
Analysis of the Ontario Ministry of Education's 2013-14 Grants for Students Needs

On March 27, 2013 the Ministry of Education released its Grants for Students Needs (GSN) for the 2013-14 school year. School boards use these funding projections to draw up their 2013-14 budgets in the coming months. The release this year comes before the Ontario Budget, and so there is a small possibility that Budget 2013 will amend the Ministry's projected GSN for 2013-2014.

The 2013-14 funding projections for the GSN continue the three-year austerity agenda for Ontario's schools:

- The operating budget for Ontario's school sector will be cut by 0.7% in 2013-14. When inflation is factored in, this is a real cut of around 3.0% from 2012-13.
- This is another cut on top of past cuts the school sector budget has experienced since 2011-12.
- In fact, when inflation is factored in, the GSN are back at their 2008-2009 level (\$18.9 B). That is a very long time to have budgets frozen while the demand for literacy, special education, and other education services continue to increase.

This year's budget will have different impacts on CUPE members depending on their board employer. In most scenarios our members will see either flat or small (1%) reductions to our budget lines. Some of these reductions will be enrolment-driven.

It comes as no surprise that the 2013-14 funding projections, again, 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.

We provide a more detailed overview of how these numbers will affect school board members below.

The Budget Context

Some commentators had held out hope that the selection of Kathleen Wynne as leader of the provincial Liberal Party (and therefore Premier of Ontario) would mean renewed funding for Ontario's schools given her interest in education issues.

Those who expected a change in direction from the Government were quickly disappointed when the funding projections were released by the Ministry.

The Ministry of Education Budget has three components:

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)

The first component of the budget, Grants for Students Needs, is by far the most significant and the one that affects CUPE members directly. The overall budget for GSN for 2013-14 is \$20.8 B. This is down from \$20.95 B in 2012-13.

This level of funding means that the Province has essentially enacted a funding freeze since 2008-2009 (after we factor in inflation). The Liberal Government is fast undoing whatever legacy they built repairing Ontario's school-system after Harris.

Considering the few places where the Government has put more money into GSN budget lines (increased funding for utilities costs (\$28M), a 2% increase to the transportation benchmark, and increased employer OMERS contributions (\$9M)) one can't help but come to the conclusion that they sourced it through the cuts to programs and services in our schools, and the wages and benefits of school board employees.

Labour Framework

Our sector is still reeling from the trampling of our collective bargaining rights. The Ministry has reduced its wage costs for the period 2012-14 by hundreds of millions through the wage freeze, delayed movement on the grid, and by the changes to sick days' entitlements. Our members have more than done their part in sharing the burden of the economic crisis and slow growth.

Members should also be aware that the Ministry has not reduced funding benchmarks for support staff for the one unpaid day that support staff were forced to take in 2013-14. This means that boards should have a little more wiggle room (0.5%) for support staff salaries.¹

The GSN provide additional funding for the 2012-13 year to facilitate boards' implementation of the CUPE-Ministry MOU. Additional funds are provided to boards to:

1. payout non-vested sick days;
2. standardize a 10-years of service threshold across boards for payout of retirement gratuities; and,
3. fund the one-year rolling sick bank so that it can be used to top up salary from 90% to 100%.

Finally, the Ministry has provided funding for grid movement based on a 97th day formula for the 2013-14 school year in line with the provincial settlement.

Enrolment Numbers

Members should examine local enrolment numbers carefully. The Province-wide reduction in enrolment is projected to be very slight (-10,000). Some boards will see a significant increase, such as in fast-growing York Region, whereas other boards are challenged by slow and steady falling enrolment.

Conclusion

The 2013-14 release of funding projections continued the pattern set in 2012-13. Freezes are the order of the day with targeted small cuts to certain grant lines. The Ministry will continue to look to reduce its funding requirements by closing schools under the Under-utilized School Strategy. It expects to save \$43.7M in 2013-14 and \$72.5M in 2014-15 this way, so we should expect to continue our battles to keep schools open.

The mention of school board amalgamations was not repeated in any of this year's documents or announcements. It is fair to say the Ministry has placed this issue on the back burner.

The Government has stressed the fact that when you add together the non-GSN grants (Education Programs – Other, and funding for FDK) the total Education budget was increased by 0.8%. This increase to the total Education budget does not affect most current CUPE members, as it is earmarked for renovations and new hires related to the roll-out of FDK.

The main takeaway is that core funding for schools has been cut by 0.7% in 2013-14.

When considering the fact that we haven't had significant increases to School Boards funding since 2011-12, the true cut is much larger after inflation is taken into account.

¹ The ongoing negotiations between the OSSTF and ETFO may have some impact on whether or not support staff will have to take an unpaid day. We'll only know this in the coming weeks.

WHAT IS A 'BENCHMARK'?

We'll be using the term 'benchmark', as in 'funding benchmarks for office support staff'. What we mean by this is that there is a set dollar figure that schools get for each staff member, and for the number students enrolled. Each of these is a benchmark figure. If it remains the same, boards get the same amount of money as they did the year before as long as enrolments have not fallen off. If the benchmark increases there is more money transferred to the board. And, if the benchmark is reduced they'll be less money transferred to the board.

Digging through the Numbers: How do the Grant Lines affect CUPE School Board Members?

The Grants for Students Needs are broken down into fifteen separate grant lines. Let's take a look at the nine grant lines that most closely impact school sector members.

1. Pupil Foundation Grant

(CUPE: Professionals and Para-professionals, some Education Assistants, some Early Childhood Educators, Classroom Consultants, Reading Specialists. Non CUPE: Teachers).

- There is a significant cut to this line of - 2.2% below 2012-13 funding levels.
- Yet, there have been no changes to either benchmark salaries or Average Daily Enrolment (ADE) formulas for CUPE members.
- The major change in funding affects teachers (change to ADE formulas).

2. School Foundation Grant

(CUPE: Office Support Staff. Non-CUPE: Principals, Vice-Principals, School Trustees)

- There has been no change to funding benchmarks for office support staff.
- The benchmarks for funding Principal and Vice-Principals have had a significant reduction (-1.5% salary cut) to reflect 3 unpaid days.

3. Special Education Grant

(CUPE: Most Education Assistants, most Early Childhood Educators, some Social Workers, some Professionals and Para-professionals)

- The Special Education Grant has two sub-grants that affect CUPE members. The Special Education Per-Pupil Amount (SEPPA) and the High Needs Amount (HNA) fund staff to work with students with special needs.
- For 2013-14, the SEPPA allocation has been cut by - 0.8%, with the biggest cut coming to allocations for Grade 9 to 12 students (-0.9%), and slightly less for JK-Grade 8 students (-0.7%)
- The HNA allocation is unchanged (0.0%) for 2013-14.
- Staff salary benchmarks are unchanged.
- However, the Ministry has adjusted the formulas for how school boards receive funding for special needs. Schools must now have around 2% more special needs students before full funding (factor of "1") kicks in. (See Technical Paper, pp. 30-32, link below)

4. First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Supplement

(CUPE: some language instructors, some native education specialists)

- The Native Languages Allocation is cut by 17%. This is a major cut (\$1.4M).
- However, the Ministry is increasing the Native Studies Allocation by 33% (\$5M).
- Overall funding for this budget line is going up by 4.5%

5. Learning Opportunities Grant

(CUPE: some Social Workers, Professionals and Para-Professionals, Speech Language Therapy, Individualized Student Support, Literacy and Math Tutors)

- This grant contains a number of sub-grants which are relevant for our members.
- Demographic Allocation is cut by -0.6%. This sub-grant supports boards to help students with academic difficulties stemming from social and economic inequality.
- Literacy and Math outside the School Day remains essentially frozen, with a \$50 reduction per pupil in the funding formula.
- Ontario Focussed Intervention Partnership Tutoring has its budget frozen at 2012-13 levels.

6. Safe Schools Supplement

(CUPE: Social Workers, Child and Youth Workers, Professionals and Para-Professional supports for students)

- This budget line is frozen (0% increase) and there is no change in funding benchmarks for 2013-14.

7. Continuing Education and Other Programs Grant

(CUPE: Adult education, Language instructors)

- There is no change to 2013-14 funding at the provincial level, and as with most budget lines, this one is also frozen (0%).

8. School Board Administration and Governance Grant

(CUPE: Board-based Support Staff, Clerical, Computer Technicians, Financial and Accounting)

- This grant is composed of seven sub-allocations.
- For our members, the relevant one of the seven is the Board Administration Allocation.
- The Board Administration Allocation will be cut by 0.7% province-wide. One of the reasons for the cut is because there is a per pupil calculation in the funding formula. Student enrolment is projected to decline by 0.5% in 2013-14, and even though the workload of board staff will not be reduced by that amount, the Ministry has not changed the funding formula so the outcome is a grant cut.

9. School Facility Operations and Renewal Grant

(CUPE: Maintenance and Custodial Staff)

- The relevant sub-grant for our members is the School Operations Allocation. Within the School Operations Allocation there is another sub-grant called the Base School Operations Allocation.
- The Base School Operations Allocation is what funds most of our maintenance and custodial members. In 2013-14 it will be cut by 0.4%.
- The allocation is calculated by multiplying student enrolment by the amount of area of the schools in the boards. The benchmarks for area per pupil have not changed for 2013-14.

Sources

- Grants for Students Needs Memo <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1314/2013B5.pdf>
- Technical Paper 2013-14 http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1314/Technical13_14.pdf
- 2013-14 Funding Projections <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1314/funding13.pdf>

- * Early Childhood Educators are also funded through the "Education Other Program Funding" Grant. At the time of writing the Ministry has not released details on this grant.

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