engage in learning activities while in transit, including access to “Homework Help” online;
- Development and deployment of mobile apps to support real time bussing information for parents, students and school administrators;
- Installation of GPS tracking on all school transportation vehicles;
- Deploy digital recording cameras and dash cameras on all student transportation vehicles.

Equity in Transportation Services

- Coterminous School Boards should be able to provide comparable transportation services and be funded to support those services relative to proximity and density of its’ schools in an area;
- Students with special needs should be provided with safe, equitable access on all school transportation vehicles;
- Family circumstances and student needs in the 21st century are complex and varied. Boards should be given sufficient flexibility to ensure local and unique circumstances can be addressed. Greater recognition of “family” circumstances and flexibility in funding to address:
 - Courtesy transportation
 - Families require alternative transportation options to allow for caregivers location for pick-up or drop-off
 - Transportation eligibility to address separation of siblings.

Safety and Well-Being of Students

- Boards recognize safety and well-being of students in the school, playground and on a school bus is a prime responsibility. Each pillar contributes to student safety and well-being for all stages of a child's trip to and from school;
- Funding for additional adult supervision while students are being transported will enhance student safety. The role of the bus driver should be focused on operating the vehicle efficiently and safely;
- There should be greater supports for some vehicles with respect to additional supervision on buses to manage and support the student’s transportation experience. These additional staff could manage interactions with parents’, specific

health plans for identified students.

- Support for alternative fueled vehicles to minimize greenhouse gases and other health and environmental risks.

Summary

Ontario's English Catholic Boards have long been leaders in providing safe, efficient, responsive school bus transportation to the tens of thousands of students entrusted to their care. We look forward to working with our partners to restructure and enhance the student experience in respect of transportation services.

Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2017-2018

Patrick Daly, President	Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Beverley Eckensweiler, Vice President	Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board
Kathy Burtnik, Past President	Niagara Catholic District School Board
Ann Andrachuk	Toronto Catholic District School Board
Michael Bellmore	Sudbury Catholic District School Board
Clifford Casey	Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board
Carol Cotton	York Catholic District School Board
Michael Del Grande	Toronto Catholic District School Board
Marino Gazzola	Wellington Catholic District School Board
Michelle Griepsma	Peterborough Victoria Northumberland & Clarington CDSB
Arlene Iantomasi	Halton Catholic District School Board
Todd Lalonde	CDSB of Eastern Ontario
Colleen Landers	Northeastern Catholic District School Board
Paul Landry	Kenora Catholic District School Board
Mark Mullan	Ottawa Catholic School Board
Mario Pascucci	Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board
Thomas Thomas	Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board
Linda Ward	St. Clair Catholic District School Board
Bishop John Boissonneau	ACBO Liaison to OCSTA
Fr. Patrick Fitzpatrick	Chaplain
Nick Milanetti	Executive Director



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

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