



## **Submission to the Ministry of Education on Special Education Grant Funding**

### **Preamble**

The Ministry of Education is hosting sector discussions regarding Special Education funding and OSSTF/FEESO is pleased to provide further input to the Ministry of Education regarding Special Education Funding

What must be stated at the outset is that the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation believes strongly that the government has a responsibility to support Ontario's neediest students and the staff working with those students. Funding and resources to ensure that these students have every opportunity to be successful must be a priority.

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation has previously provided many recommendations regarding the government's allocation of education funding. In our January 2008 submission, the following recommendations regarding Special Education were offered:

1. 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 workspace. A base level of funding must be provided that is protected from the impact of declining enrolment.
2. 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 these services be available to the student.
3. Funding for preventative programs and short term intervention for students at risk without an IEP must be part of any special education funding model.
4. 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 actual costs for salaries, benefits and professional development.
5. Funding and services provided by the government ministries and agencies must be routed through the school board.

In the Ministry's current quest to address Special Education funding, the delivery of these programs and services and student achievement, OSSTF/FEESO continues to advance these recommendations as part of the solution.

### **Special Education Funding Fall 2010**

At the recent September 24, 2010 meeting with Ministry of Education regarding changes to the Special Education Grant (SEG) funding model, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation representatives received information and provided initial input. Recognizing that the current funding model is one that has evolved since 2002, OSSTF/FEESO has been pleased to offer suggestions as well as support to some of the changes that have occurred. While reforms to funding, which included the end of the Intensive Student Amount (ISA) process have been encouraging, the funding model can still be improved. It is hoped that the expressed intent of the Ministry of Education to develop a long-term process, requiring no further modification to the Special Education funding structure can be accomplished.

Of the six components currently included in the Special Education Grant, it was reported that the planned focus change is upon the High Needs Amount (HNA), which accounts for 43% of how SEG is currently determined. These changes have yet to be clearly defined. At the September 24<sup>th</sup> meeting, Ministry of Education representatives indicated the HNA would be based not only upon information provided from district school boards and EQAO testing results but also from the most recent census information.

OSSTF/FEESO is concerned about the proposed reliance on census data and offers the following for consideration.

1. The 2006 data does not reflect the current Ontario population. In recent documents authored by the Government of Ontario, the changes to the demographics have been clearly identified. Basing the HNA portion of Special Education funding on data which no longer reflects accurate information about Ontario families will not result in funding to support student achievement, particularly for those with identified and unidentified needs.
2. OSSTF/FEESO would suggest that considering the 2006 census information, in conjunction with information such as, up-to-date rates of unemployment, applications to Ontario Works and statistics regarding dependence on subsidized day care and food banks, would give the Ministry of Education a sounder basis for Special Education funding.
3. In addition, current cross-Ministry initiatives would support the communication of such statistics as those related to clinical diagnoses which potentially impact student achievement. Such data is regularly generated by Children's Mental Health Centres across Ontario and could be valuable to the Ministry of Education as one additional source of data.

### **Expressed Concerns**

OSSTF/FEESO representatives identified the following areas of concern at the September 24, 2010 meeting:

- students are no longer receiving full time programs, but rather, fragmented part-time support;
- students are in larger special education classes where there are often circumstances that force administrators to ‘pierce the maximum’;
- when students are in ‘regular’ classrooms, the addressing of their accommodations is less concentrated;
- other concerns raised included the support required for students suffering from mental health concerns, not just special education, as well as the impact upon a ‘regular’ student when students who present greater needs do not have those needs adequately met.

Although the Ministry of Education is seeking recommendations regarding the funding model, the following must be considered if Ontario “will continue to be, a leader in the design and delivery of special education programs and services” as identified by the Working Table on Special Education:

- Students at risk need to have as many choices as university/college bound students;
- Class size for specialized programs for students at risk must be smaller;
- Additional funding for expansion of co-operative and technical education programs and facilities is essential to help more students achieve their full potential;
- Access to support programs and school board professionals is essential to student achievement;
- Professional development for teachers and educational workers supporting these students is essential to the students’ success;
- Student success must be defined more broadly than academic achievement. It is a single student’s advancement of knowledge and understanding. It is about students being prepared for life.

## **Recommendations**

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation wishes to again, formally submit its previous recommendations, and specific recommendations regarding proposed changes to the funding structure:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Funding for preventative programs and short term intervention for students at risk without an IEP must be part of any special education funding model.
4. 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.
5. Funding and services provided by the government ministries and agencies must be routed through the school board.
6. The 2006 data does not reflect the current Ontario population. In recent documents authored by the Government of Ontario, the changes to the demographics have been clearly identified. Basing the HNA portion of Special Education funding on data which no longer reflects accurate information about Ontario families will not result in funding to support student achievement, particularly for those students with identified and unidentified needs.
7. OSSTF/FEESO would suggest that considering the 2006 census information, in conjunction with information such as up-to-date rates of unemployment, applications to Ontario Works and statistics regarding dependence on subsidized day care and food banks, would give the Ministry of Education a sounder basis for Special Education funding.
8. In addition, current cross-Ministry initiatives would support the communication of such statistics as those related to clinical diagnoses which potentially impact student achievement. Such data is regularly generated by Children's Mental Health Centres across Ontario and could be valuable to the Ministry of Education as one additional source of data.

## **Conclusion**

The review of special education funding has a broad impact upon school boards and their employee groups as it will result in changes to the delivery of programs and services, and ultimately, student achievement. Many education workers now employed in school boards have knowledge and expertise concerning how best to support students with special education needs and improve student outcomes. OSSTF/FEESO requests that the Ministry reconsider the timing of the Fall 2010 Sector Discussions and the limited focus on specific sections of the Special Education Grant so that more information can be taken into consideration before the funding model is finalized.

October 15, 2010

cope343/js