

Submission to the
Standing Committee on Finance
& Economic Affairs

Pre-Budget Consultation

February 4, 2004



Founded in 1930, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA) represents 29 English-language Catholic district school boards and five English-language Catholic school authorities. Collectively, these school boards educate over 600,000 students from Junior Kindergarten to grade 12.

In late 2003, OCSTA prepared and submitted to the Minister of Education a brief on education finance entitled, "Adequate Funding for Education Excellence." A copy of that brief is attached and forms the basis of our submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Our comments are focussed on areas that we believe require immediate attention.

OCSTA and its member boards share with the government the goal of providing high quality education for Ontario's students. We are very encouraged by the Premier's stated support for education as a provincial priority and the Education and Finance Ministers' message of a strong commitment to publicly funded education. We agree with the government's view that education is a critical factor in the economic and social development of our province. In a society that is increasingly dependant on knowledge and communication, education is a means to economic growth and prosperity.

Health care and education are identified by the people of Ontario as top priorities for government spending. Investments in publicly funded education have a positive impact on the ability to sustain health care. A well-educated and productive workforce creates the wealth that allows us to have a vibrant and effective health system. In addition, education is a strong determinant of health and leads to a reduced need for health care services.

It is essential that education and Ontario's students have a high priority in government spending.

OCSTA strongly supports the basic philosophy and structure inherent in the current funding model. The student-focused funding model provides every student in the province access to equality of educational opportunity. It is OCSTA's position that the foundation of equity for all students, upon which the funding model is built and now a legal requirement under the *Education Act*, must be maintained. All future initiatives, including any transition funding, one-time grants or refinements to on-going grants, must preserve equitable distribution of funding.

Provincial Advisory Committee

OCSTA agrees with the government that the achievement of substantial improvement in education will require the cooperative effort of the government, educators, school boards and parents. It is vitally important that those responsible for the education of Ontario's children cooperate and support one another in order to use available resources most effectively in striving for excellence in education.

Our Association has for several years recommended the formation of a provincial advisory committee made up of representatives from school boards and provincial education organizations to monitor the impact of student-focused funding and to provide on-going advice to the Minister on funding issues. An advisory committee would assist the Ministry in ensuring that the funding model remains responsive to the changing needs of students. Such an advisory committee could recommend to the Ministry of Education and to the government ways to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of provincial funds and a system to track and respond to changes in school boards' costs.

Recent changes to several benchmarks within the formula have resulted in significant funding improvements, for which Catholic boards are grateful, but more work needs to be done. A provincial advisory committee could assist the government to monitor the adequacy of individual grants as well as the impact of the funding formula as a whole, to ensure that necessary changes are identified, implemented and reviewed for efficiency and effectiveness. The committee would also be a vehicle through which the government could address emerging issues and recognize new initiatives.

Employee Compensation

Compensation allocations are a critical part of school board budget planning and operation. Employee compensation constitutes about 80% of a school board's operating expenditures.

As employers, school boards welcome the government's intention to foster an environment where our teachers and other educational workers are valued, respected and compensated fairly for the important work that they do.

The 3% increase (\$340M) provided by the province for employee compensation for 2002-03 was appreciated, as was the further 3% increase for 2003/2004. These increases gave many school boards the flexibility they required to reach collective agreements with their employees, and were consistent with collective agreements reached with health and public administration workers at that time.

Although these increases provided for 3% salary increases, they did not address the gap that has existed for several years between provincial allocations and boards' actual costs. This gap, which the Education Equality Task Force calculated to be 4.6%, is a matter of great concern to school boards, all of whom will be seeking new collective agreements with their teacher employees this year.

The cost of compensation for employees also includes the cost of benefits, which has risen considerably in recent years and far exceeds the current benchmark.

Multi-Year Funding

Current legislation requires all school boards to reach three-year agreements with their teachers employees, effective September 1, 2004. OCSTA must strongly emphasize the need for reliable multi-year grant forecasts coupled with adequate resources, to enable school boards to successfully negotiate staff salaries and benefits, to engage in responsible long-term planning and to maintain peace and stability within our education community.

Technology

Technology is an important tool to assist students in meeting the challenges of today's world.

The Ministry of Education, along with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, recognized the importance of information and communications technology (ICT) through the creation of the Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning (OKNL) in the spring of 2000. Although the OKNL has proposed a direction for integrating education and ICT in Ontario, little action has been taken to date. A clear plan of action and adequate resources would enable the education community to move forward with providing learning technology that best enhances student learning.

Up to this time, funding limitations have curtailed school boards' ability to replace obsolete computer hardware or expand their inventory to meet growing needs related to current curriculum and to educational life in an information society. The high costs of infrastructure, line charges for access to the internet and professional development for teachers all strain available resources.

The additional \$22 million added in 2003 to the benchmark for classroom supplies, including classroom computers, is appreciated. OCSTA member boards are looking forward to further increases that have been promised as part of a three-year provincial commitment to provide new funding totalling \$66 million.

The 2003 Provincial Budget committed to investing \$90 million in secondary schools over the next four years to renew technological equipment, train teachers and develop partnerships with employees and colleges. A comparable investment at the elementary school level is also required.

Access to communication and information technology is important in all parts of the province. Unfortunately, many school boards in Ontario do not currently have equitable and effective access to technology as a learning resource. Costs for adequate access to the internet vary from \$250 per month in populated areas of southern Ontario to \$10,000 per month in the north. It is essential that action be taken to insure that students in all schools across Ontario share equitably the benefits of information technology.

School Construction

OCSTA acknowledges the investment that has been made since 1997 in providing a substantial number of new pupil places through the building of new schools and additions. Recent announcements with respect to additional funding for renovations and repairs are also welcomed and will help school boards to address their most pressing renewal needs. There remains a concern, however, with respect to benchmark costs used within the formula for School Renewal and New Pupil Places allocations.

Current benchmark costs are based upon the situation that existed in 1997. In 1998, construction costs were at the lowest that they had been in several years. Since then, costs of both material and construction contracts have grown considerably. The benchmarks are no longer aligned with boards' costs and require updating.

Recent funding increases will help school boards to address their most pressing renewal needs. Current renewal grants are inadequate, however, to cover the accumulated backlog of deferred maintenance. OCSTA supports the Rozanski Report's recommendation for a new strategic investment in a 'deferred maintenance amortization fund' to assist boards to secure the funds they require to begin to address their deferred maintenance needs.

Transportation

Since 1998, the Ministry of Education has worked with representatives of school boards and school bus operators to review the funding of student transportation with the goal of developing a new allocation formula. There have been some increases in the level of transportation funding since that time, but substantial change in the funding formula has not yet occurred.

A new approach to transportation funding, announced by the Ministry of Education at the end of the 2002-2003 school year, has now been proposed. The impact of the proposed new funding formula and its ability to meet the significant transportation needs of Catholic school boards cannot be assessed until the actual funding rate for each of the relevant factors is determined. OCSTA must withhold judgement on the new formula until we have had an opportunity to review its financial implications for Ontario's Catholic school boards.

OCSTA must draw to your attention one specific aspect of the proposed new transportation funding model that causes deep concern for Catholic school boards. The June 26, 2003 Memorandum B15 from the Ministry of Education to Directors of Education makes reference to a government decision “that boards would have to be part of a transportation consortium to be eligible for funding under the new model.”

Catholic school boards operating within very limited funding prior to 1998 have been fiscally responsible and accountable in operating efficient transportation services, using measures such as double and triple runs and, in cases where it proved to be financially advantageous, cooperating with other agencies to provide services. Catholic boards want to continue to operate transportation efficiently and are open to new ways of doing so. New consortia, however, may or may not produce greater efficiencies. For certain boards, forming a consortium would increase the cost of student transportation.

Transportation consortia raise concerns for Catholic boards for another reason as well. It is essential that Catholic boards retain full autonomy in determining local policies and service standards, not only to effectively meet the program requirements for schools and students, but also to ensure the accessibility of a Catholic school to those families who choose Catholic education for their children.

A funding formula that would require Catholic boards to participate in a consortium that impedes their ability to fulfill their distinctive mandate, would be seen by OCSTA and Catholic school boards as inequitable. Mandatory participation in any consortium that increases the cost of student transportation or impairs boards’ ability to set appropriate service standards would be unacceptable to Catholic school boards.

OCSTA looks forward to further opportunities to work with the government and Ministry of Education officials to arrive at a grant that provides equitable and adequate funding for student transportation services.

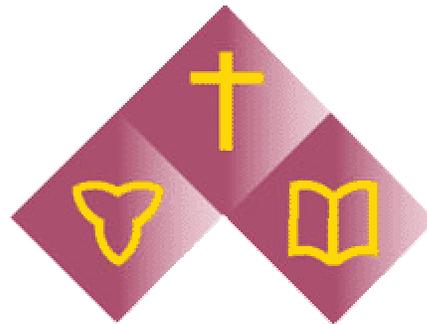
Conclusion

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association appreciates the opportunity to present this brief to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. It is our belief that the implementation of our recommendations would improve the quality of education available to students across Ontario. We are eager to assist the government in any way possible to further these initiatives.

A Brief to the Minister of Education

**Re:
Adequate Funding for
Education Excellence**

November 21, 2003



**Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association**

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Preamble

Founded in 1930, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA) represents 29 English-language Catholic district school boards and five English-language Catholic school authorities. Collectively, these school boards educate over 600,000 students from junior kindergarten to grade 12/OAC.

Inspired by the Gospel, the Mission of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association is to provide leadership, service and a provincial voice for Catholic school boards in promoting and protecting Catholic education.

Annually, OCSTA submits a brief to the government with recommendations for improvements to the funding of education. Recommendations are made on the basis that the education funding system in Ontario must respond to four essential principles:

Equity – A funding formula must distribute education dollars equitably among all Ontario school boards and their students;

Adequacy – The level of funding for education must be adequate to ensure quality education for today's students;

Autonomy/Flexibility – The model must allow school boards the autonomy and flexibility in spending they require to achieve the distinctive goals of their system, and to meet local needs; and

Accountability – The educational funding model must include mechanisms that ensure the appropriate degree of accountability of all parties and transparency of process and reporting regarding efficient and effective use of educational resources for students.

This year's recommendations take into account our Association's concerns with some specific aspects in the current funding formula as well as reflections on some of the directions outlined in *Excellence for All*, the new government's plan for education. Twelve recommendations are included within seven general areas:

- A. Working Together in the Education Sector
- B. Recognizing Employees in School Systems
- C. Providing Students with a Good Start
- D. Students and Staff Moving into the 21'st Century
- E. Accommodating Students
- F. Helping Students with Special Needs
- G. Serving the Broader Community

Introduction

OCSTA looks forward to working with the new government as it continues the task of refining the education funding model. It is essential that the provincial funding mechanism provide school boards with adequate financial resources that are allocated in an equitable manner. It is the role of school boards to distribute these funds for the benefit of their students and to meet their particular needs. All the while, school boards must remain accountable for their policies and actions.

We are very encouraged by the Premier's stated support for education as a provincial priority and the Education Minister's message of a strong commitment to education.

OCSTA and its member boards share with the government the goal of providing high quality education for Ontario's students. We agree with the government's view that education is a critical factor in the economic and social development of our province. Education is a means to economic growth and prosperity in a society that is increasingly dependant on knowledge and communication.

It is essential that education and Ontario's students have a high priority in government spending and that education funding be increased to respond to inflationary pressures and address the serious financial issues confronting school systems in the province.

OCSTA strongly supports the basic philosophy and structure inherent in the current funding model. The student-focused funding model promised every student in the province access to equality of educational opportunity. It is OCSTA's position that the foundation of equity for all students, upon which the funding model is built and now a legal requirement under the *Education Act*, must be maintained. All future initiatives, including any transition funding, one-time grants or refinements to on-going grants must ensure equitable distribution of funding.

Since the inception of the funding model, OCSTA has provided input to the government regarding necessary refinements to some aspects of the formula. Some areas of difficulty that needed to be addressed have existed since the inception of the current funding formula. (e.g., approach to transportation funding); others have arisen because benchmarks within the formula have not been updated to reflect current costs (e.g., compensation and school construction). New initiatives introduced by the government since 1998 have not always been accompanied by appropriate funding (e.g., criminal reference checks). Other initiatives recommended to the government to better equip students to meet the challenges of today's society have not yet received sufficient funding (e.g., greater support for the use of technology in school systems and early childhood programs).

OCSTA recognizes and acknowledges the improvements that have been made in recent years to the funding of education. Since its inception in 1998, the student focused funding model has made dramatic improvements in the march towards equity across the province of Ontario. More recent improvements reflecting the government's response to the Report of the Education Equality Task Force are greatly appreciated and include funding of Special Education, remote and rural schools, employee compensation and transportation.

OCSTA has long advocated a close working relationship with the government in the funding of education. Our Association has for several years recommended the formation of a provincial advisory committee of stakeholders to monitor the impact of student-focused funding and to provide on-going advice to the Minister on funding issues. The government's plan for education, *Excellence for All*, states that the achievement of substantial improvement in education will require the cooperative effort of the government, educators, school boards and parents. An advisory committee comprised of representatives of stakeholders would promote cooperation and support among those who have a strong interest in education.

OCSTA believes that it would be beneficial to the government to work with a stakeholder's advisory committee to address the financial and practical implications related to proposed new initiatives, including the "Best Start Plan," the introduction of programs for helping struggling students, the extension of the mandatory learning age to 18, new programs to make schools safer and the implementation of reductions in class size.

OCSTA agrees with the government's view that investments in our pre-school children are smart investments, "they pay off with better learners, healthier children, more secure families and a more productive economy." (*Excellence for All* pg. 6– The Ontario Liberal Plan for Education) We support the introduction of funding for full-day junior and senior kindergarten programs on a staggered basis, beginning with the boards currently offering these programs and moving to funding those boards wishing to start or reintroduce full-day junior and/or senior kindergarten programs.

OCSTA is encouraged by the government's focus on positive relationships and stability in Ontario's education sector. We believe that a funding model that provides for a realistic level of compensation for employees in the education sector will be of great value in this regard.

OCSTA looks forward to being part of the education solution that the government proposes and to working cooperatively for the benefit of the students we serve.

What follows is a specific review of a number of aspects of the funding model and the rationale for OCSTA's recommendation to improve or enhance these areas.

A. WORKING TOGETHER IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

It is vitally important that those responsible for the education of Ontario's children cooperate and support one another in order to use available resources most effectively in striving for excellence in education.

Advisory Committee to Assist Monitoring & Refining

In the years since 1998, benchmarks in the funding formula have become outdated and out of step with the reality of school board costs. Recent changes have resulted in significant improvements, but there is more work to be done. Some of the recent changes have not been fully implemented, but are being phased in over a number of years – (e.g., funding for classroom supplies and secondary school technology). Other changes, such as those related to transportation funding, are still in the preliminary stages of implementation while still others remain on the horizon, e.g., updating of all benchmarks, including employee compensation.

Many of the benchmarks that have recently been increased had not been updated since the inception of the funding formula in 1998. They had fallen far behind boards' real costs. The on-going credibility of the funding model depends on its ability to remain responsive to educational realities of the day and changes in costs. To ensure that necessary changes take place in a timely fashion and that changes, when made, are monitored and adjusted for efficiency and effectiveness, OCSTA has advocated the involvement of a provincial advisory committee, made up of representatives from local school boards and provincial education organizations. An advisory committee would assist the Ministry in ensuring that the funding model remains credible and responsive to the changing needs of students. Such an advisory committee could recommend to the Ministry of Education and to the government ways to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of provincial funds and a system to track and respond to changes in school boards' costs. The committee would also be a vehicle through which the government could address emerging issues and recognize new initiatives.

Recommendation 1

That benchmark costs for all expenditures, classroom and non-classroom, be regularly updated

- a) the creation of an advisory committee with representation from the appropriate education partners and the Ministry of Education; and
- b) an annual review of benchmark costs for all components of the funding model.

OCSTA appreciated the opportunity to be involved in the consultation regarding the Students at Risk Strategy. The \$50M being provided annually by the Ministry of Education is helping boards to implement school-based supports for students in grades 7 to 12 who are at risk of not graduating.

OCSTA believes that all new initiatives should be accompanied by a process of consultation and by appropriate funding. In the past, boards have sometimes been directed to implement change without accompanying funding. In the period since 1997, boards have been faced with many additional costs, such as those associated with the implementation of the new curriculum, standardized testing, student suspension and expulsion, and criminal reference checks. Cost pressures not reflected in the benchmarks have also resulted from regulatory requirements such as those related to health and safety and water quality.

Recommendation 2

- a) That additional funding be provided to cover costs resulting from educational initiatives and regulatory requirements introduced since 1997.
- b) That the introduction of new educational initiatives and legislative or regulatory requirements be preceded by consultation with stakeholders and accompanied by adequate funding.

Membership Fees - Provincial Trustee Association

Provincial trustee associations provide a valued service both to their member boards and to the Ministry of Education. For school boards, they provide a common voice as well as support and direction in matters of both collective and individual interest. For the Ministry of Education, they provide both immediate feedback on current issues and reflective input to the planning of policies and programs impacting the education and welfare of Ontario's children. School boards' membership in a provincial trustee association is a legitimate expense and should be recognized as such within Ministry documentation regarding the funding of school board administration and governance (e.g., the Technical paper and Parents' Guide for the funding model).

An increase in funding to recognize the cost of boards' membership fees would indicate the Ministry's acknowledgement of and support for the value and contribution of provincial trustee associations.

Recommendation 3

That membership fees in provincial trustee associations be recognized through an increased board administration cost within the school board administration and governance grant.

B. RECOGNIZING EMPLOYEES IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

In order to be effective and workable, an education funding model must provide fair, appropriate and realistic levels of compensation for teachers, custodians, secretaries, support workers and administrators. To be credible, a funding model must recognize a boards' actual costs.

Employee Compensation

Compensation allocations are a critical part of school board budget planning and operation. Employee compensation constitutes about 80% of a school board's operating expenditures. The recommendations of the Education Equality Task Force (EETF) support our Association's past requests for adjustments to the compensation benchmarks.

In our submission to the 2002 provincial pre-budget consultation, OCSTA noted that salary benchmark adjustments since 1997 did not reflect actual increases in compensation within other parts of the broader public sector. OPSEU salaries at that time, for example, had increased by 8.8% since 1998 while the salary benchmarks for most school board employees increased by only 1.95%. Salary benchmarks for some staff remained unchanged.

The 3% increase (\$340M) provided by the province for employee compensation for 2002-03 was appreciated, as was the further 3% increase for 2003/2004. These increases gave many school boards the flexibility they required to reach collective agreements with their employees, and were consistent with collective agreements reached with health and public administration workers at that time.

Although these increases provided for 3% salary increases moving forward, they did not address the gap that had existed for several years between provincial allocations and boards' actual costs.

In their review of salary costs, the EETF estimated a shortfall of 4.6% between actual 2001/2002 salary costs for teachers and the existing salary benchmarks for 2001/2002. If boards provided increases in employee compensation within the 3% provided for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004, benchmarks would still need to be increased by an additional 4.6% to align with actual salaries for 2003/2004. In cases where increases to compensation levels over the past two years have exceeded 3% annually, or where an increase was provided for at the end of a collective agreement, even more severe challenges will arise. Although the Toronto Catholic District School Board, for example, attempted in its most recent negotiations with its elementary teachers to work within the 3% increase, an arbitrator's ruling following a lockout forced the board to provide, in addition to the 3% raise for the 2002-03 school year, a further 2% increase on the last day of a 2003-04 contract year.

Implementation of Rozanski's recommendation for a 4.6% increase in compensation benchmarks, phased in over three years, would allow school boards to address other areas of their budgets that have been penalized in recent

years as funds were reallocated to meet the realities of compensation costs for various employee groups.

The cost of compensation for employees also includes the cost of benefits, which has risen considerably in recent years. The Rozanski Report estimated that to update benchmarks in this area would require percentage increases substantially higher than those required for salaries.

Recommendation 4

That employee compensation benchmarks for teaching and non-teaching staff be amended to reflect more realistically school boards' costs.

Average Per-Pupil Credit Load

The new secondary school curriculum provides for a graduation course expectancy of a minimum of 30 credits. This is an average of 7.5 credits per year. Students may take additional credits.

The foundation grant currently provides funding for the number of secondary school teachers required when students take an average of 7.2 credits (the provincial average in 1997). Through the Teacher Qualification and Experience Grant, additional funding is provided to a board where its average secondary school credit load exceeds 7.2 credits up to a maximum of a board wide average of 7.5 credits. The EETF has recommended that the Ministry of Education review the credit-load factor and make an appropriate adjustment. They noted that in 2003-03, over 50 school boards reported average credit loads greater than 7.5.

OCSTA believes that the maximum credit load should be increased to recognize the actual number of credits taken by a board's secondary school students. This average currently exceeds 7.5 for many boards and is likely to increase as more students strive to complete their secondary school program within four years. An increase in the credit load factor within the funding formula would recognize the higher cost faced by boards in employing additional teachers to provide instruction when the average credit load exceeds 7.5.

Recommendation 5

That the credit load factor within the Teachers Qualification and Experience Grant be adjusted to recognize the actual average per-pupil credit load.

C. PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH A GOOD START

The early years establish the foundation upon which a child's future success is built. Schools can play an even greater role in those formative years, when children are four and five years of age.

Full Time Junior & Senior Kindergarten Programs

OCSTA agrees with the new government's view that "investments in our preschool children are smart investments: they pay off with better learners, healthier children, more secure families and a more productive economy". (*Excellence for All – The Ontario Liberal Plan for Education pg. 6*)

Early childhood education is critical to the future learning success of children in elementary and secondary schools. In the December 1994 report of the Royal Commission on Learning, *For the Love of Learning*, early childhood education was identified as the first of four essential engines that would drive the transformation of education in Ontario.

It is OCSTA's long-standing position that local school boards, in consultation with their local community, must retain the flexibility to determine the scheduling of the kindergarten programs to be offered. We support the introduction of full day junior and senior kindergarten programs on a staggered basis beginning with the recognition of boards currently offering these programs and moving on to funding those boards that wish to start or re-introduce full day junior and/or senior kindergarten programs.

As suggested by the Royal Commission on Learning, savings from the elimination of the fifth year of secondary school could be utilized to pay for the additional costs of the expansion of the Kindergarten programs. The overall provincial decline in enrolment would provide savings in staff costs as well as additional pupil places, which could be utilized to accommodate full-day junior and senior kindergarten programs within boards who choose to offer them.

Moving on a graduated basis in introducing these programs would allow for their introduction to coincide with the availability of suitable accommodation and appropriately qualified teachers.

Recommendation 6

That the Ministry of Education provide funding for full-time Junior and Senior Kindergarten programs, where boards choose to offer these programs.

D. STUDENTS AND STAFF MOVING INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

Technology is an important tool to assist students in meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Technology

The Royal Commission on Learning (1994) saw information technology as one of the four engines essential to drive the transformation of education in Ontario. The Ministry of Education, along with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, recognized the importance of information and communications technology (ICT) through the creation of the Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning (OKNL) in the spring of 2000. The Report of the Education Equality Task Force, 2002 also addressed the issue of technology.

Up to this time, funding limitations have limited school boards' ability to replace obsolete computer hardware or expand their inventory to meet the growing needs and expectations related to the current curriculum and to life in an information society. The high costs of infrastructure and line charges for access to the internet have also strained available resources.

The Ministry of Education, in announcements made this year, has increased funding for technology by providing

- an additional \$22 million for classroom resources, which includes classroom computers, textbooks and other learning resources,
- an additional \$10 million for secondary schools, for the renewal of technological equipment and the training of teachers.

The additional \$22 million added to the benchmark for classroom supplies, including classroom computers, is appreciated. OCSTA member boards are looking forward to further increases that have been promised as part of a three year commitment to provide new funding totaling \$66 million.

The 2003 Provincial Budget committed to investing \$90 million in secondary schools over the next four years to renew technological equipment, to train teachers and to develop partnerships with employees and colleges. With long-term commitments for funding, school boards are in a position to develop comprehensive multi-year plans for improvements to technology. A comparable investment at the elementary school level is also required.

Recommendation 7

That increased funding for technology be provided so that school boards may update, maintain and introduce

- a) hardware and related infrastructure
- b) software
- c) related professional development for teaching and non-teaching personnel

Access to Information Technology

Access to communication and information technology is important in all parts of the province of Ontario. Unfortunately, travel on the electronic highway becomes quite restricted in some areas of the province due to remoteness and the exceptionally high cost of access. This is particularly true in much of northern Ontario.

The final report of the Chair of the Infrastructure Requirements and Development Working Group of the Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning (OKNL) recommended that

- a) All learners have equitable and effective access to the learning networks.
- b) A fibre-quality provincial network be built to support learning. The establishment of this connectivity at 100 MB province-wide should be the first priority in the implementation of ORION. (Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network)

Many school boards in northern Ontario do not have equitable and effective access to technology as a learning resource. The Superior North Catholic District School Board, a small northern board responsible for nine elementary schools in nine towns along the north shore of Lake Superior and in the area northeast of Lake Nipigon, would be faced with a cost of \$20,000 per month for a Line 1 bandwidth which would give access to the internet for its schools and board office. Costs in other parts of Ontario are considerably less, as low as \$250 per month in populated areas of southern Ontario.

Several northwestern school boards, French and English, Catholic and secular, have attempted unsuccessfully to obtain access to the ORION network on a similar basis as would be provided to colleges and universities. Discussion within the government between the Ministry of Education and the Management Board Secretariat of Ontario could be productive in assisting school boards in the north in their attempts to provide equitable internet access for their students.

Recommendation 8

That action be taken to ensure that all students and school staff throughout Ontario have real and equitable access to technology and information for teaching and learning (broadband access) regardless of geographic remoteness or sparsity of population.

E. ACCOMMODATING STUDENTS

Students must have access to school facilities that provide an effective environment for teaching and for learning.

School Construction

OCSTA acknowledges, with appreciation, the investment that has been made since 1997 in providing a substantial number of new pupil places through the building of new schools and additions. Recent announcements with respect to providing new funding for renovations and repairs are also appreciated. There remains a concern with respect to benchmark costs used in the formula for the School Renewal and New Pupil Places allocations of the Pupil Accommodation Grant.

Current benchmark construction costs are based upon the situation that existed in 1997. In 1998, construction costs were at the lowest that they had been in several years. Since then, costs of material and construction contracts have grown considerably as market demands have increased.

The EETF calculated that updating the benchmarks for school renewal would cost \$25 million, while updating costs for new pupil places using the Ontario C.P.I. would cost \$39 million. OCSTA believes that the cost may in fact be even higher, as becomes quite evident when one attempts to align the construction costs used for the 1998 funding model with current costs and costs projected in 2004 and beyond.

The government's own experience involving the building of three new interchanges on the 401 east of Toronto dramatically illustrates the increase in construction costs. In 1998 the total cost of the three interchanges was projected to be \$53.6 million. We understand that today's estimate is \$118 million. In the education sector construction costs are also increasing significantly. The Superior North Catholic District Board recently tendered for a small elementary school, estimated by its architect to cost \$3 million. The lowest of six tenders was \$3,756,000. The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario is planning to build a small secondary school for 500 students. Two years ago, the estimated cost was \$10.5 million. Today the projected cost is \$12 million. Boards across the province find that construction costs have risen considerably as market pressures have brought higher demands for subcontractors and thus higher prices.

Further adjustments to the Pupil Accommodation Grant are required. Dr. Rozanski's recommendation of a "deferred maintenance amortization fund," as well as a means of determining an appropriate construction cost benchmark, must be further studied, taking into consideration recent government initiatives as well as future needs.

Recommendation 9

That the funding formulas for the construction of new buildings and additions as well as for facility renewal projects be changed to reflect current costs of construction in the various regions of the province.

Transportation

The level of funding for student transportation provided by the Ministry of Education has been the subject of considerable criticism and concern for many years. Transportation is one area of funding that the Ministry and school boards recognize was not adequately addressed with the introduction of the new funding model. Since 1998, the Ministry of Education has worked with representatives of school boards and school bus operators to review the funding of student transportation with the goal of developing a new allocation formula. There have been some increases in the level of transportation funding since that time, but substantial change in the funding formula has not yet occurred.

A new approach to transportation funding, announced by the Ministry at the end of the 2002-2003 school year, has now been proposed for implementation in 2004-05.

OCSTA appreciates that the new transportation funding model is to respond to variations in transportation needs across the province including the following:

- differences in the need for general transportation services because of geography and the distance between students' homes and their schools;
- differences in the need for specialized vehicles to provide transportation services to students in wheelchairs or with other mobility challenges;
- differences in the need for transportation services for special education programming; and
- differences in the need for unique transportation services (air, water), board and lodging, and transportation to Provincial Schools.

The impact of the proposed new funding formula and its ability to meet the significant transportation needs of Catholic school boards cannot be fully assessed until the actual funding rate for each of the relevant factors is determined. OCSTA must withhold judgement of the new formula until we have had an opportunity to review its financial implications for Ontario's Catholic school boards.

At this time, however, OCSTA must also draw to your attention one specific aspect of the proposed new transportation funding model that causes deep concern for Catholic school boards.

The June 26, 2003 Memorandum B15 from the Ministry of Education to Directors of Education makes reference to a government decision "that boards would have to be part of a transportation consortium to be eligible for funding under the new model."

Catholic school boards operating within very limited funding prior to 1998 have been fiscally responsible and accountable in operating efficient transportation services, using measures such as double and triple runs and, in cases where it proved to be financially advantageous, cooperating with other agencies to

provide services. Catholic boards want to continue to operate transportation efficiently and are open to new ways of improving efficiency. However, new consortia may or may not produce greater efficiencies. For certain boards, forming a consortium would increase the cost of student transportation.

Transportation consortia raise concerns for Catholic boards for another reason as well. It is essential that Catholic boards retain full autonomy in determining local policies and service standards, not only to meet effectively the program requirements for schools and students, but also to ensure the accessibility of a Catholic school to those families who choose Catholic education for their children.

A funding formula that would require Catholic boards to participate in a consortium that impedes the board's ability to fulfill their distinctive mandate would be seen by OCSTA and Catholic school boards as inequitable. Mandatory participation in any consortium that increases the cost of student transportation or impairs boards' ability to set appropriate service standards would be unacceptable to Catholic school boards.

In light of the above, OCSTA recommends:

Recommendation 10

That the impact of the proposed new transportation formula be reviewed with the assistance of stakeholders to ensure that

- a) school boards' actual transportation costs are met in a fair, equitable and accountable manner; and
- b) the formula is amended where funding is inconsistent with actual costs.

F. HELPING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Much had been done recently to assist students facing particular challenges within the school system. More remains to be done.

Special Education

OCSTA appreciates the prompt response to Dr. Rozanski's recommendations for changes in the funding of special education. OCSTA has long sought such improvements. Changes made with respect to the Intensive Support Amount (ISA) process and implementation are well underway. The impact of both of these measures is being translated into positive steps for the improvement of programming for many students. At this time, however, we would like to raise important issues regarding one specific group of exceptional pupils.

OCSTA is concerned about the availability of meaningful programming for autistic children whose numbers are increasing rapidly in our province. OCSTA supports school-based delivery of integrated services for students with autism between the ages of 6 and 21. We are also concerned about services for autistic children prior to the age of 6.

The province is currently providing an Intensive Early Intervention Program for children with autism. The program targets children aged two to five for services using Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI). Due to the lack of sufficient resources, particularly of qualified IBI therapists, many children are not being served. Some remain on waiting lists up to the age of six, at which point they become ineligible for service. Others who receive service up to age six look for its continuation when they enter school.

School boards do not have sufficient resources to provide the intensive support services that are expected by many parents of autistic children either before or after the age of six. The amount of service needed for these children is both intensive and extensive - up to 40 hours per week per child prior to age six, and up to 20 hours per week per child beyond age six. Within schools, special education programs provided for students identified as autistic may include speech language activities, structural learning activities and/or social skills training. A student identified as having special needs such as autism has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) based on an individualized assessment of the student's learning needs.

In November, 2002 the Ontario government announced an investment of an additional \$58.6M for services for children with autism, which would allow an additional 610 children and their families to get I.B.I. services by 2006/2007. (In 2002, 550 children were receiving this support.) \$3M was also to be provided to give support to families and their children as they made the transition into school or other community services. An additional \$16M was promised for an out-of-class program for elementary school-age children with

autism. The Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services was to fund programs that would take place in schools or other community locations and provide children, supported by trained professionals, with an opportunity to spend time with their peers and to develop social interaction, behaviour and communication skills. All those who are concerned with the education and welfare of autistic children welcomed these announcements and look forward to their implementation.

On-going cooperation and communication among all parties providing services for autistic children is necessary if available resources, including professional staff and programs, are to be used effectively and efficiently. Catholic school boards are anxious to provide the best programming and support possible for autistic children entrusted to their care.

Recommendation 11

That the Ministry of Education, working cooperatively with other provincial ministries, ensure that adequate funding, professional staff and programs are in place to meet the needs of autistic children at both pre-school and school age levels.

G. SERVING THE BROADER COMMUNITY

Life long learning is today's reality. Schools assist in this process through continuing education programs. Adult education for members of our community who lack facility with the English language is extremely important in a Canadian society that embraces many from other parts of the world where English is not a first language.

Accommodation for Adult English Second Language Programs

The importance of providing education for recent immigrants to Canada is recognized by both the federal and provincial governments. This is particularly true with respect to providing English as a Second Language programs.

For elementary and secondary school students, the Ministry of Education provides funding for English as a Second Language/English Skills Development (ESL/ESD). A number of school boards also offer programs for adult ESL students, which may be funded by either the federal (e.g., LINK program) or provincial government (Adult Basic Education courses).

Costs associated with renewal for school facilities used for daytime adult ESL programs are not recognized in the current funding model. In addition, the Ministry of Education does not recognize, as occupied, pupil places used for daytime adult ESL instruction. Some school boards, often those with vacant schools in a downtown area, use school facilities to house these programs. The Ottawa-Carleton CDSB, for example, uses four vacant elementary schools in the City of Ottawa for adult ESL. The funding formula does not recognize these as occupied spaces for purposes of the board's pupil places count, severely limiting the board's ability to qualify for funding for badly needed new pupil places in Carleton, where the population is growing. This creates a funding problem.

Recommendation 12

That adequate funding be provided to school boards to meet the costs of accommodation for adult English as a Second Language programs.

Conclusion

OCSTA appreciates the opportunity to share with the Committee the experience and observations of the Catholic school boards of Ontario. We offer our continued support for initiatives that further our goal of a provincial funding formula for education that provides

- equitable and adequate funding for students
- for autonomy and flexibility for school boards
- measures to ensure the accountability of all partners in Ontario education.

OCSTA commends and supports the government's commitment to "*Excellence for All*" through quality education. We would be pleased to assist the Minister and Ministry of Education staff in any way possible with the development of policy options that will lead to improved opportunities and greater success for the students we serve.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That benchmark costs for all expenditures, classroom and non-classroom, be regularly updated through

- a) creation of an advisory committee with representation from the appropriate education partners and the Ministry of Education; and
- b) an annual review of benchmark costs for all components of the funding model.

Recommendation 2

- a) That additional funding be provided to cover costs resulting from educational initiatives and regulatory requirements introduced since 1997.
- b) That the introduction of new educational initiatives and legislative or regulatory requirements be preceded by consultation with stakeholders and accompanied by adequate funding.

Recommendation 3

That membership fees in provincial trustee associations be recognized through an increased board administration cost within the school board administration and governance grant.

Recommendation 4

That employee compensation benchmarks for teaching and non-teaching staff be amended to reflect more realistically school boards' costs.

Recommendation 5

That the credit load factor within the Teachers Qualification and Experience Grant be adjusted to recognize the actual average per-pupil credit load.

Recommendation 6

That the Ministry of Education provide funding for full-time Junior and Senior Kindergarten programs, where boards choose to offer these programs.

Recommendation 7

That increased funding for technology be provided so that school boards may update, maintain and introduce

- a) hardware and related infrastructure
- b) software
- c) related professional development for teaching and non-teaching personnel

Recommendation 8

That action be taken to ensure that all students and school staff throughout Ontario have real and equitable access to technology and information for teaching and learning (broadband access) regardless of geographic remoteness or sparsity of population.

Recommendation 9

That the funding formulas for the construction of new buildings and additions as well as for facility renewal projects be changed to reflect current costs of construction in the various regions of the province.

Recommendation 10

That the impact of the proposed new transportation formula be reviewed with the assistance of stakeholders to ensure that

- a) school boards' actual transportation costs are met in a fair, equitable and accountable manner; and
- b) the formula is amended where funding is inconsistent with actual costs.

Much had been done recently to assist students facing particular challenges within the school system. More remains to be done.

Recommendation 11

That the Ministry of Education working cooperatively with other provincial ministries, ensure that adequate funding, professional staff and programs are in place to meet the needs of autistic children at both pre-school and school age levels.

Recommendation 12

That adequate funding be provided to school boards to meet the costs of accommodation for adult English as a Second Language programs.