



Submission to the 2020-2021 Education Funding Consultations

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation was founded in 1919, OSSTF/FEESO represents almost 60,000 public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, instructors, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, and many other educational workers.

OSSTF/FEESO is pleased to provide its submission to the Ontario Ministry of Education for the 2020-2021 Grants for Student Needs. OSSTF/FEESO strongly believes that with the appropriate political direction, savings can be found for reinvestment into Ontario's world-renowned education system. However, recent funding cuts must be reversed to ensure our students have the best possible outcomes.

The cuts made by the government in the 2019-2020 school year, and those planned for the next 3 years, will decimate Ontario's world class education system, undermining the education of two million students. The cuts will tarnish Ontario's reputation in the business community and ultimately damage Ontario's economy. OSSTF/FEESO, along with the majority of Ontarians, urges the government to take a different approach to education funding. Public education must be viewed as an investment in Ontario, and not an expense.

Funding public education is an investment opportunity with real returns, a fact that has been researched by leading economists. In June of 2019, the Conference Board of Canada released their report titled *The Economic Case for Investing in Education*. The research demonstrates that with every dollar cut from education, \$1.30 of economic benefit is lost. The reverse is also true, when the government invests a dollar in education, there is an increase of \$1.30 to the economy. When more is invested in education, there is a drop in the demand for social services such as health care, welfare and in the judicial system. This alone should prompt the government to reverse recent cuts and instead make real investments in Ontario's education system.

Ontario's public education system, as evidenced by the 2018 PISA results, is one of the world's best. However, that standing is under severe threat due to the unilateral funding cuts made to the K-12 system. The future status of Ontario's public education system is clearly in jeopardy and the government must act quickly before more damage is inflicted upon our students and economy. On September 26, 2019, The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) released a report detailing the alarming fact that the projected growth in Ministry of Education spending was well below education cost drivers (school-age population and inflation) over the next four years. This means that compared to the 2018-2019 school year and despite an overall increase in funding available to school boards, there will be significantly less per pupil funding, compared to previous years. In fact, according to the government memo (2019: B14), per pupil funding is already down \$54 per student in the first year of a multi-year plan of significant cuts.

A reduced level of per pupil funding impedes school boards from providing high quality education to a growing population. Further, by incorporating the new child care tax credit as a component of education funding, the government has created the illusion of increased funding, in the amount of \$390 million. School boards and Ontario students can ill afford to play this shell game.

OSSTF/FEESO believes there must be equal access to a comprehensive and well-rounded education system for everyone in Ontario. Public education should be well resourced with programs provided by qualified professionals. Safe and positive learning environments can only exist when schools are well-maintained and class sizes are kept at a level that provides substantial opportunities for individual attention. OSSTF/FEESO believes that meaningful consultation and shared decision-making are essential aspects of a strong education system.

Recommendations:

1. Restore the funding to match the level of teaching staff in the 2018-2019 school year. On March 15, 2019, the Minister of Education made several announcements that slashed the funding for classroom teachers at the secondary level. These included changing the funded average class size from 22:1 to 28:1, elimination of the Secondary Programming Grant and the removal of Local Priorities Funding (LPF). The cumulative effect of these changes will result in the elimination of over 10,000 secondary teachers from the system by the end of the 2022-2023 school year, as confirmed by the FAO in their Ministry of Education Expenditure Estimates 2019-2020 report. This will result in the removal of over 60,000 course sections, drastically reducing student choice in programs. A significant loss of program has already occurred in school boards when the provincial class size average only reached approximately 22.5:1 in this first year of cuts. Students will be unable to study certain subjects in their home schools and will have to resort to outside sources to finish their OSSD requirements. These cuts will not improve student success. We recommend that the government listen to the overwhelming majority of Ontario's students, parents and teachers and restore teaching staff to the level in the 2018-2019 school year.
2. Restore lost education worker positions to the system and fund these positions based on need. The cumulative effects of cutting the base amount in the Cost Adjustment and Qualifications & Experience Grant, reductions in the Supplementary Area Factor (SAF) resulting from increasing the class size average, the removal of the Local Priorities Fund, and the reduction of the funded level of Early Childhood Educators (ECE) has forced school boards to cut education workers from our schools. The numbers of education workers lost to the system will only increase as the funded class size average increases thereby resulting in a greater reduction in funding. The vast majority of education workers work directly with our most vulnerable students. These students have benefited in recent years from having more educational assistants and professional support staff personnel in our schools assisting with their learning. We recommend that the government restore funding to school boards so that education workers are rehired and to fund these positions based on the needs of the students.

3. Eliminate mandatory e-learning for secondary students. E-learning is of value to only a limited number of students. However, mandatory e-learning is detrimental to many students, particularly students at risk. Part of the government's proposal for mandatory e-learning is a further increase in the funded average class size from 28:1 to 35:1. If every student in Ontario is forced to take two mandatory e-learning credits to graduate, this will eliminate even more teachers and, as a result, more education workers from the system. Further, the Operations Grant will be reduced through additional changes to the SAF. Parents, students, teachers and education experts have been unequivocal in their opposition to mandatory e-learning. E-learning is acceptable on a voluntary basis only. The very few secondary students who possess the self-discipline and have access to the necessary technology should be free to choose these courses of their own volition. Forcing all students to take e-learning courses will lead to higher failure and dropout rates, more anxiety for students, and yield little educational value. We recommend that the government reverse this cut and maintain voluntary e-learning credits as an option for those students who may benefit from them.
4. Increase funding for adult non-credit continuing education. In school boards that offer LINC, LBS, Adult ESL, and other non-credit programs for adults, the funding is from different ministries: Children and Community Social Services and Colleges and Universities, as well as Federal LINC funding. These streams of funding do not provide for appropriate administration and preparation time needed by Adult Education Instructors to ensure the program requirements are met. Portfolio Based Learning Assessment methodologies have been mandated as the method of assessment and time required to adequately operationalize the program is non-existent, creating tremendous pressure on Adult Education Instructors and frustration for students. The GSN funding for Adult Non-Credit Instruction must be increased to address these pressures and ensure that instructors receive the appropriate preparation time and compensation to fulfil their duties and ensure a successful program. Improving language skills in adults, including those new to Canada, has a significant positive impact on the economy, as these adults seek employment within Ontario.
5. Increase funding for multi-disciplinary teams of school board professionals. Special needs students require services from various support personnel to reach their full potential. Students are best served when they have professional student support personnel who have the specialized expertise to work within the education system alongside teachers and other educators to achieve the best possible learning environments and outcomes. School boards should be adequately funded to employ multi-disciplinary teams of professionals who can provide these essential supports.
6. Establish a benchmark level of funding for educational assistants at the secondary level. Currently there is no funding generator for educational assistants at the secondary level in the Pupil Foundation Grant (PFG) although there is one in each of the elementary divisions. This forces school boards to take money from other allocations to pay for educational assistants assigned to students in secondary schools. By putting a generator into the GSNs for these essential education workers, the Ministry could better assess where money is spent and relieve pressure on money intended for other projects or purposes.
7. Increase funding for adult credit day school. Adult day school teachers teach the same curriculum as regular day school teachers to students 21 years and over, yet they do so in conditions that are more difficult. Adult day school teachers have little to no preparation time, no class size protection, and fewer teaching materials compared to their regular day school colleagues. Although some adult day school teachers have finally reached parity in salary with regular day school teachers, this parity is not based on the same workload. In addition, adult day school students do not have the same services available to them such as guidance and special education assistance. The primary reason is that the funding grant for these programs, the Continuing Education and Other Programs Grant,

uses a per average daily enrolment benchmark well below that of regular day school students. We recommend increasing this benchmark to match that of secondary school students.

8. Change the amortization period for retirement gratuity liability for school boards. Following the imposition of Bill 115 and the elimination of the retirement gratuity for education workers, the Ministry continued to provide funding to school boards in order to facilitate their retirement gratuity payout obligations. This funding was constructed to be wound down over a period of seven years, even though many employees may not be receiving the payout until after this time period. This creates a funding pressure on school boards to budget now for a payment later. OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the wind-down funding for retirement gratuities be amended to a longer period to reflect actual payout obligations and relieve budget pressure on school boards.
9. Increase the education worker benchmarks in the GSN. The benchmarks in the funding formula for education workers are not consistent with current salaries. These benchmarks should be updated so that money does not have to be taken from other areas of the GSNs to make up the shortfall.
10. Reduce the school board's reliance on rights arbitration. A fair, effective, and timely grievance procedure is an essential component of effective labour relations. Our collective agreements contain grievance procedures that allow for speedy resolution of disputes. Unfortunately, school boards have shown an increasing tendency to rely on the longest and most expensive mechanism in our procedures: rights arbitration. Between 2011 and 2016, the incidence of arbitration (where costs were incurred) nearly tripled from 1.53 arbitrations per 1,000 members to 4.34 arbitrations per 1,000 members. Predictably, most school boards have been unwilling to disclose how much is spent in legal and other fees associated with rights arbitrations, but preliminary accounts show that boards are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. These costs are unnecessary and defaulting to rights arbitration creates needless delays and stress for frontline education workers. OSSTF/FEESO recommends a review of school board expenditures on rights arbitration to identify overall trends and specific problem areas. We further recommend that the Minister of Education intervene to discourage boards from relying on rights arbitration as a default strategy when resolving grievances.
11. Change the Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount (DSENA) from a prediction model to one that addresses actual need. This allocation of the Special Education Grant is designed to address variation among boards with respect to the special education needs of their students and the boards' abilities to respond to those needs. However, the current model is based on statistical predictions and the overall enrollment of every student in the board as a whole, rather than meeting the unique individual requirements of students with the highest needs. The current model also relies on out-of-date long form census data, which are no longer collected. This model should be changed to provide funding to school boards based on the actual needs of each board's special education population.
12. Increase the funding to repair schools. As of November 2019, the cost to repair Ontario's public schools has risen to \$16.3 billion and must be addressed more quickly than previously planned. This disrepair is not only dangerous for staff and students, it also impacts the learning environment and student success. The government has pledged to spend \$13 billion over 10 years but this rate of funding will not keep pace with the need for repairs. The government must address the repair backlog with additional funding by increasing the benchmarks for the Pupil Accommodation Grants. These benchmarks are based on 1998 average school board spending. It is critical that these benchmarks be updated as they do not take into account the individual needs and states of

disrepair of individual schools. The recent cancellation of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund has set boards on a path of cancelling crucial repairs.

13. Reduce the number of staff at the Ministry of Education. There has been a tremendous growth in the number of staff at the Ministry of Education over the past 5 to 10 years. The Ministry of Education is particularly overstaffed in the areas of policy and programs. By reducing ministry staff, funds could be redirected to classrooms so that students receive additional resources and more support from educational support personnel.
14. Eliminate the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). EQAO testing has not proven itself to provide any value for money. The Premier has already indicated he understands the shortcomings of the EQAO. As educational workers, OSSTF/FEESO and our members have never been opposed to testing. However, testing should support learning and be interpreted in relation to other forms of assessment and evaluation. The current standardized testing regime creates high-stakes, high-stress, low utility evaluations. Moreover, regular publication of standardized test results from the EQAO creates a politically-charged environment where schools, portrayed as competing with one another, receive questionable ratings based on narrow criteria. We are deeply invested in high quality education and eager to support strategies that will improve education outcomes. The Ministry of Education spends approximately \$35 million per year to operate EQAO. Many alternative methods of testing (e.g. randomized) would save millions of taxpayer dollars that could be better invested in staffing schools with caring adults to support students in their education and well-being. OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the EQAO and its testing programs be discontinued and the savings be re-invested into student learning. At minimum, more cost efficient alternative methods of standardized testing, such as randomized tests, should be used.
15. Reinstate full day kindergarten (FDK) funding and monitor how boards spend this money. For several years, funding generated through the JK-3 Pupil Foundation Grant for ECEs has been consistently underspent. By analyzing the EFIS reporting from school boards since the program's full inception, OSSTF/FEESO has found that since 2014-2015, cumulatively over \$200 million earmarked for ECEs in the FDK program has not been used for ECE staffing for the JK and SK program. For 2016-2017, this amount alone was over \$80 million provincially. Boards have used their discretion under the rules of the GSNs to reallocate these funds elsewhere. OSSTF/FEESO members working in the FDK program report high JK/SK class sizes, classes in which no ECE is assigned or multiple split classes – all a direct result of boards choosing not to allocate FDK funds to ECEs. OSSTF/FEESO is calling on the government to envelope the funds generated for FDK so that the program can operate as intended and not be used to subsidize other chronically underfunded portions of the GSNs.
16. Establish greater transparency on spending by trustee associations. Following the passage of The School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, the Ministry allocated funding through the Administration and Governance Grant essentially to pay school boards' fees to their respective trustee associations. This funding (\$4.5 million for 2017-2018) allows the trustee associations, as the designated employers in central bargaining, to conduct their day-to-day operations regarding centrally bargained issues. There is no accountability by trustee associations or school boards for the use of these funds. School boards are not obligated to publicly report on these expenditures. OSSTF/FEESO insists that the trustee organizations be required through law to report the allocation and expenditure of these funds for the interest of public accountability and transparency.

17. Address the increase in violence in Ontario's schools. A growing number of OSSTF/FEESO members have reported incidents involving biting, punching, kicking, spitting, and other forms of assaults by students year-after-year. These members, primarily educational assistants but also teachers, work with high needs students in special education classrooms. This issue has reached a crisis level, with severe physical and psychological impacts on education workers. This crisis also comes with increased costs in lost time, sick leave benefits, WSIB and administrative time and resources. OSSTF/FEESO's program *End the Silence → Stop the Violence* has highlighted this issue and brought it to the attention of the Ministers of Education and Labour. In response, the Ministry of Labour released a document titled, *Workplace Violence in School Boards: A Guide to the Law* in March of 2018. School boards must be compelled to utilize the best practices in this Guide in order to ensure compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). Providing proactive health and safety training, during PD days or other paid time, to all school board employees is an important step toward reducing the incidents of workplace violence. Increased funding must be provided to school boards to create programs that protect those who work with high needs students. More education assistants, specialists and support workers must be hired to support high needs students and reduce injuries to educational workers.
18. Change the GSN to ensure there is equity of access in the public education system. The current funding formula ignores the inherent differences between urban, suburban and rural areas. Adjustments must be made to the basic funding formula so there is adequate funding for boards to address inequalities that occur as a result of income levels, gender, race, special education identification, new immigrant and Indigenous status. OSSTF/FEESO strongly believes in equitable access for every student to a complete public education. Programs like music, art, drama, physical education, technical studies and languages are essential to creating well-rounded citizens who are exposed to many different subjects and possible career paths, and not just core programming. Students are best served when these programs are properly funded and provided in their own public school. Alternative access schemes, especially ones that employ privatization or vouchers, will end in inequitable access for the students of Ontario.
19. Critically evaluate programs to ensure value for money. There has been a steady increase of new and compartmentalized programs through the years. In every school board, valuable funding has been re-directed from the classroom and students to assign teachers, principals and education workers to areas that are administrative in nature. Positions such as, but not limited to, Learning Coaches, Student Success Coordinators, and School Efficiency have been created to address individual school board projects. It is unclear whether these programs have been critically evaluated to determine if they have increased positive student outcomes. These members could be better utilized in classroom settings or directly supporting students thereby reducing class size or allowing specialized classroom programs to operate. To ensure value-for-money, the government must ensure there is an examination of these programs in order to determine their effectiveness by referring this issue to the education partners for study and recommendation.
20. A comprehensive, expert panel, including members from all stakeholder groups, should be convened to conduct a review of the GSNs. This panel should meet at set intervals to conduct ongoing reviews, for example, every 3 to 5 years. The funding formula has not been reviewed since 2002, leaving the public education system critically underfunded and schools in desperate need of repair.