



Affording Our Students' Success:

2020-21 Pre-Budget/Grants for
Student Needs Submission

Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA-AECO)



Introduction



Introduction

"Adequate and targeted funding for students within the education system has the ability to strengthen and support entire communities and change the trajectory of students' lives.

The provincial budget is a fundamental tool we can use to outline key supports and methods to enhance student achievement from all areas of the education system and province. Our funding must reflect the paramount importance of education in Ontario and the ability that a strong education system has to improve our society as a whole.

The finances of any corporation or business reflect their priorities, and similarly, the unsurpassed importance of education must be reflected in our budget.

Ontario's world-class education system is a conduit to providing millions of students with diverging needs, desires, and aspirations with a firm foundation of skills and character traits that will continue to enable them to grow into engaged, passionate, and knowledgeable global citizens. The role of the publicly funded education system is to develop individuals, communities, and societies that have strong workforces and can contribute to the building of a better future.

The purpose of our education system is both the development of civically minded adults who are able to contribute to a dynamic workforce. However, it is also a means that we can use to elevate students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or disadvantaged backgrounds, and serve as an equalizer and a path to overcome difficulties.

The future of our province lies with the students we empower and the opportunities to learn and develop that we, through aspects such as our budget, get to afford them every day."

Sally Meseret,
President, OSTA-AECO



Human Rights and Equity Within the Classroom and Beyond



Human Rights and Equity Within the Classroom and Beyond

Ontario's student population has changed rapidly over time, both in terms of the broad demographic outlook as well as the accommodations that are needed to facilitate student success.^{[1][2]} However, the Ministry of Education currently does not have a standardized method to track the broad changes of in the make-up and diverse composition of the student body and student experiences within individual school boards.^[3]

In 2014, the Government of Ontario released its vision for an education system that reflected upon equity guidelines known as Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan. This plan outlines common concerns and findings about equitable representation in small and large scale educational practices.^[4] For example, in the 2014-2015 school year, graduation rates greatly differed for students who were academically-streamed in grade nine (a 95% graduation rate) and students who were applied-streamed in grade nine (a 74% graduation rate).^[5] A concurrent survey later found that students in lower-income communities were more likely to be streamed into applied-level courses in comparison to students in higher-income communities.^[6] In turn, a majority of students who were academically-streamed in grade nine immediately continued their education into university (54%), while students who were applied-streamed were more likely to not attend a postsecondary institution directly and enter into alternative fields (67%).^[6]

Additionally, students of colour often experience significant structural barriers in Ontario's public education system. In schools that have a high percentage of students that are racialized, studies have demonstrated that racial profiling of the student population frequently occurs. A year-long consultation completed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission which analyzed methods of discipline used in schools found that students who are racialized were reported to have received harsher treatment or punishment for inappropriate behaviour in comparison to non-racialized students, and were more



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likely to be searched by police or comparative authorities.^[7] Such profiling can have lasting impacts on a student's education -- both professionally and personally. Similar treatment has also been previously noted for students with disabilities, students with special education needs, and Indigenous students.^[7]

Students from all backgrounds deserve equitable opportunities in the Ontario education system to succeed personally and professionally. However, the Ministry of Education and boards across the province do not have sufficient methods and policies to address the realities faced by marginalized students in Ontario's K-12 schools. Currently, self-disclosed information relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, and other broad socio-economic factors are not collected.^[3] Additionally, collecting information about special needs and student accommodations has been met with challenges from some school boards.^[8] Understanding that a student's current success levels in Ontario's school system is often impacted by a student's personal circumstances, the Ministry of Education should be obliged to act on equity-based strategies, such as Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan, so as to ensure that the policies and best practices in school boards reflect the unique needs of the students they are serving.

A method that has proven to be successful in tracking the needs of students from rapidly diversifying backgrounds is through the administration of student censuses.^[9] Specifically, this form of voluntarily-disclosed data collection reviews demographics of the broader student population, including (but not limited to) identity, ability, living circumstances, housing precarity, physical and mental health, and emotional well-being.^[10] As of January 2020, approximately ten percent of Ontario's school boards are running or are planning to run their own censuses and have been able to implement strategies from their findings to overcome common challenges noticed in their schools.^{[10][11][12][13]}



Human Rights and Equity Within the Classroom and Beyond

^{[14][15][16]} To illustrate, results gathered by the Toronto District School Board led the board to advocate for more funding for food insecurity programs, after-school programming, vision and hearing screening, promoted changes in policies around homework, and gave individual schools opportunities to better understand their students while simultaneously challenging misconceptions about their students.^[17]

School boards should also be encouraged to hire staff to implement human rights and equity advisors (HREAs). HREAs strive to implement the findings of Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan, conduct training for human rights compliance with board staff, and develop supplementary resources to support human rights and equity across the board.

^[18] Previous funding has been committed for hiring and maintenance of this position in the 2019 Ontario Budget as part of the government's Priorities and Partnerships Fund (PPF).^[18]

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. Starting this budget year, the Ontario government commit to gradually subsidizing and implementing student censuses for all school boards, in order to gather voluntarily-disclosed data on the student population, as proposed in Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan.
2. That the Ontario government continues to commit funding for human rights and equity advisors in Ontario, and extend such funding into every school board and school authority, with select amounts of funding particularly addressed towards high priority areas.



Healthy Minds, Healthy Lives



Healthy Minds, Healthy Lives

Schools play a significant role in childhood development; hence, the demand for schools to have adequate mental health services for all students is widely understood. Despite this, many mental health and well-being services in Ontario schools are not adequately funded enough to serve Ontario's vastly diverse student population. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada's 2006 report *The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada*, the onset of most mental illnesses begins during adolescence and young adulthood.^[19] The demand to address mental illness at this age is particularly important for school performance, where properly accommodating mental health supports goes far in helping children succeed. Research conducted by Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) and Ipsos in 2017 concluded that one in two parents (50%) had struggled with their child's anxiety,^[20] and that three in five students (60%) have felt concerned about their performance at school due to anxiety.^[21] Mental health advocacy organizations across the province have long recognized the need to address these pressing concerns, yet parents, students, and educators continue to be affected by funding discrepancies.

In response, in 2019 the Ministry of Education announced the allocation of nearly \$40 million towards mental health services and the hiring of frontline mental health workers in secondary schools, increasing mental health service guidance through School Mental Health Ontario, and funding programs aimed at supporting victims of sexual abuse, bullying, and other types of physical violence.^[22] Despite this, the amount of money currently dedicated to school mental health resources through the funding formula continues to remain very restricted, creating access gaps for students who may need these supports the most.

Access to clinical psychologists and social workers to address student mental



Healthy Minds, Healthy Lives

health and wellbeing is not uniform. Rather, consistent discrepancies in mental health service delivery are often noticed in Northern and Southwestern Ontario, in comparison to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). As shown in People for Education's 2019 report *Supporting students' mental health: A collective responsibility*, students in these regions often cannot rely on regularly-scheduled psychologists, with only 8% and 10% of schools reporting consistent access in Northern and Southwestern Ontario, respectively.^[23] Consequently, these inadequate services become a major burden on families around the province. In Northern Ontario, parents are also more likely to face difficulty in providing support in the community to fill the already-existing gap within school services.^[24] In the southwestern region, two-thirds of parents had reported levels of concern for their child's anxiety.^[20] In a truly equitable school system, students would not have to face consequences of geographic inequities to their own mental health based on their geographical region.

Community-level barriers to mental health do not just exist in the form of geographic barriers. Rather, social barriers also play a large role in creating service gaps in Ontario. In terms of socioeconomic status, lower-income groups are twice as likely to develop anxiety or depressive disorders,^[25] but according to the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences, often lack access to physician-based health care in their communities.^[24] This misalignment for health care resources currently puts additional pressure on schools to fill the gap in services for low-income students, which are likely to not be met with high demand. Additional research completed by the Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres has correlated other access barriers to health services based on gender, race, sexual orientation, Indigeneity, and guardianship.^[26] While targeted approaches to funding and addressing mental health concerns related to struggles coming from these backgrounds should be prioritized in schools, this has not occurred thus far on a large



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scale in Ontario.

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. That the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Community and Social Services pledge to address current remaining funding and staffing gaps for clinical psychologists and social workers, particularly in Southwestern Ontario and Northern Ontario.
2. That the government further investigate and evaluate the effectiveness of the current Funding Formula model in providing adequate funds for school mental health services to high need groups and regions.



From School Despair to School Repair



From School Despair to School Repair

Students deserve to learn in safe, well-maintained schools in which the state of school infrastructure does not impede on the ability of students to learn.

In 2002, the Government of Ontario empanelled the Education Equality Task Force to examine the effectiveness of the funding formula throughout the province.^[27] At the time of publication, the report noted a \$5.6 billion capital repair backlog and offered key recommendations to improve current, high-maintenance infrastructure.^[28] While some metrics have been enhanced in calculating funds to be allocated, the current capital backlog has only continued to balloon. In 2017, the Auditor General of Ontario predicted there would be a \$15.2 billion backlog by the start of 2020.^[29] However as of February 2020, the current backlog has surpassed this estimation with an additional \$1.1 billion in high-need infrastructure deficits.^[30] This deficit highly concerns OSTA-AECO and students across the province and must be tackled both quickly and at a greater magnitude.

In 2019, OSTA-AECO recommended in its budget submission to extend the School Condition Improvement (SCI) program and maintain funding until the capital repair backlog was eliminated.^[31] According to current Ministry data, 289 publicly-funded schools are categorized as prohibitive to repair (PTR), meaning that the cost to repair a school facility is greater or equal to 65% of the cost to replace it.^{[32][33][34]} Beyond schools classified as PTR, the Ministry estimates that there are now 758 schools in the province that have an SCI value between 45-64%.^[33] These are schools that the Ministry notes may be at risk of being categorized as PTR in the near future.^[34] This puts the Ministry in a position to consolidate or close, at minimum, over 1 in 17 of Ontario's 4850 publicly-funded schools,^[35] and puts almost 1 in 6 schools at risk of being in this position sometime in the near future. To avoid this, the Ministry must maintain current SCI funding for the 2020-21 school year, address existing capital repair backlogs, and create long-term efficiencies in school infrastructure maintenance.



From School Despair to School Repair

To measure the conditions of publicly-owned school infrastructure, the Ministry of Education sets parameters under the Facility Condition Index (FCI).^{[36][37]} This index is transparent, current, and provides a measure of accountability for the public to examine the quantitative repairs needed for their local schools. Updates to the FCI occur every five years after all publicly funded schools over five years old have been assessed under the current cycle. The same cannot be said for a standard of good repair.^[37]

As of the 2019-20 school year, the Ministry of Education has not publicly defined what baseline conditions school facilities should meet to achieve an adequate standard. The FCI states the amount of repair that is needed within schools, but does not transparently state where work can be done to improve the FCI rating, nor does the FCI indicate if the properties evaluated are in a state of good repair.^[36] Instead, students, parents, education workers, and staff are left to decide on their own - with full ambiguity - what condition their local schools are in. Considering that information about classroom temperatures, water quality, air quality, accessibility audits, asbestos,^[38] and structural damage due to environmental factors such as mold (among other metrics) are all not included in calculations,^[39] these FCI ratings often do not tell the complete story of the state of school infrastructure. Instead, the Ministry of Education should consider both the FCI and additional factors such as those outlined, and create a standard for good repair across the province.

The FCI also fails to consider many permanent elements of the school environment. The technical paper on School Facility Condition Assessment Data for the 2016-2020 evaluation period notes that items such as "portables, solar photovoltaic panels and other solar energy collectors, the appropriateness of room space, small sheds, play equipment/structures, scoreboards, goal posts, and flag poles" are out of scope for FCI evaluation.^[39] This current definition does not reflect the needs and realities of Ontario's school



From School Despair to School Repair

infrastructure. Across the province, the use of portables has evolved from temporary usage to near permanent usage, especially in schools that continue to see over-enrolment.^[40] As this common addition becomes normalized within the school environment, portables -- which often face common challenges such as site pollution, water damage, and poor air ventilation -- must be included in future FCI calculations.^[41] The same should occur for school-owned play structures, in which deterioration may pose considerable physical health and safety risks for students.

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. That the Ministry of Education maintains current funding levels for the School Condition Improvement (SCI) allocation, until the backlog in school infrastructure repairs is eliminated.
 2. That a province-wide standard of good repair that uses a variety of metrics, including FCI calculations and other environmental factors, be defined and adopted by the Ministry and take effect for the upcoming cycle of disrepair calculations.
 3. That the Ministry of Education includes the use of portables and play structures within the Facility Condition Index (FCI) for the upcoming cycle of disrepair calculations.
- scale in Ontario.



Supporting Special Education



Supporting Special Education

Under section 8(3) of the Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2, the Minister of Education is responsible for ensuring that “all exceptional children in Ontario have available to them (...) appropriate special education programs and special education services without payment of fees by parents or guardians”.^[42] In turn, school boards are required to provide funds and create a special education plan that would be reviewed annually.^[43] While this plan works well in theory, it must also have sufficient funds in place for it to work in practice. In most of Ontario, this is not the case.

From a school board perspective, special education budgeting has been inadequate. In 2017, the Auditor General's annual report found that almost 80% of school boards spent over \$100,000 on allocated special education funding, with one board spending more than \$81 million more than allotted.^[44] Budgeting for special education has not proven successful in reflecting the magnitude of student needs or geographic realities. The percentage of students who receive special education services per board varies anywhere between 8% and 28%, depending on numerous circumstances in review and accommodations.^[45] However, these ratios of the student population are not ultimately reflected within the funding formula as a demographic adjustment. These issues, among many others, contribute to significant fiscal strain on school boards and often leave boards with no choice but to put money allocated for other purposes into special education in order to meet the increasing demand. As a result, the consequences of these issues are often imparted onto students. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, Ontario's current and insufficient funding practices “are resulting in delays at many stages of the special education system, misidentification of student needs, and students with disabilities not receiving the accommodations to which they are entitled”.^[46] Therefore the current funding model does not adequately support students, and boards cannot meet their duty to accommodate without causing undue hardship on other operations within



Supporting Special Education

the board.^{[46][47]} OSTA-AECO is concerned that this issue is systemic and believes that an in-depth review is warranted into this section of the formula.

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. That the Ministry empanel an ad-hoc committee to examine how Special Education funding could better be allocated to serve more students effectively and create less strain on school board budgets.
2. That the Ministry includes demographic-based metrics into the Special Education Grant portion of the Funding Formula, in order to provide funding that is more reflective of individual board demands.



Set For Success: The Demographics Grant



Set For Success: The Demographics Grant

When the current Funding Formula was first proposed in 1997, the Ministry established an expert advisory panel to study the use of specific grants in the Ontario budget to accommodate boards with higher proportions of students that have been deemed to be “at-risk” of academic failure.^[48] The result of consultations on this grant, known as the Learning Opportunities Grant, consisted of 10 different grants that covers support programs ranging from student success programming in secondary schools, to the Specialist High Skills Major Program, to math programs outside of the school day.^[49] The largest section of this grant is known as the Demographics Allocation. This grant uses a variety of metrics to distribute funding to local school boards for initiatives such as breakfast programs, homework help programs, and independent supports.^[49] Though Learning Opportunities Grant funding is used for a variety of supports across school boards, the addition of the Demographic Allocation strives to foster equitable learning environments, regardless of social, economic, or prior educational barriers.^[50]

At the time of its proposal, the Ministry's advisory panel recommended that \$400 million be spent on the Demographic Allocation,^[51] or approximately \$603.5 million, adjusted for inflation.^[52] Despite this, the funds allocated towards this grant have never surpassed the \$366.1 million spent in the 2019-20 budget, not accounting for inflation.^{[53][54]} Rather, the amount of money allocated towards this grant has increased slightly, up from the \$362.9 million allocated last budget season.^{[55][56]} This is all despite numerous expert advisors, including by the government's own working group in 2003,^[57] continuing to ask for increases to match the \$400 million investment recommended in 1997 to inflation, and the growing need for student supports across multiple school boards.

Students cannot and should not have to wait any longer for this funding. Every day that funding in this grant continues to be missing is yet another day in which students who



Set For Success: The Demographics Grant

are at-risk of facing academic difficulties lack the support that they need to thrive within a school environment. The Ministry must provide school boards and students the funds and support necessary to succeed in Ontario's school environments and realize their full potential in and beyond a classroom setting.

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. That the government follow the recommendations made in 1997 by the Expert Panel on the Learning Opportunities Grant and increase the Demographics Allocation to match the recommended funding level of \$603.5 million, adjusted from the initial calculation.



Healthy Eating, Healthier Learning



Healthy Eating, Healthier Learning

In addition to the initial investments made under the Demographics Allocation, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education should work towards prioritizing additional investments in nutrition and healthy eating programs in elementary and secondary schools, especially in high-priority neighbourhoods. The Ontario government administers funding for nutrition programming amongst three branches, wherein investments in the Demographic Allocation, the Population and Public Health line item in the Ministry of Health's budget, and the Student Nutrition Program in the Ministry of Community and Social Services budget all play roles in enhancing nutrition access in schools.^{[58][59][60]}

Nutrition and healthy eating programs are intentionally designed in Ontario to target "priority populations", which Ontario Public Health Standards has previously defined as "groups that would benefit most from public health programs and services...that are at risk and for which public health interventions may be reasonably considered to have a substantial impact at the population level".^[61] These priority populations are intended to be targets for equitable access in health support, including with school nutrition, where students who may have issues with food security are considered to be priority populations for nutrition programming.

Benefits which stem from nutrition and healthy eating programs have been abundant. For example, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) piloted the Feeding Our Future program, which provided complementary food and beverages to students in select schools who may face food insecurity.^[62] Students would be served nutritious meals every morning by school administrators and program staff at no charge to the student and would be able to choose food that was reflective of cultural and dietary needs.^[62] At the end of the program, the TDSB concluded that the program had been very successful in improving student outcomes. Benefits from continual access to nutritious meals included improved student behaviour, improved abilities for students to stay on



Healthy Eating, Healthier Learning

task, and reduced tardiness.^[63] In fact, using a variety of indicators, researchers determined that 78% of students who had participated in this program in Grade 10 were on track to graduation, in comparison to the 61% of students in Grade 10 on track to graduation who did not participate in this program.^[64]

Fully-funded nutrition and healthy eating programs, if executed correctly, have the power to bridge significant gaps in student achievement. Research demonstrates that students have trouble learning when hungry.^{[65][66]} By tackling this significant structural barrier for student achievement, the Government of Ontario will ensure that students have the potential to succeed before even stepping into their classrooms.

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. That the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Community and Social Services prioritize significant investments in nutrition and healthy eating programs for elementary and secondary schools, especially in high-priority neighbourhoods.



The Local Priorities Fund



The Local Priorities Fund

Since the ratification of nine central agreements with the Ministry of Education, the Funding Formula has included an additional subgrant specifically for addressing local staffing needs. The Local Priorities Fund, which was established for the 2017-18 budget year,^[67] aimed at addressing a range of staffing priorities for children in need and “at-risk” students. At the time of its introduction, the Ministry estimated that “about 875 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers and about 1,600 to 1,830 FTE education workers” would be covered under the subgrant, with the number of hires being subject to local labour negotiations.^[68] However, there have been no commitments by the Ministry to reimplement this funding as employer bargaining agencies and education workers' unions continue to negotiate new collective agreements. This failure to commit to renewing this fund puts local boards and students at risk of not being able to provide adequate supports to high-risk students who need the support most.^[69]

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. That the government commit to covering all remaining monies stemming from the Local Priorities Fund (LPF) and increase its amount with inflation, regardless of the outcome of collective bargaining.



Enhancing Virtual Learning Environments



Enhancing Virtual Learning Environments

In today's society, technology has become an integral component of our education system. The ways in which we integrate technology into our classrooms are ever-evolving to meet modern pedagogical standards.

In March 2019, the Ministry of Education outlined its latest mandate Education That Works for You. Among a variety of proposed changes it includes the introduction of a mandatory four-credit eLearning requirement that would take effect for the 2020-21 school year.^[70] This mandate, which was later modified to require students to complete a minimum of two credits on a Ministry-approved Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diploma, has been critiqued and/or criticized by both teachers' federations and employer bargaining agencies for lacking critical supports in broadband access, students in special education, and a solidified student-teacher relationship.^{[71][72][73][74]}

In response to this mandate, OSTA-AECO published a report on the challenges of mandatory eLearning.^[75] Our findings included that 95% of students disapproved of the new eLearning mandate, that a majority of students felt that their learning styles have not properly been accommodated, and that a maximum of 90,000 of Ontario's 2 million currently-enrolled students would not be able to obtain their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).^[76] These findings are considerably important, and they highlight a number of challenges that must be addressed before eLearning can be equally accessible for all Ontario students. OSTA-AECO has recommended numerous improvements to eLearning, including enhancing Additional Qualifications for teachers who may wish to become eLearning instructors, addressing language barriers, and focusing on the retention of critical learning skills.^[77]

OSTA-AECO continues to be concerned about the implementation of the eLearning mandate. Though the Ministry has suggested that the number of mandatory eLearning



Enhancing Virtual Learning Environments

credits have been reduced to two,^[78] considerable issues with achievement rates and access to resources in online courses have not been addressed. Additionally, the amount of funding that has previously been dedicated to supporting the implementation of eLearning through the Continuing Education subgrant had decreased in the previous budget season.^{[79][80]} If the Ministry is able to put this new requirement into effect for the 2020-21 school year, it will prove to be difficult to integrate this mandate without the accompanying necessary funds. However, if this mandate is reversed for the 2020-21 school year, an increased investment in this subgrant will still be necessary to accommodate an increasing number of students who wish to take courses through online learning.

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. That the Ministry implement substantial investments in continuing education, in order to meet increasing demand for eLearning and blended learning environments.
2. That the Ministry reverses its mandate requiring all students to take a minimum of 4 eLearning courses and retract its subsequent proposals to modify the mandate to 2 eLearning credits.



Recognizing Language Competencies



Recognizing Language Competencies

In 2013, the Ministry of Education began to update the framework used for the instruction of French as a Second Language (FSL) in Ontario schools.^[81] Among the many major changes featured in this overhaul was the modification of the influences that shape both FSL programming and its curricula, notably with close attention paid to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).^[82] The CEFR is an internationally-recognized standard for assessing language competencies and the ability of a language speaker to speak fluently on a six-point scale ranging from A1 to C2.^[83] The CEFR's use of threshold descriptors to accurately assess the level of competency in a language have proven to be particularly important in these pedagogical revisions to FSL, having seen the informing of learning criteria on these levels.^{[82][83]}

To assess and certify levels of French language acquisition, France's Ministry of Education awards the Diplôme d'études en langue française (DELF) to candidates who demonstrate adequate fluency standards within levels outlined by the CEFR.^[84] Similar to its framework, DELF certifications are recognized around the world and act as official certifications of French language comprehension.^[85] Plus, the acquisition of DELF certification often means increased opportunities for employment in Ontario and Canada's public sector, employment abroad, and for admission into university programming across the country.^[86] This certification also has the added benefit of having no expiration date, so that the initial demonstration of learning is recognized for the rest of a student's life.^{[85][86]}

Ontario must prepare its students for a competitive work environment. In a global work environment that is increasingly becoming more interconnected, Ontario's future workforce must be prepared to demonstrate its ability to communicate with other workforces around the world. By joining the ranks of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and the Yukon, the Ministry of Education would have the potential to offer quantifiable recognition of French language development to its students for little to no upfront costs.



Recognizing Language Competencies

¹⁸⁷¹ A full agreement to run DELF for Schools testing may have the added benefit of saving a considerable amount of money for school boards who may do this testing on their own, but have not signed an agreement with the French Ministry of Education, by commissioning tests in wholesale.

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. That the Ministry of Education considers piloting and/or funding DELF testing at the Ministry level or, through subsidizing costs, at local school boards that may wish to run their own testing centres for the DELF assessment.



Free the Flow



Free the Flow

Students deserve to be afforded the ability to go to school in both a healthy and a sanitary environment. Personal barriers in sanitation, however, often play a significant role in dictating whether or not many students across the province end up going to school.^[88]^{[89][90]} It would, therefore, be expected that mundane sanitary products that often play a key factor in school attendance would be provided to students at no charge in all public schools.

This is not the case for students who may need to access menstrual hygiene products such as sanitary pads and tampons. The reality for many students who menstruate is that the cost of sanitary pads and tampons continue to pose huge challenges to students from low-income families, where access to food and other essential products are prioritized over menstrual care.^[91] In fact, this issue presents such a considerable challenge to many students that a 2018 study by Procter and Gamble® found that 1 in 7 students often miss class due to inadequate access to menstrual products.^[88] Similar research conducted by Plan Canada found that 68% of people who menstruate had missed out on similar life activities due to barriers on participation presented by inadequate access to menstrual products.^[92] For students who need valuable connections with their peers at school, these missed opportunities have significant impacts.

Governments and school boards across Canada have begun to tackle this issue by providing access to menstrual products within schools, thereby breaking down an uncontrollable barrier to student participation. In Ontario, the initiative to provide menstrual hygiene products within school washrooms has been fully or partially implemented in the Waterloo Region District School Board, the Thames Valley District School Board, and the Toronto District School Board.^{[93][94][95]} However, it is very much possible to centralize this process and guarantee access to menstrual hygiene products at a province-wide level. Last year, the Government of British Columbia announced that it would provide nearly



Free the Flow

\$300,000 as a start-up fund for school districts to mandate free menstrual products in schools, making British Columbia the first province to address this issue and its subsequent stigma directly.¹⁸⁹

Providing menstrual hygiene products to students who menstruate in a fully-accessible manner opens doors for students to attend school and extracurricular activities without the fear of sanitation barriers or stigma. By jumpstarting a centralized fund, the Ontario government would have an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of local governments and ensure greater equity of access for menstrual products in school boards across Ontario.

OSTA-AECO recommends:

1. That the Ministry of Education and Ministry for Children, Community, and Social Services establish a new fund that would allocate monies towards school boards for no-cost menstrual hygiene products for students who menstruate.



Conclusion



Conclusion

Our province's budget is a fundamental tool that can be used to uphold the merits of our education system, and create a promising and sustainable future for the students of Ontario.

By investing in key grants including the School Condition Improvement (SCI), Special Education Grant, Local Priorities Fund, and Learning Opportunities Grant, we are able to provide students with safe, inclusive, and equitable experience in the education system. Through these key investments, students will be able to attend school in safe environments, receive adequate support that matches their needs and lived realities, and will be able to utilize available school resources to achieve their best outcomes.

Investments in major areas including students censuses and human rights equity advisors in Ontario will ensure that there are supports in place to recognize the unique backgrounds of students in Ontario, and support them in a way that enables students to reach their full potential, uninhibited by factors such as race, country of origin, sexuality, language spoken, amongst other factors.

Wellbeing, another key area of investment recognizes that social workers, psychologists, and guidance counsellors are paramount to a student's successful navigation of the education system. Adequate resources and funding for those areas will ensure that students have the support to succeed in their journey throughout elementary and secondary schooling, and have the ability to gain assistance if they contend with issues throughout their time in the education system.

Maintaining key standards of school repairs, and ensuring students are able to go to school in safe, and healthy environments will ensure that students can devote their time to learning and will have adequate resources to support them as they eventually transition to becoming key members of the 21st century workforce.

Special Education funding is particularly important as it ensures that our education



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system is fundamentally inclusive, and enables students with a range of abilities and challenges to succeed. Providing adequate funding and support in for students requiring it will uphold the fundamental principle of no student left behind, and will create an environment where the education system strives to, and successfully meets the needs of each of its students, regardless of what those needs are.

In order for students to be awake, alert, and able to succeed in the school environment, they need to be able to have access to healthy and nutritious foods. Investing in this key area will ensure that students have the most rudimentary and basic resources within their reach so they do not have to contend with additional difficulties in being unable to have access to key resources necessary for success.

Ontario's education system truly serves students from a wide variety of walks of life, and as such that includes those who use resources such as night school, summer school, adult school, and online learning. Ensuring that there is effective support for these areas of our education system will provide a diverse group of learners with the opportunity to receive world class education regardless of their background, or previous life experience.

As a bilingual country, the ability to communicate in French is a fundamental component of our country. The certification of this skill however, should not be limited to those with the resources to afford it themselves. As a result it is important that our province explores subsidizing the cost of DELF testing to ensure all students have access to certification of french language proficiency, which has the ability to open doors for students and increase career prospects.

An important aspect of success in the education system rests upon students attending school in a safe, sanitary environment. It is important that the cost of feminine hygiene products does not serve as a barrier to students who require them for basic hygienic purposes. Investments in providing these products ensures that regardless of a



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student's socioeconomic background, they are able to succeed and have the adequate resources to do so.

The education system is the means by which we can fundamentally improve the outcomes of students across the province. Ontario's more than 2 million students are truly the most promising leaders of our future. When we instill in them the key skills and values they need to be successful, we are securing for ourselves a prosperous, bright, and inclusive future where people from all walks of life can take part in creating, progressing, and enjoying the future of Ontario.



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