

In response to the 2022-2023 Education Funding Guide and consultation process, the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB) provides the following input to the focus areas identified:

### 1. Mental Health Supports

- **How are ministry supports helping school boards meet the mental health needs of their students?**
- **What can the Ministry of Education, other ministries, school boards and other partner agencies do to better support the mental health needs of students?**

During the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 fiscal years, DPCDSB has committed the use of all federal and provincial funding allocated for COVID-19 related expenditures in the area of mental health supports. DPCDSB initiated a variety of programs to support elementary, secondary and adult learners, as well as ongoing capacity building for staff. An increase in summer learning programs and camps provided more students with opportunities to focus on learning needs and transition programs supported students with differing abilities to adjust to returning to in-person learning. Funding was also utilized to implement an access line to be able to connect with students during the summer months and provide individualized mental health counselling/intervention.

COVID and school closure periods created barriers for families needing to access psychological assessments. DPCDSB offered comprehensive assessments during the summer months to assist with getting kids back to in-person learning.

One of the greatest impacts to students through the COVID-19 pandemic has been the social and mental well-being of their learning and development. Ongoing, extensive supports are necessary to help students recover from the experiences of lockdown and isolation periods. This work can take many years, therefore, the supports from the ministry need to be ongoing and not one-time only.

### 2. Reducing Administrative Burden and Red Tape

- **What initiatives could support the reduction of red tape and administrative burden for the education sector?**
- **Are there areas of overlap or duplication within the GSN (e.g., funding or reporting)? If so, what are they?**

Improvements have been made to the Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) process with the introduction of Transfer Payment Ontario (TPON), however there remains a level of accountability for each grant that has to be followed through on. A comprehensive report back process is not likely necessary in all cases, especially when the allocated funding is not material, which can be defined based on size of board. The Ministry could look to implement a reporting process that requires only a sample number of boards to submit full reports in any given year.

There are significantly increased demands placed on school board administration staff with regards to accountability and reporting, however funding for administrative tasks is often overlooked. All provincial

and federal funding allocations to school boards, as related to COVID, neglected to include a component for the administrative work to be completed for implementation and reporting.

It is important to note that the administrative work in managing COVID, employee health matters and work accommodations, staff absences and coverage, health and safety protocols and implementation, attestations and compliance with the vaccination attestation policy has been overwhelming for staff in Human Resources and Employee Relations, Information Communications and Technology (ICT) and Financial Services departments. The changes have been fast and furious, with minimal time to implement and no margin for error. All other internal projects and work plans have been halted for over two years, while COVID has taken control.

To enhance compliance with the enveloping provisions, the Ministry should consider removing the legal expenditures from Board Administration category or creating regional legal supports instead of regional internal audit teams. The legal support would be beneficial to boards. The Uniform Code of Accounts requires all legal expenses to be mapped to Board Administration and Governance despite no identifiable source of funding within the grant model. As a large urban school board within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), there are significant legal issues, with outcomes that can be precedent setting on a provincial basis. Human rights and special education legal concerns are increasing exponentially.

### **3. Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG)**

- **Given that the 2021 census is nearing completion, what is the best way to integrate updated census information into the GSN?**
- **Should the Demographic Component of the LOG be focused on a specified outcome(s)? if so, what are they?**

The LOG and other grant allocations continue to be based on outdated census data (2006) related to social and economic indicators. Integrating updated census data needs to be intentional and purposeful: it cannot be an exercise of redistribution of funds where there are school boards that win and others lose.

The census data is used within the Special Education Grant to estimate the proportion of students predicted to receive special education programs and services, it is important to ensure the information is relevant and as up-to-date as possible. An update to the GSN to reflect updated census data may include some level of redistribution of funding, but should also include an incremental funding factor, should the results of the census indicate the need.

The largest portion of LOG is flowed through the Demographic Allocation, which provides funding based on social and economic indicators that are associated with students having a higher risk of academic difficulty. The Ministry may want to take this opportunity to incorporate a GSN funding mechanism to support the develop of culturally responsive curriculum resources and professional development opportunities to address equity, diversity and all forms of racism including anti-black racism.

#### 4. Urban and Priority High Schools

- **Should the school board list be updated to respond to changing demographics and growth within school boards? If so, what factors should be considered in updating the school board list?**
- **How can the ministry ensure that the funding allocation is spent on supports for the most academically challenged at-risk students?**

The urban and priority schools are identified based on local challenges such as low academic achievement levels, suspensions and expulsions, poverty and lack of access to community resources in the area. The goal is to keep students engaged and attending school regularly. If demographics are analyzed and scrutinized in too many ways, it could be to the detriment of some students that need additional services and attention. If the update in response to changing demographics is brought about for cost cutting purposes, then some students in need could be left out.

Success indicators of this initiative should be evident in increased academic achievement levels, a reduction in suspensions/expulsions and strong attendance. However, COVID conditions in all schools have complicated the path for at-risk students. Any changes contemplated for the urban and priority secondary schools should be delayed until after the 2023-2024 year.

DPCDSB is experiencing a significant decline of enrolment, similar to other GTA school boards, which will detrimentally impact the amount of funds allocated. Thus, DPCDSB will have to change the level of supports currently in place.

As the 2021-2022 year started and a large number of students returned for in-person learning, it has become evident that there has been an increase in the number of students considered at-risk across all schools, not just those identified as urban and priority schools. The temporary cancellation of Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing and in-person exams, as well as difficulty in verifying actual attendance during COVID, may have an impact on academic achievement levels utilized to identify urban and priority schools.

#### 5. New Teacher Induction Program

- **Given that there is no fixed benchmark for the NTIP, are school boards facing challenges due to funding varying every year with the fluctuation in the number of teachers?**
- **What would be the benefits and/or challenges to having a fixed benchmark?**

There are some challenges to not having a fixed benchmark because amount differs from year to year and therefore planning for NTIP becomes unpredictable. Additionally, DPCDSB has new permanent teachers who are above the year 2 on the grid, who do not generate funds. The amount per teacher provided through the enhancement fund has decreased significantly. Many of our teachers supported in the NTIP are in Long Term Occasional (LTO) assignments, however the varied funding does not capture LTOs and additional funding for this group of teachers through the enhancement fund has decreased significantly.

Providing a fixed benchmark is more consistent for planning purposes than the fluctuating grant, and it would be beneficial as NTIP could adequately support teachers. However, if there is an increase in new hires, a fixed benchmark may be disadvantageous dependent on the fixed benchmark amount.

## Additional feedback

DPCDSB is committed to ensuring all learners in our community are treated with respect, dignity and are supported to reach their full potential by acknowledging structural barriers in our policies and practices. The removal of barriers requires the acknowledgment of racism, discrimination, and in particular anti-Black discrimination, as historic, pervasive, institutional, and systemic. This work requires a deep and meaningful shift in policies and practices in a manner which changes circumstances and outcomes for those communities most impacted. This work requires resources both financial and human. In order for school boards to sustain this work in the manner it requires, specific and enveloped funding is necessary. As with the Indigenous Education funding, DPCDSB is requesting that protected funding for dismantling anti-Black racism be considered as part of the GSN.

All school boards across the province experienced enrolment declines during the 2020-2021 school year as a direct result of COVID. In 2021-2022, it is evident that only Greater Toronto Area (GTA) school boards are continuing to experience this decline in enrolment. DPCDSB will require stabilization funding similar to that provided in the 2020-2021 year by the Ministry. The decline could have serious implications for years to come as families move away from the GTA to more affordable regional areas.

A significant investment in systems and remote work capabilities was made during the 2020-2021 year, including electronic process flow management, computer devices, internet devices and other system upgrades, yet most funding was one-time only. Without future funding or an annual provision for this expense, all the equipment will become obsolete with no way to reinvest.

The major operational systems of school boards, such as the financial and human resource and payroll systems require ongoing upgrades and new investments, yet the Board Administration and Governance Grant does not include funding specific for this purpose. There is a lack of funding to upgrade technology such as firewalls and cybersecurity software to ensure all data is appropriately safeguarded. External audit reviews continue to recommend upgrades and staff training but resources are already stretched to capacity.

The Board Administration and Governance grant is lagging in terms of keeping up with average salaries for these highly skilled workforce positions. Average salaries for certified professionals in finance, human resources, employee relations, planning and communications exceed the benchmark funding determined by the Ministry. A review of the benchmarks would benefit all school boards, given the enveloping requirement not to overspend.

The GSN funding model incorporates benchmark increases for inflation and cost of living in other grants, such as school operations. Building this increase into the Board Administration and Governance grant would assist with the inflationary pressures coming through technology and software costs, audit services and salaries.

**Long Term Disability** - A significant concern to the DPCDSB and some other school boards across the province is the increasing costs in LTD plans. Funding the LTD plan at DPCDSB rose significantly to \$79 million in the 2020-2021 year causing a deficit position of \$51.3 million. The costs are overwhelming and there is no mechanism for control. The benefit benchmarks in the GSN are reduced by 0.167% each year for a 12-year period that began in 2012. DPCDSB has been left with an employer paid LTD plan and no provincial funding to support the cost as the benefit benchmark funding continues to be reduced. DPCDSB is now working with the ministry on a financial recovery plan.

**Summary**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit feedback on education funding for the upcoming 2022-2023 school year.

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board