

Budget Submission 2011

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) represents 60 000 educational workers across Ontario including public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, attendance counsellors and many others in education. Most of our members participate in the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) or the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS) pension plans, but some of our members belong to smaller, private university pension plans.

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OSSTF/FEESO understands the impact that the economy has had on government revenues in the past year. OSSTF/FEESO also appreciates the government's commitment to honour established collective agreements and education-based initiatives like the Early Learning Plan. It is clear and undisputed that finances will be limited for the foreseeable future. The competition for the limited funding will be great. However, it is also clear and undisputed that funding applied to education should be considered investment dollars. These investment dollars provide significant returns for Ontario's economy, workforce, culture and social structures.

The future knowledge based economy is reliant on the base training and education provided by secondary schools in Ontario. Secondary schools are the gateway to the growth opportunities in apprenticeships, skilled trades, university based professions and immediate employment opportunities. Therefore, it is essential that secondary schools are able to provide the full spectrum of programs along with the necessary supports to give each student the opportunity for maximum achievement.

Student Distribution and School Configuration

In an era of declining enrolment, school boards and the government must not avoid the obvious answer to enrolment pressure in a revenue-limited system. Student distribution and school configuration must be considered regardless of political, religious and union demands in order to provide a sound education for all students. Having access to all schools in a geographical area and the freedom to create configurations that respond to enrolment and demographic shifts is essential to reach maximum economy during a time of enrolment decline. A school of JK to Grade 8 students may be the best fit in one area of a school board, and a Grade 7 to Grade 12 school may serve the school board in another area. The influx of younger students into the early years of formal education puts pressure on the facility when enrolment declines in the intermediate years. Current curriculum increasingly requires specialized equipment and teachers with specialized education and training, consequently making the 7-12 schools attractive. The current practice of bussing a student past one half full school to attend another half full school must end. Rising heat and hydro costs require school boards to balance enrolment in schools before spending capital dollars on expanding existing space.

An unfortunate by-product of enrolment decline is school closure. Most school boards will have to make difficult decisions on school closure due to enrolment decline or population shifts within their boundaries. The government must revisit the process for review of school accommodation to ensure that appropriate schools remain open, and that the schools that remain open, are viable. School boards should not be financially penalizing the viable schools by propping up schools that should be considered for closure.

Community Participation

For the foreseeable future, the school is and will continue to be the hub of the community. The school is considered the safe, comfortable centre of activity in a small community, or in a neighbourhood, in larger urban centres. In many cases, the economic viability of the area is directly reliant on the existence of the school. The school is often the most appropriate location for facilities that the greater community depends upon. To that end, the community and/or municipality should expand their financial participation in the school. This reliance on the school is magnified in the northern and rural communities of Ontario. The school is *the centrepiece* of the municipality and without it, traffic to the core of the community is dramatically reduced.

Many municipalities are in a position to underwrite construction, maintenance or service costs. Forgivable loans or partnership agreements with a municipality to provide everything from meeting rooms to sports fields can ensure that there is less duplication of facilities as well as a maximum utilization of existing assets. This broad use of facilities can expand well beyond the direct community use.

Other government ministries and agencies can tap into the school as a central location and a convenient service point for members of the broader community. It should be noted that with expanded use of the facilities, safety of the students and staff, along with maintenance and upkeep must be factored into the equation. In addition, work space for school board employees must be guaranteed. Information gathered by the Ministry of Education could be the basis for determining the services provided to school-age children and their families.

Funding For Special Education Programs

Special education funding for the implementation and maintenance of special education programs in the school called the Special Education Per-Pupil Amount (SEPPA) must be increased to account for the integration and support of high needs students in the school, including specialized classrooms and workspaces. A base level of funding must be provided that is protected from the impact of declining enrolment. Special education spending for individual high needs students should be simply based on the Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the student and a requirement that those services be available to the student. Funding for preventative programs and short term intervention for students at risk without an IEP, must be part of any special education funding model. Support services (i.e. educational assistants) and professional student services personnel (i.e. psychologists, social workers, speech and language pathologists, child and youth workers, etc.) must be funded for the actual costs of salaries, benefits and professional development. Funding and services provided by the government ministries and agencies must be routed through the school board.

Adult Education

Ontario Learns: Strengthening our Adult Education System, a report produced by Kathleen Wynne, former Minister of Education, indicates that Ontario is committed to higher educational achievement for Ontarians, as well as lower unemployment, faster integration of new Canadians into the economy, and facilitating more children arriving at school ready to learn. A strong adult education system can help Ontario achieve these economic and social goals. In addition, the 2003 OECD/UNESCO research quoted in this report indicates that adult education and training can contribute directly to the goals of higher performance for underachieving students in the K to 12 system when the adults in their lives gain the language, literacy and numeracy skills that they need to effectively participate in their children's education. Currently, Ontario suffers from significant job losses in the manufacturing sector. Many of these employees would benefit from a combination of retraining and education that would open doors to versatile employment opportunities. Adding adults to partially filled buildings is a cost effective way to provide an important service and expedite their return to the active workforce.

OSSTF/FEESO believes that this government can fulfil this commitment, support Literacy and Numeracy and Learning to Age 18 initiatives and revitalize adult education programs in Ontario by implementing a mixed model, where at risk students who are under 21 years of age are placed in mixed model programs with adults 21 and over. The job-focused and skills-focused approaches of Learning to Age 18 initiatives such as the new High Skills Majors are ideally suited to adult education. A mixed model enriches programs for adult students, and youth in alternative programs benefit from job-focused adult curriculum. The current funding levels for adult education are a fraction of what is provided for student under 21 years old. The GSN grant allocation is based mainly on enrolment and therefore programs need a critical mass of funding to be able to run. Providing adequate funding levels for adults in a program results in more diverse educational opportunities that can be developed especially in more remote or outlying areas where the need is great.

University Funding

More enrolment-based funding for infrastructure and support staff is required in the university sector. As government initiatives attract more students into the university system, the result is the necessity of more capital expenditures to support research and enrolment. Currently, more students have not equaled more funding and as a result, the services have not been able to be maintained. Universities are not adding support staff at a rate anywhere near their enrolment growth. This directly impacts students. Governments must provide the funding, as well as direct universities to use that funding to ensure the infrastructure at the university is able to continue to support the increased numbers of students attending their programs. The government must ensure that universities allocate their funding in a clear and transparent way to ensure accountability.

Ministry of Education Initiatives

During the past several years, the Ministry has initiated numerous capacity building initiatives that, for optimum results, require continuing reinforcement for teachers and support staff. These include the introduction of Board and School Improvement Plans, Growing Success, the School Effectiveness Framework and Learning for All K-12. In addition, in order to support various Ministry Student Success program initiatives, funding and appropriate training must be provided. Areas include differentiated instruction (DI), credit recovery, cross panel teams, Specialist High Skills Majors, anti-bullying, equity and aboriginal education.

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