

CUPE Research Briefing Note

DATE: May 6, 2013

FROM: Govind Rao, Senior Officer, Research

TOPIC: **2013 Ontario Budget - School Boards**

The School Board Sector had an advance look into the Education funding portion of Ontario Budget 2013 on March 27, 2013. That was the day the Ministry of Education released its Grants for Student Needs (GSN) projections for 2013-14.ⁱ

The Ontario Budget projects funding for the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2013-14 to be \$24.15 billion, up from \$23.55 billion in 2012-13 (an increase of 2.5%). **Much of this increase will not directly affect education services provided to students.** It is related to the transfer of child care funding to the MOE, and additional capital funding related to the roll-out of Full-Day Kindergarten.

The most important impact on Ontario's students is buried in the numbers and concerns the operating budget for School Boards as outlined in the GSN for 2013-14. CUPE Research released a Factsheet in April 2013 which contains a detailed breakdown of funding lines as they impact our members.ⁱⁱ

Nothing in yesterday's 2013 Budget release indicates a change from service cuts and budget line freezes to School Board operating budgets that we released at the end of March.

Overview of Budget 2013 - School Boards

With this budget, Premier Wynne has signalled that the government intends to continue the austerity agenda for Ontario's schools.

The operating budget for Ontario's school sector will be cut by 0.7% in 2013-14. This is a real cut of around 3.0% from 2012-13 levels once inflation is factored in.

Overall Key Numbers

1. The Grants for Students Needs (\$20.8 B)
2. Education - Program and Other Funding (\$182.5 M)
3. Funding related to the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten (\$963 M)
4. Capital Grants - \$3.6 billion over three years to build/renovate 90 schools

Collective Bargaining

The government boasts that it has materialized \$1.3 billion in cost savings from school board workers (support staff and teachers) for fiscal year 2012-13, as a result of the most recent round of

negotiations. The Budget confirms that workers were the target of the *Putting Students First Act* and not education quality as the Minister claimed.

It comes as no surprise that the 2013-14 funding projections do not provide boards with any money for a wage increase or increases in worker complements. The distressing outcome of this policy is that it means the people who make the Ontario school system world class, receive less for their efforts. In this context, it will be even harder for school boards to recruit and retain the staff they need to build and maintain a high quality public education system.

School Board ‘Efficiencies’ and ‘Modernization’

The 2013 Budget announces the government’s plan to introduce an efficiencies and modernization savings strategy in the school boards sector. The budget document does not provide much detail, however, the budget enabling legislation does not list the Education Act. School board amalgamations in the near term therefore appear to be unlikely.

More likely is that the government will continue on its current course of encouraging the closing of schools that it considers are underutilized. It expects to save \$43.7M in 2013-14 and \$72.5M in 2014-15 this way.

We have also seen attempts to find efficiencies by sharing staff between boards and schools, and continuing the creation of school busing consortiums. These strategies only lead to poorer education services and education outcomes, as well as overworked employees.

Conclusions

The Budget trumpets the government’s achievements in improving the quality of education and achievement of Ontario’s students, but it is being done in buildings that don’t have the custodial and maintenance budget necessary to keep them clean and functioning well.

How can students achieve in a context where enriching programs like music instruction are being slashed? The demand for special education support services is nowhere near being met, and in fact, was cut in 2013-14 projected funding (see CUPE Factsheet on GSN).

The 2013 Budget continues the pattern set in 2012 and 2011. Freezes are the order of the day with targeted small cuts to certain operating budget lines.

The main takeaway is that operating funding for school boards has been cut by 0.7% in 2013-14. No amount of government trumpeting of its education achievements will change this fact: students are receiving less education support than they need to learn and succeed.

wl/cope 491

ⁱ 2013-14 GSN information can be accessed at the Ministry’s website at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/funding.html>

ⁱⁱ The CUPE Factsheet is available at: [http://www.cupe.on.ca/a5632/CUPE%20Fact%20Sheet%20Analysis%20of%20the%202013%20GSN%20\(ENG\).pdf](http://www.cupe.on.ca/a5632/CUPE%20Fact%20Sheet%20Analysis%20of%20the%202013%20GSN%20(ENG).pdf)