

Submission to Grants for Student Needs 2011-2012

The challenges that confront the Ontario Government due to the financial downturn in both the Ontario and world economy highlight the need to foster a long term sustainable and competitive workforce. Many experts have stated that a knowledgeable, well trained workforce is one of the key drivers attracting industry to a region. The emerging knowledge based economy will require education to remain a focussed priority of the Government of Ontario.

OSSTF/FEESO recognizes the investment that has been made in public education in Ontario and is also proud of the return on the investment that has been made. The announcement of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results in reading, mathematics and science indicates that Ontario's students are performing very well in all three disciplines in comparison to students in 75 other jurisdictions throughout the world.

"These results demonstrate that strong investments in our education system at all levels pay strong dividends when it comes to our children's success in learning," stated Ken Coran, President of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

According to the announcement, Ontario students were outperformed only by Shanghai, China when it comes to reading ability. It also indicates that Ontario's education system has been more successful than most others at mitigating the negative effects of socio-economic disparity between high and low income families.

Clearly, public education works for Ontario. Schools are the hub of most neighbourhoods and communities. School age children and their families see the school as a safe and inviting place. OSSTF/FEESO believes it is vital to the future of the province to keep the success of public education as a primary goal. Success requires investment. Maintenance of funding levels with some enhancements will give Ontario a positive return on that investment on economic, environmental and social measuring sticks.

Student Distribution and School Configuration

Forecasts point to enrolment decline in many school boards of the public education system for some time in the future. At the same time, isolated areas have significant enrolment growth or a demographic shift that results in decline in one area of the board and growth in another. It is also a stark reality that construction costs are escalating exponentially. School boards, in this limited funding environment, must be prepared to entertain creative solutions to enrolment shifts and the bricks and mortar of their jurisdiction. Student distribution and school configuration must be as flexible as possible 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 are essential. 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 board in another area. The influx of younger students into the early years of formal education may put pressure on some facilities

providing JK to grade 8. The complement of younger students is growing while the enrolment decline wave is moving through the middle grade years into secondary schools. Current curriculum increasingly requires specialized equipment and teachers with specialized education and training. The combination of these factors makes 7-12 schools attractive. Funding for students in the 7-12 configuration must be generated through the Secondary Foundation Grant to support the specialized equipment and classes that are provided.

Schools as the Hub of the Community

For the foreseeable future, the school is and will continue to be the hub of the local 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 on. To that end, the province, the community or municipality should expand their financial participation in the school. Many 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 services provided to school age children and their families. Funding for these types of programs already exists. Routing it through school boards and schools is a very efficient delivery model.

Many municipalities are in the 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.

Adult Education

Ontario is committed to higher educational achievement for Ontarians, as well as lower unemployment, faster integration of new Canadians into the economy, and having more children arrive at school ready to learn. A strong adult education system can help us achieve these economic and social goals. Research 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 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 a 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. With adequate funding levels for adults in a program, more diverse educational opportunities can be developed especially in more remote or outlying areas where the need is great.

Government Initiatives

The Student Success Agenda has required a significant number of program and policy changes to the elementary and secondary school system. 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.

While there is good evidence to support the merit of the initiatives, the cost and workload implications of the initiatives have not been determined or addressed prior to their implementation. In most cases, limited funding has been provided. The level of funding has ranged from funding through an application process for pilot projects to structural changes to the Foundation Grant meant to provide additional teachers. Also, funding has been moved from grants impacting support services to schools and board offices to finance specific priorities of the government. In many cases, direct impact of workload is not addressed, especially in the areas of office, clerical and technical staff, custodial and plant support staff and professional student services areas. OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the government ensure that the personnel costs of these initiatives are fully funded. OSSTF/FEESO also recommends a moratorium on new initiatives. The government must allow time for the current initiatives to mature in the local school setting and give time for true analysis to be reviewed.

Government legislation contained in Bills 177, 168 and 157 require school boards to develop policy that may impact employee rights and working conditions. Appropriate staffing levels and training of that staff must be in place for the success of the initiatives.

Funding Student Credits

Student achievement is measured in the secondary panel by credit accumulation and graduation rates. The government has introduced a number of measures to ensure that a student is able to accumulate and recover credits more successfully than in the past. Secondly, many district school boards have designed the school day so that students may take more than four courses per semester and possibly more than eight courses per school year. School boards have music, coop, dual credit and other credit intensive programs that provide credits for work done outside of the traditional instructional class time. Credit recovery programs and dual credit courses allow students to achieve more credits inside and outside the traditional instructional day. In addition, the shortening of the secondary program to four years has caused the average credit totals in school boards to steadily increase. The government has capped the funding for student credits at 7.5 credits per student per year. Many school boards average above the 7.5 credit level. The main non-funded expense for these extra credits is teacher cost. This under funding puts upward stress on class sizes.

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.

Provincial Framework Agreements

In 2008, OSSTF/FEESO signed Provincial Framework Agreements with representatives of Ontario school boards under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. These framework agreements subsequently led to four year collective agreements between OSSTF/FEESO bargaining units and school boards spanning 2008-2012. The framework agreement and the local collective agreements include a number of provisions that are dependent on committed funding levels in the 2011-2012 Grants for Student Needs. It is imperative that the enhancement funding allocated from this agreement be used for the designed purpose. In 2011, \$119 million will be allocated for enhanced service to students by education assistants. In 2009-2010, a majority of school boards directed GSN funding into operating reserves.

Early Learning Plan

OSSTF/FEESO is encouraged by the commitment of the Ontario Government to bring the Early Learning Plan fully on stream. The growing pains of the program are apparent and must be addressed to ensure success of the fully implemented program. Facilities must be adequate and fully equipped. There must be dedicated time for the early childhood educator and the teacher to plan and prepare for their classes together. Loopholes in the staffing regulations have created unacceptable manipulations of class sizes and ECE staffing.

Pay equity

The *Pay Equity Act* is intended to correct the historical undervaluing and lower pay for work performed by women and men in female job classes. It specifically addresses gender imbalances and provides for compensation parity between women and men working at jobs that are different but are of equal or comparable value. Some funding was provided to school boards in the early 1990's to provide for Pay Equity settlements. A large number of district school boards are reluctant to reach pay equity agreements with their employee groups. As outlined throughout this paper, support staff and professional student services personnel are underfunded. This underfunding not only creates problems in contract negotiations, it is a major cost for employers in reaching pay equity settlements. As part of the 2011-2012 GSN regulations, the government must include a requirement that school boards must establish pay equity plans with their employee groups.