



December 14, 2018

**The OHSC's Report on Public Engagement on Education: Education Funding
Submission to: The Honourable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Education
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister of Education**

The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition is pleased that, as a learning province, the Ontario government has chosen to engage in a province-wide consultation. This submission focuses *on education funding*, particularly as related to *student well-being*. The OHSC's response to the four topics specified for this submission is framed in the attachment provided.

Children who experience a greater sense of well-being are more able to learn and assimilate information in effective ways; are more likely to engage in healthy and fulfilling social behaviours; and are more likely to invest in their own and others' well-being and in the sustainability of the planet, as they take up their social, professional, and leadership roles in adulthood. *Ontario Ministry of Education, Well-Being in Our Schools, Strength in Our Society*, (November, 2016, p. 1).

Who is the Ontario the Healthy Schools Coalition?

The Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition (OHSC) is an innovative coalition promoting and supporting healthy schools to advance the health and learning of Ontario's children and youth (ontariohealthyschools.com). As a broad-based coalition with members from school boards, public health units, mental health organizations, hospitals, universities, and parent and student organizations, the OHSC has a vision for every child and young person in the province of Ontario to be educated in a healthy school environment. "A healthy school promotes the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of the whole community, and constantly strengthens its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning, and working (The OHSC, adapted from the World Health Organization)".

The OHSC played a key role in the development of the 2006 *Ontario Foundations for a Healthy School Framework* – based on the Comprehensive School Health (CSH) framework that is consistent with international standards – and its subsequent update in 2014 as a resource document. This resource encourages schools to address curriculum, teaching and learning; school and classroom leadership; student engagement; social and physical environments; and

home, school and community partnerships in order support the development of a healthier school. Healthy schools optimize student success, both academically and socially, and contribute significantly to society's efforts to develop productive citizens.

The OHSC made significant contributions to Ontario's student well-being strategy including: mental health, safe and accepting schools, healthy schools, and equity and inclusive education. The OHSC is also an active partner, nationally and internationally, in healthy schools research and initiatives.

What is the OHSC's Position on Well-Being and Funding Parameters?

The OHSC acknowledges the Ministry goal to reduce inefficiencies through funding reallocation. The challenge positioned in the government review is immense. The stated four percent reduction in funding is almost \$100 million for education - about \$800 per pupil. The OHSC believes effective funding change should be evolutionary, ongoing, and fairly reflect cost of living adjustments. The OHSC believes the scope of the planned change cannot be achieved in the very short term without extraordinary harm to Ontario's children and youth.

The OHSC is very concerned that the *well-being* component appears to be missing from the strategy. For example, the **Conclusion** to the funding guide states: "Going forward, program funding in the education sector will need to be managed carefully with the goal of preparing Ontario students for success, improving their academic achievement, and equipping them with the tools needed to enter the working world" (p, 5).

In its publication, *Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education* (May 2016), the Ministry of Education positions important ideas about *student well-being*.

Well-being is a positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social, and physical needs are being met. It is supported through equity and respect for our diverse identities and strengths (p. 3).

The OHSC believes that *well-being* (for both students and teachers) must continue as a cornerstone of our strong and effective publically funded education system. *Student well-being* is as foundational as student achievement. Effective, healthy teachers are essential for successful healthy students, making teacher well-being a substantial priority.

As a health promotion and disease prevention strategy, ensuring continued funding for *student well-being* promises to reduce Government expenses significantly, particularly in the health and education budget envelopes. It is better for society in general and financially responsible to promote sustainable, long term health and well-being. Education is the venue to embed health promoting knowledge, attitudes, and skills, which are integral to the *modern learning skills and attitudes* needed for students to succeed.

The OHSC is pleased that the new Government has publically positioned its support for promoting positive mental health as a key component of well-being. Schools need to continue to have access to the funded *Mental Health Leader*. This key leader works with staff to build capacity to support positive mental health in the classroom for all learners and to support students with mental health needs. The **School Mental Health ASSIST** initiative is essential in helping school boards build professional capacity to promote mental health for all students as well as staff members.

The grant structure is missing important parameters specific to *student well-being* that are needed to promote student growth through integrated approaches. Promoting integrated approaches will contribute significantly to *student well-being* and contribute to effective cost savings.

By way of summary, the OHSC recommends a renewed funding model which:

- emphasizes *student well-being* as a cornerstone of Ontario's education system;
- finds efficiencies which enhance publically funded education while continuing to promote health and well-being; and
- replaces the current funding model with one which reflects the *modern learning skills and attitudes* needed for students to succeed in their future and complex world.

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Respectfully submitted



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The OHSC's Comments on the 2019-2020 Funding Guide Consultation

The OHSC is pleased to provide comments which we hope will be helpful in moving significant education funding reform to scale. Where we have information and expertise, we have tried to quantify some of these amounts.

Allowing school boards to keep a portion of savings from finding efficiencies would provide motivation and incentives to work towards savings.

1. Efficient Price Setting

There are opportunities for efficiencies, ranging from reviewing and updating current practice to looking at opportunities which have not yet been tried on larger scales. Recognizing the many differences among school boards, implementing what follows will have an impact in reducing costs.

New Schools/Additions/Renovations: Creating schools with core bricks/mortar components (office, specialized areas like libraries, gymnasias, labs) and modular classrooms is said to save 20% through construction efficiencies. Use of the repeat design model/concept for new construction is said to save 10% through design efficiencies.

Making Better Use of Existing Facilities: Expanding the use of Grades 7-12 schools would enable better use of existing space.

Surplus Classrooms: Declining enrollment has made classrooms surplus across the province. Revenue could be facilitated through leasing to tenants passing strict character/reputation screening. There may also be an opportunity to provide in-school health services for students and families.

Class Size Caps and Averages: The average class size approach was introduced in the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) in the mid-late 90's. Class size caps were implemented and expanded as part of collective bargaining in the early 2000's. Experience since has taught us that students would benefit if there was more flexibility and likely save some money.

Broader Sharing of School Board Resources: Facilitating more inter-board sharing of operational and business services such as payroll, recruitment, purchasing, finances, technology,

capital planning, and student transportation would build in an economy of scale and thus reduce overall costs.

Streamlining Reporting Practice: Greater use of business intelligence tools would streamline reporting and still retain reasonable levels of accountability.

Reducing Staff Travel Costs: When appropriate, investing in and using video-conferencing, instead of requiring staff to travel for meetings and professional development, would reduce travel and related staff costs by over 50% and allow staff more time to take on other needed functions. At the same time, professional development is critical to staff well-being, and the benefits of networking, sharing resources, and learning about emerging trends and best practices through face-to-face opportunities is well substantiated.

2. Outcomes-Based Funding

The Government acknowledges that the GSN was not designed as an outcomes-based model. Experts in framing educational needs and in measuring outcomes need to be engaged in reviewing the line by line analysis of the GSN to ensure integrity in moving to an outcomes-based funding model. The OHSC believes outcomes-based funding needs to reflect the *modern learning skills and attitudes* required for students to succeed in their future and complex world.

The OHSC believes the Ministry would benefit from engaging human resources with more expertise in outcomes-based thinking related to how *student well-being* and the more traditional student achievement parameters can be integrated. Use of better, more integrated approaches could be evaluated through successful practice known to educators and be incorporated into the GSN framework for implementation and evaluation (outcomes) purposes.

Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG). The LOG was initially created 20 years ago to support academically at-risk students who could benefit from instructional intervention.

Leadership and staff education/training was needed to successfully achieve the student achievement classroom strategies and protocols. Continued investment is needed in supporting teachers to build a similar repertoire of leadership and staff education to continue the evolution of the repertoire of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to support *student well-being*.

Establishing *student well-being* outcomes through the LOG is a natural evolution of this goal and essential to ensure Ontario's publically funded education system remains as one of the very best in the world.

The **School Mental Health ASSIST** initiative is an example of an exemplary programme which has demonstrated positive outcomes and which should receive significant augmented funding.

3. Accountability and Value-For-Money

Determining value for money and related accountability requires a very clear vision as to what Ontario's publically funded education system is based on. Such reform takes time, research and a good deal of public consultation. To properly support a renewed vision, a more contemporary funding formula should then emerge. As is the case with respected exemplary systems globally, that vision ought to be sustained even through a government change. Ontario's education system is recognized by international education experts to be a high-performing one.

The OHSC believes that taxpayers get excellent service for their money and, on balance, funding is used for its intended purpose. Limited resources over a number of years has meant keeping the focus on key priorities and making strategic choices about how best to develop or use resources to improve student achievement. However, the student achievement focus has been emphasized at the expense of an integrated co-focus on student achievement and *well-being*.

The OHSC is concerned about what appears to be a retreat to a sole focus on traditional student achievement without recognition of the importance of *student well-being*. This would be a regressive casualty of cost reduction. To some, *student well-being* is a form of "non-core programming". Too often a *back to basics approach* is used in positioning needed reform; this is in contradiction with Ontario's global reputation of being among the best educational jurisdictions in the world.

4. Other Education Funding Efficiencies

Other Ministry Consultations: Broader provincial discussions reported in Ministry reports (2018) and other discussion venues also indicate areas of overlap/duplication within the GSN. As mentioned earlier in this report, LOG funding is a frequent topic of discussion. This is certainly a place where the OHSC feels parameters related to *student well-being* could be embedded.

Relieving Teacher Workload: Workload connected to accountability for monitoring student achievement and student reporting has replaced the historically, all important teacher judgment. Just as heavy, unneeded regulations are detrimental to economic and business entrepreneurialism, relying on excessive levels of documentation at the expense of teacher judgment costs a lot of money. Effective classroom teachers are our most important resource in public education. A more

balanced approach to teacher accountability and responsibilities would create much happier and productive teachers and reciprocally, much happier and productive students. This would enable teachers to focus more on teaching and less on excessive bureaucratic tasks. This would do much to create a healthy workplace for teachers which in turn would have a positive impact on student learning, health, and well-being.

In addition, the OHSC believes that the appropriate classroom supports need to be in place to help teachers effectively teach the curriculum. Of significant concern to the OHSC is the number of reported teacher stress leaves, which significantly impacts the classroom environment and therefore student success.

Modify the School Week/Year Length: Some internationally recognized, high-performing jurisdictions have a school year with fewer than Ontario's 195 school days including the four day week model used in British Columbia. A recent report out of British Columbia says compressing the school week to four days has had no negative impact on academic performance. School boards say the move has saved them money and helped to keep schools open that had lower enrolment. This could be beneficial to rural Ontario schools. Savings accrued from a slightly shorter school year and/or modified school year schedules could enable augmented funding for *healthy schools and well-being*.

References

Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition, Web-site, ontariohealthyschools.com.

Ontario Ministry of Education, *2018-19 Education Funding: Discussion Summary*, 2018.

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People for Education, *Funding Consultation, The Future of Public Education*, December 2018.