



Funding formula short-changes special education

Deficiencies in Ontario's education funding formula for support services mean that school boards don't have enough money to deliver quality special education programs.

These funding flaws are the continuation of a pattern that has short-changed special needs students and dedicated Educational Assistants (EAs) in our schools since the provincial education funding formula was introduced in 1998.

Lack of resources and policy supports put EAs at increased risk

The job of EAs is to work with special needs children and they are trained to do that. However, a bad funding formula is creating situations where EAs are exposed:

- To health and safety hazards on an ongoing basis;
- To back injuries as a result of lifting heavy students with mobility impairments;
- To repeated acts of violence and verbal abuse from students who have severe physical and behavioural difficulties. Some of these children lash out, hit, bite and kick EAs who may need hospital attention as a result.

THE LACK OF RESOURCES AND POLICY SUPPORTS MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO MEET THE NEEDS OF SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS WHILE ADEQUATELY PROTECTING EAS FROM HARM.

'Proudly committed to helping special needs students succeed'



McGuinty government failing special needs students and EAs

Enhancing both special education programs and health and safety for EAs requires political will and genuine cooperation between the ministries of education and labour.

But, so far, the government has failed to:

- Enact province-wide policies on violence committed against special education support staff;
- Set standards concerning training and safety equipment to improve health and safety;
- Adequately fund special education.

Funding gaps hurting EAs and special needs students

The spring 2006 education grants eliminated or reduced various grants that school boards had used to help cover the cost of EAs' jobs. And increasingly, EAs are downloaded work in order to fill provincial funding gaps. As a result, EAs' working conditions have worsened, increasing workloads and the risk of injury and burnout.

Funding shortfalls have meant:

- Cuts to the time EAs have to spend with special needs students. Hours of work decreased from seven, to six-and-a-half, to six, or even less than six hours a day in some school boards. This has created untenable workloads for EAs. They are struggling to carry out all their required tasks within a shortened workday.
- Not enough workers. Hundreds of EAs and special education support workers have been cut. Faced with a funding formula that does not provide sufficient dollars for support services and Ontario's balanced budget legislation, school boards have targeted special education for cuts to balance their budgets. This further increases the workloads of those EAs that remain in our schools.

Hidden cuts to special education

Since the province and teachers' federations and school boards reached an agreement last year on additional teacher preparation time, EAs and other support staff are increasingly performing more supervision of students—work that teachers used to do.

In some boards, EAs are doing more than 400 minutes a week of general supervision—a full day per week.

When EAs are asked to do general supervision on top of their regular work, it amounts to a hidden cut to special education because that's time not spent with special needs students.

PROBLEM IS...THE PROVINCE DIDN'T INCREASE FUNDING TO SCHOOL BOARDS TO COVER THIS NEW AGREEMENT WITH TEACHERS.



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**Ontario School Board Workers
Coordinating Committee (OSBCC)**



Fund the actual cost of special education in the funding formula—not just a small portion

It is time for the Ontario Liberals to acknowledge the key role that EAs play in our school system, and change the provincial funding formula so that special education is adequately funded.

There are more than 20,000 EAs employed by school boards across the province. Yet the funding formula only mentions those EAs who work as JK/SK EAs, of which there are relatively few left across the province.

The Ontario government must demonstrate their commitment to special needs children by valuing the responsibility and the work EAs do by introducing the following measures to improve their working conditions:

- Revise the funding formula to include realistic benchmarks for EAs' salaries, hours of work, and professional development. This increase in funding would allow school boards to have all EAs work a minimum of a seven-hour day.
- Establish province-wide standards and guidelines to ensure EAs are optimally employed to serve the interests of special needs children;
- Provide significant funds for training and ongoing professional development to deal with the educational demands and violence that can occur when students with autism spectrum disorder and other severe behavioural conditions are given the public education they deserve;
- Set standards concerning training and safety equipment;
- Change the Education Act to include the roles and responsibilities of EAs in our school system.