

Grants for Student Need 2019/2020 Consultation Submission Submission on behalf of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association

Introduction

The Ontario Student Trustees' Association- l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario, officially branded as OSTA-AECO, is an active partner in Ontario's education system and the largest student stakeholder group in Ontario, representing over 2.2 million students. Our General Assembly is comprised of student trustees from public and Catholic school boards across Ontario. Members of the association work tirelessly throughout the year to advocate for student's voice and strive to work with our partners in government and otherwise to improve Ontario's education system for our students. More information about our work can be found at www.osta-aeco.org.

While the provincial government is looking for efficiencies throughout our province, we urge them to fully understand the magnitude of the decisions they make. Students are the heart of our education system; while striving to ensure that all of Ontario's youth achieve at the highest level possible, we must provide them with comprehensive curricula and supports, and understand the variety of learners throughout our province. This is possible through an equitable funding model.

Efficient Price Setting

Currently, there are parts of the Grants for Students Needs (GSN's) which already follow the efficient price setting concept. Efficient Price setting suggests that correct statistical data is used to provide funding.

OSTA-AECO recommends that;

- A. The provincial government ensures that all benchmarks:
 - i. Reflect the current costs of operations which have risen over the past couple of years;
 - ii. Are reflective of the needs that school boards possess;
 - iii. Are up to date with current and relevant statistical data which should be updated on a regular basis;
 - iv. Ensure that there is flexibility to consider certain factors such as the increased costs for rural/remote boards and special student demographics;
 - v. Are transparent and understood by school boards;

- B. The government should act on these recommendations by updating the current benchmarks for capital repairs. Currently, the benchmarks for maintenance spending is set at a level similar to the amount provided in 1997 and have seen minor adjustments for inflation.¹ Additionally, these benchmarks are based on two (2) boards which were the median of the per square foot maintenance spending incurred by the one-hundred twenty-two (122) school boards in existence before the funding formula was introduced. Updating these benchmarks will allow for modernized maintenance funding that reflects the needs of today's school boards.

Outcome Based Funding

In 2006, OSTA-AECO published a report titled “*Loss of Learning; Education vs Evaluation*”² which encompassed a variety of educational aspects. Specifically, the association put forward 8 recommendations for the province to ensure that students are being taught 21st-century skills and are not subjected to evaluation oriented solely around standardized testing.

OSTA-AECO recommends that;

- A. Education is not based solely on standardized testing and graduation rates. More information can be found at https://www.osta-aeco.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/education_vs_evaluation.pdf
- B. School boards be given flexibility with the fiscal discretion they need to craft and fund innovative solutions that will meet individual board outcome requirements as well as provincial outcome goals.
- C. An outcome-based model would work well for the Language Grant.³ Specifically, the allocations regarding the English as a second language/English literacy development (ESL/ELD) and the Actualisation Linguistique en français allocation. To ensure that these allocations are outcome-based, funding should be provided based on the average number of pupils who are not meeting the expectations of proficiency standards rather than the number of years a student has been living in Canada for.
- D. An outcome-based model would also work well for the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG).⁴ This could be achieved by returning the LOG to being entirely funded on demographic factors and moving the Student Achievement Envelope to another grant, like the Pupil Foundation Grant. Since its inception in 1998, the purpose of the LOG has been to enhance student achievement for at-risk students. However, through the addition of the Student Achievement envelopes which are not tied to demographics in any way, the core purpose of the LOG’s has been significantly diluted. Through this reform, the entirety of the resources provided by the LOG will be focused on demographic factors which will allow for improvements in student achievement for at-risk students, ultimately fulfilling the core outcome sought by the LOG.

Accountability and Value-For-Money

When considering value for money in the context of Ontario’s education system, it needs to be rooted in the fact that public education is an invaluable entity. Our education system does essential work lifting individuals, communities, and our province as a whole. As the government continues to look for efficiencies throughout our province, we urge them to recognize the magnitude of our education system which sets up our youth as successful future citizens who will one day form the foundation Ontario’s economy.

OSTA-AECO recommends that;

- A. The Ministry of Education conducts a fully independent, objective, and external review of the entirety of the educational funding formula. Through this undertaking, the ministry will get an unfiltered look at the fiscal state of Ontario's education system, providing a factual basis for future reforms. An excellent model for a review is the 2002 Rozanski Report⁵, which through its independent model shed critical light on the physical state of Ontario's schools.
- B. Additionally, the Ontario Government should maintain and expand a form of local priorities funding for Ontario's school boards, as it will provide boards with the autonomy and resources, they need to create new solutions. These specialized, creative, and innovative solutions will rectify some long-standing issues in our education system, thus providing maximum value for money to the provincial government and the diverse needs of students.

Other Education Funding Efficiencies

The students of Ontario are extremely diverse, requiring distinctive supports—based on differing experiences—to achieve their full potential. Taking this into consideration, Ontario must have a funding formula which provides students and all school with the basic needs and supports while also providing crucial funding for our exceptional learners and at-risk students.

OSTA-AECO recommends that;

- A. The government continue to consult with stakeholders and ensure that student voice is at the core of future reforms within the education system;
- B. The government keep the following considerations in mind to any and all alterations to the GSNs;
 - i. Student well-being;
 - ii. Equity for all students;
 - iii. Transferable skills development;
 - iv. Rural/remote/northern education realities;
 - v. Funding adequacy throughout the province;

For any questions or comments, please contact amal.qayum@osta-aeco.org

Endnotes

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- ¹ Fix our Schools, Ontario's Deteriorating Schools: http://fixourschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Hugh_MacKenzie_Report_Ontarios_deteriorating_schools.pdf
- ² OSTA-AECO Loss of Learning; Education vs Evaluation 2006: https://www.osta-aeco.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/education_vs_evaluation.pdf
- ³ Education Funding 2018/2019 Technical Papers: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1819/TechnicalPaper2018-19.pdf>
- ⁴ People for Education, Learning Opportunities Grant, 2017 Report: <https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/P4E-The-Learning-Opportunities-Grant-2017.pdf>
- ⁵ Report of the Education Quality Task Force, 2002. Investing in Public Education: Advancing the Goal of Continuous Improvement in Student Learning and Achievement: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/task02/complete.pdf>