

CUPE·SCFP



CUPE/OSBCU Submission on Ontario Ministry of Education Funding Consultation

January, 2021

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Tie funding to specific staffing levels by limiting employers' ability to use funds for purposes for which they were not generated.
2. Make permanent the COVID-related funding and tie it to specific staffing levels.
3. Increase all benchmarks to fully reflect the costs of negotiated central agreements and real inflation of non-compensation related costs.
4. Establish a provincial cleaning standard for schools, including the initial step of hiring an average of one additional permanent custodian per school (approximately \$273 million).
5. Improve special education outcomes by hiring an average of one additional EA per school (approximately \$273 million), with the goal of reducing student to EA ratios and targeting resources to students with the greatest needs.
6. In addition to all funding announcements made to date regarding ventilation, enhance and improve HVAC systems and maintenance at all schools by establishing a minimum standard for performance (initial investment of approximately \$100 million).
7. Improve school administration by hiring an average of 0.5 FTE secretaries per school (approximately \$135.7 million) to address increased workloads due to additional duties being added to secretaries, including COVID-19 related responsibilities.
8. Double the number of library technicians employed in schools (approximately \$62 million) to enhance library services to students, improving their skills and outcomes.
9. Training for custodial staff to do preventative maintenance, including additional hours of work to do preventative maintenance (approximately \$36 million for one additional paid day per month for all custodian FTEs to do additional preventative maintenance).
10. Fund the hiring of additional maintenance workers to address the existing \$16 billion in deferred maintenance needs (approximately \$81 million for additional staff). The province will also need to develop a plan for eliminating deferred maintenance needs to protect infrastructure and provide the highest possible quality spaces for students to learn.
11. Additional funding for student supervision (approximately \$62 million for an average of 0.5 FTE per elementary school). This will help enhance student safety and reduce workloads of other staff who can use this time to focus on the core duties of their occupations, focusing on student needs.
12. Additional funding to ensure all DECEs have a minimum of 35 hours per week for full-time jobs (approximately \$25 million).
13. Ensure that there is one DECE in each Kindergarten class, including classes with fewer than 16 students (approximately \$55 million).
14. Enhance funding for community use of schools.
15. Provide funding to improve wages to address recruitment and retention problems at school boards, including boards' inability to maintain an adequate number of supply and casual staff in all classifications (approximately \$100 million).

Canadian Union of Public Employees/Ontario School Board Council of Unions (CUPE/OSBCU)

The Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU), the bargaining agent for 55,000 Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) members who work in Ontario school boards, welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback on Education Funding for the 2021-22 school year.

CUPE/OSBCU members have a vast amount of experience in the education sector, working in virtually every job classification in Ontario schools, excluding teachers and managerial or supervisory positions. These include early childhood educators, educational assistants, instructors, library staff, child and youth workers, other professionals and paraprofessionals, office and clerical staff, information technologists, custodial, maintenance and trades personnel. Our members' experience informs this submission, as does the need that all CUPE members have for a strong and sustainable publicly funded and publicly delivered education system.

Introduction

Each year CUPE/OSBCU makes a submission on education funding in Ontario, and each year we highlight the insufficiency of education funding and the structural flaws in the funding formula. For example, arbitrarily low benchmarks for funding, lack of measurable standards for cleaning and maintenance, and predictive models for funding that are also based on outdated data¹ have led consistently to chronic underfunding of education in Ontario. In her 2017 report, the Auditor General of Ontario noted that the funding formula has not had a comprehensive review since 2002 and recommended that the funding formula be reviewed in its totality every 5 years. Although the annual formal, public consultation conducted by the Ministry of Education was seen by the Auditor General as an important component to reviewing key funding areas, it does not substitute for a comprehensive public review.²

This past year has highlighted some of the structural problems with education funding that exacerbate underfunding. Notably, the Ministry announced additional funding on August 4, 2020³ and identified priorities, including hiring additional custodial staff and enhancing special education by hiring additional educational assistants. In the B-memo outlining the Ministry's priorities for the additional COVID-related funding provided by the federal government,⁴ the Ministry highlighted the need to hire additional custodial and other staff, improve ventilation in

¹ See, for example, Hugh Mackenzie, *Harris Era Hangovers: Toronto School Trustees Inherited Funding Shortfall*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, February 10, 2015, https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2015/02/CCPA-ON_Harris_Era_Hangovers.pdf, and Dan Crow, "The Consequences of a Neoliberal Funding Formula: Time to tear it up and start again", *Our Schools/Our Selves*, December 14, 2017, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2017/12/Crow.pdf>.

² Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, *Annual Report 2017*, <http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arbyyear/ar2017.html#volume1>

³ Ministry of Education B-Memo 2020:B11 "Investments to Support School Reopening in Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak", August 4, 2020, https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/B2020/B11_EN.pdf

⁴ Ministry of Education B-Memo 2020:B14, "Additional Funding for School Reopening", August 26, 2020, https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/B2020/B14_EN.pdf

schools, and enhance special education supports. To date there is little evidence that all boards in the province actually did the hiring they were required to do under these B-memos. Boards have far too much flexibility when it comes to hiring education worker staff with the funds generated through the GSN with the specific intent of funding education worker positions. While we recognize that some board level flexibility is necessary, boards' ability to move money from most grants and allocations to other purposes undermines the Ministry's ability to set and implement broad policy goals and has the effect of creating employment insecurity for education workers. Obviously, this is bad for the workers who regularly face the risk of layoffs due to boards' budgeting decisions. But this is also bad for the overall functioning of boards, and most notably it is bad for students who can see a discontinuity of service or understaffing in the services on which they rely.

Restrictions on how funds are allocated should only be introduced, however, if two conditions are met. First, funding for all needs must be sufficient to actually cover the full costs of those needs. For example, most school boards regularly spend more on special education than they receive, and every board, at one point or another, has moved money from other allocations to cover the costs of special education. In the absence of sufficient funding for special education, and other needs, boards are essentially forced to move money from one priority area in order to pay for another priority area. Funding sufficiency is therefore a necessary condition to adding restrictions to how funds are spent. Second, there should be a comprehensive consultation with all unions in the school board sector to determine the appropriate balance between sweating funds and board flexibility.

The provincial budget released on November 5, 2020 gives us reason to believe that it is this government's intention to not only continue to underfund schools, but to intensify the crisis. The total figures for education funding show that funding is projected to increase in 2020-21 by roughly \$800 million (far less than the \$1.3 billion the government has claimed was invested this year)⁵, from \$30.2 billion to \$31 billion. The majority of this additional money appears to be COVID-related funding to cover the costs of reopening schools in the context of a pandemic. Funding for 2021-22 is projected to go up a meagre \$100 million, or roughly one-third of one percent, far less than the additional costs that will accrue due to increased enrolment, negotiated settlements with unions, and inflation for non-compensation costs. For 2022-23, funding will increase by a mere \$200 million, roughly two-thirds of one percent, which is again substantially below the necessary funding just to cover known cost increases. We urge the government to reverse this plan to once again force austerity on boards; an austerity that can only come at the expense of student outcomes, student and staff safety, and the jobs security and working conditions of education workers across the system.

⁵ On page viii of the Introduction to the provincial budget there is a claim that \$1.3 billion has been made available for education in 2020-21. However, on p. 13 of the budget (under "Ontario's Fiscal Plan") it shows that the government is only increasing spending for Education by \$800 million (from \$30.2 billion in 2019-20 to \$31 billion in 2020-21). Ministry of Finance, *Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover*, November 5, 2020, <https://budget.ontario.ca/2020/pdf/2020-ontario-budget-en.pdf>

Instead of reverting to austerity measures we have recommendations for specific funding priorities that are explicitly intended to improve the health and safety of schools and improve the quality of services provided to students. In order to meet the ongoing needs of students, and the broad social function of an education system, all decisions about education funding should be informed by the following guiding principles:

- Providing the highest quality publicly funded, publicly administered education system possible.
- Guaranteeing all students have equitable access to the same high-quality publicly delivered education, and all resources necessary to succeed should be provided to all students.
- Affirming that publicly funded and publicly administered schools are important to the full development of communities across the province. Preserving schools, enhancing community use, and making schools community hubs will strengthen communities across the province.⁶

Recommendations

CUPE/OSBCU has several recommendations for how to improve the education system for students and workers alike. Our recommendations are guided by the principles outlined above.

1. Tie funding to specific staffing levels by limiting employers' ability to use funds for purposes for which they were not generated.

Most of the grants and allocations in the GSN are not sweated. That is, in most cases there is no requirement that funds generated for a specific purpose are spent on that purpose. One of the key exceptions is special education funding. Funds generated to pay for staff, for the most part, are not tied to staffing levels. Boards regularly move unsweated money from one allocation to another in order to meet certain priorities. This suggests that some areas are structurally underfunded (e.g. special education, for which boards usually spend more than they are allocated by the Ministry) while other services are discretionally underfunded (i.e. priorities that generate more money through the GSN than boards spend on those jobs and services).

In order to eliminate this tension between the way funding is generated and the way money is spent by school boards we recommend that additional sweating be built into the GSN. This recommendation must be coupled with a commitment to eliminate all structural underfunding (i.e. to make all funding adequate to meet existing needs). The recommendation should be accomplished through meaningful consultation with all unions in the school board sector to

⁶ Until the end of the global pandemic community use of schools will, by necessity, continue to be restricted based on the best advice of public health professionals. The pandemic, of course, will eventually end. All investments in schools made now will be a necessary part of ensuring schools can be used by communities once physical distancing and limits to public gatherings end.

ensure that greater restrictions on school boards' ability to shuffle money around do not come with any unintended adverse consequences.

2. Make permanent the COVID-related funding and tie it to specific staffing levels

In August 2020 the Ministry announced \$309 million in additional funding would be made available to help reopen schools in September. Later that month the federal government announced that it would augment the province's investment with an additional \$763.34 million (\$381 million of which was allocated for September, the second half to be allocated based on federal government approval in December 2020).⁷ Given the uncertainty of the duration of the pandemic it is entirely likely that the same kinds of measures utilized this year to promote healthy and safe learning and working environments in schools will continue to be necessary in the 2020-21 school year. As such, this money should be extended by an additional year, at a minimum, as a COVID-19 mitigation investment.

But many of the purposes for which this COVID-related money was to be allocated are needs that will continue beyond the end of the pandemic. There will need to be an ongoing commitment to improving ventilation in schools. Additional custodial and caretaking staff will be needed to improve the cleaning standards in schools, which will help reduce ongoing risk of illness from a myriad of sources (including annual cold and flu transmission in schools). Ongoing funding for special education staff and mental health supports in schools will benefit students and help improve outcomes. Some of the specific priorities identified in the COVID-related funding announcements might not be necessary after the pandemic has ceased to be an ongoing pressing concern (PPE costs will likely be lower, for example). Funds originally allocated for needs that will expire with the end of the pandemic should, however, be reallocated to other purposes for the betterment of service delivery. There is no shortage of investments that could be made to improve student outcomes and to improve the working environments for the staff who make our education system possible.

3. Increase all benchmarks to fully reflect the costs of negotiated central agreements and the real inflation of non-compensation related costs.

This should be an obvious recommendation that would be accepted without reservation. The most recent provincial budget, however, gives us cause for great concern. Projections for future funding increases for education are a paltry one-third of one percent for the next fiscal year and only two-thirds of one percent for the year after that. Compensation increases alone will outstrip funding increases. On top of that there will be non-compensation cost increases that will be in excess of the 1% compensation improvement in the settlements with all unions in the sector. Enrolment growth will also add pressure to existing budgets. Failure to cover the costs that are already foreseeable will put school boards in exceptionally difficult situations, making it impossible to balance budgets while still maintaining service levels for students and meeting

⁷ <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/08/26/prime-minister-announces-support-safe-return-school> and <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/58135/additional-funds-enhance-ontarios-robust-back-to-school-plan>

collective agreement obligations. Accordingly, we find it necessary to recommend that all funding increases accurately reflect the real increases of existing staffing and non-staffing costs. All other recommendations will, if adopted, also need to be increased annually to meet real projected cost increases.

4. Establish a provincial cleaning standard for schools, including the initial step of hiring an average of one additional permanent custodian per school (approximately \$273 million).

The global COVID-19 pandemic has raised the profile of the need to have higher cleaning standards in all schools. The Ministry recognized this in August 2020 when it allocated additional (although insufficient) resources to hire custodial and cleaning staff to help make schools safe for students' return to in-class instruction.

COVID-19 is not the only illness that can be prevented through enhanced cleaning. Annual cold and flu season always results in increased student and staff absence due to illness. Incidence of cold and flu could be reduced through increased cleaning,⁸ which will by necessity require additional staffing of custodial positions. Prior to the pandemic, several Ontario school boards had lowered their cleaning standards as a cost savings measure. Some boards only required classrooms to be cleaned every second day, including areas with high touch surfaces.

In order to permanently improve the quality of cleaning in schools we recommend, as an initial measure, funding an average of one additional Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) custodian per school. Boards would have some flexibility on how to deploy additional staff. For example, larger schools with greater needs might be allocated more than 1 FTE custodian, while smaller schools might require less than a full FTE. We do, however, recommend that deployment of new custodians be done in consultation with local unions who are in a much better place to know the precise needs of schools at the board.

The hiring of additional custodians is, however, only the first step. We further recommend that the Ministry, in consultation with all unions in the school board sector, establish a minimum provincial cleaning standard that would define mandatory targets for frequency of cleaning, quality of cleaning, ratios of staff to floor area, and include accountability measures to ensure school boards achieve and maintain the standard. The establishment of an appropriate standard might require additional investments in custodial staff at a later date to meet the appropriate quality of cleaning.

⁸ See for example, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, *How to Clean and Disinfect Schools to Help Slow the Spread of Flu*, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm>

We estimate that the initial cost of hiring an average of one FTE custodian per school will be roughly \$273 million. This is based on an average cost of \$56,564 per custodian FTE.⁹ This amount will need to be adjusted annually to cover compensation increases.

5. Improve special education outcomes by hiring an average of one additional EA per school (approximately \$273 million), with the goal of reducing student to EA ratios and targeting resources to students with the greatest needs.

School boards regularly spend more on special education than the funding they receive for special education. This indicates a general structural deficiency in funding from the Ministry of Education. Funding does not meet the ongoing basic needs of students. Insufficiency of funding is exacerbated by the use of predictive models for determining funding, and the use of outdated data for calculations.¹⁰ The issue of use of census data will be addressed in more detail below (per the questions in the Ministry's 2021-22 Education Funding Guide). Generally speaking, however, there must be much greater attention paid to getting the correct balance between funding stability and funding based on the actual needs in schools, so that there is continuity of employment for special education workers and continuity of service for students with exceptionalities.

People for Education regularly reports that there is a waiting list of students who are waiting for assessments for special education.¹¹ Clearly there is a need for an investment to clear this backlog. Providing assessments for all students on waiting lists will reveal the requirement for additional support staff to meet the newly identified needs. That is to say, the insufficiency of funding for special education will be revealed to be much greater, and an investment in additional staff will be required to meet that newly identified need.

Additionally, we can point to the working experiences of our members to identify the impact of underfunding and understaffing special education. In a 2018 survey of Educational Assistants we found that 60% of EAs provided support to 5 or more students. Fewer than 8% provide support to only one student. While we recognize that each student's needs are different, and not every student will need the full-time support of one or more EAs, workloads that include 5 or more students are untenable. At the time of the survey 76% of EAs reported that the number of students they support had increased over the previous 5 years, clearly indicating that student needs are increasing faster than the increase in staffing. Of those EAs who said

⁹ This is the benchmark funding for education workers identified in LOU #4 of the CUPE central collective agreement. It is the estimated cost of returning CUPE positions with the Education Worker Protection Fund. There might be a need to adjust this initial estimate to meet actual costs.

¹⁰ See for example Hugh Mackenzie, *Harris Era Hangovers: Toronto School Trustees Inherited Funding Shortfall*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, February 10, 2015, https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2015/02/CCPA-ON_Harris_Era_Hangovers.pdf,

¹¹ See for example People for Education, *What makes a school? People for Education annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2019*, <https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PFE-2019-Annual-Report.pdf>

they had not experienced an increase in the number of students they support fully half reported that they were already working with 5 or more students. Phrased slightly differently, half of members whose workloads (on a per-student basis) had not increased were already being overworked.

EAs provide vital services to students with special education needs. But EAs are also necessary to the overall teaching and learning environments in classrooms. They are part of an integrated team of educators in the classroom. Moreover, EAs do not only provide services and assistance to students with exceptionalities, they also provide supports to other students in classrooms where time allows. Without EAs, classrooms could not function at optimal levels. Investing in EAs will support all students' performance and help achieve classroom excellence.

We recommend that an initial investment of approximately \$273 million be made to hire an average of one FTE EA in each school in the province.¹² This would go a long way to meeting the existing need for special educational supports and provide greater one-on-one time between students and education experts. Deployment of additional EA support will, of course, depend on actual needs in schools. Some schools with higher needs will require more than one EA FTE, others might require less than a full FTE. School boards should be required to consult with local unions on how to best deploy additional EA staff to best meet the needs of students.

6. In addition to all funding announced to date regarding ventilation, enhance and improve HVAC systems and maintenance at all schools by establishing a minimum standard for performance (initial investment of approximately \$100 million)

As part of its COVID-19 response, the Ministry identified improving air quality as a potential priority for school boards. It is not clear how much money school boards actually spent on improving air quality, through upgrades to HVAC systems or ad hoc measures like the purchase of HEPA air purifiers. But the need for improved HVAC systems in schools across the province has been well established for years. Certainly, the need for air filtration was made a pressing concern by the COVID-19 problem. However, the lack of air conditioning and/or inadequate heating in many schools across the province has been a predictable consequence of structural underfunding for maintenance and building upgrades.

COVID-19 (and other illness) risks can be mitigated through enhanced cleaning measures (as noted above, and as recognized by the Ministry), as well as by social distancing and use of PPE. Vaccinations against COVID-19 (as well as flu vaccines) will also help reduce risk and make schools safer. But the end of COVID-19 spread (as well as the spread of other airborne contagions) will also require improved HVAC systems (and other air purification devices where improvements to HVAC are impossible) at every school board.

¹² Costing is based on the same benchmark cost for a CUPE education worker used for custodial staff. Actual costs might vary from this estimate, and will need to be adjusted annually for compensation increases.

Additionally, it is important to note that currently school boards across the province are having recruitment and retention problems with HVAC technicians because wages are below those available in other workplaces. This is in no small part due to the legislative restrictions on free collective bargaining that have been imposed on school board workers (through Bill 115 under the Liberal government and Bill 124 under the Ford government). Boards are relying on private, for-profit providers where they are unable to fill positions. The use of private, for-profit contractors costs more than in-house service delivery. It would be more cost effective to improve compensation for direct employees of the board to remediate the recruitment and retention problem caused by wages that are lower than other employers.

Of course, recruitment and retention problems are not exclusive to HVAC technicians or to maintenance/trades positions in general. In the short term, school boards should be encouraged to utilize Article C14 of our central agreement to improve wage rates for specialized job classifications to address the problem of recruitment and retention. Moreover, we recommend that the government plan for a long term wage improvement strategy for education workers to undo the damage of Bills 115 and 124, and in recognition of the important and valuable contributions made by education workers across the province whose low wages artificially subsidize the provincial coffers.

7. Improve school administration by hiring an average of 0.5 FTE secretaries per school (approximately \$135.7 million) to address increased workloads due to additional duties being added to secretaries, including COVID-19 related responsibilities.

Office staff play a core function in the operations of schools. They are the face of the school to all visitors, provide a key link between the school and parents, regularly interact with students, teachers and other education workers, and ensure that administrative functions run smoothly. Despite this, office staff are often overlooked in discussions of funding. Over the past several years the workloads of office staff have increased tremendously, a problem that has been worsened by the increased administrative workload to deal with COVID-19 and the dual model of in-class and online learning. The introduction of door buzzers in schools, a useful safety measure, has meant that secretaries are spending significantly more time answering the door for visitors. Secretaries have taken on additional banking and cash handling responsibilities, taking them away from other core functions of their jobs. Moreover, many school boards have made the discretionary decision to cut secretarial positions that have been vacated due to retirements and resignations. Job losses by attrition have exacerbated the workload burden of school office staff.

Additional funding to hire more office staff will alleviate the additional workload and help make schools function more effectively. An investment of approximately \$135.7 million to hire an average of 0.5 FTE school secretaries for every school in the province will go a long way to lessening the burden of overwork and give school office staff more time to help make schools function more effectively.

8. Double the number of library technicians employed in schools (approximately \$62 million) to enhance library services to students, improving their skills and outcomes.

High quality, well resourced, and well staffed libraries play an important role in educating students. The modern library is about more than just borrowing books. It plays a key link between library users and information in print and digital media. Developing the skills necessary to fully utilize libraries, and access information, does not happen on its own. It requires highly skilled staff, including library technicians, who can guide students, have a role in curriculum support, provide necessary instruction, and meet the differing needs of students. Funding should be sufficient to guarantee that every school has the resources available to properly staff school libraries, including a minimum complement of library technicians in each school. The funding model should recognize that larger schools will require a larger number of staff, but each school should have at least one library technician to deliver services to students. Funding should also be sufficient to keep properly staffed libraries open for the entire school day.

In addition to the work they do on a daily basis to make school libraries important centres of learning for students, library workers also worked diligently to make the transition to online learning possible. They provided regular support to students and staff, and demonstrated tremendous flexibility, agreeing to work that is normally outside of their job descriptions in order to assist with student supervision and other educational and administrative tasks at schools when access to physical libraries was limited or when libraries were closed. Library workers deserve recognition as members of the whole education team at schools. Hiring more library staff can only add to the educational experience for students and will provide support for other educators at schools.

9. Training for custodial staff to do preventative maintenance, including additional hours of work to do preventative maintenance (approximately \$36 million for one additional paid day per month for all custodian FTEs to do additional preventative maintenance).

With proper training, many routine maintenance tasks can be performed by employees who are not certified tradespersons. Training custodial workers to do preventative maintenance will allow certified tradespersons to focus on the specialized skills within their scopes of practice. Training custodians for these duties will help reduce costs at boards and free up time for skilled tradespersons to tackle more complex assignments. More will be accomplished and the physical condition of buildings can be preserved and improved more consistently.

We recommend the Ministry provides funding for preventative maintenance programs in all school boards, including training for custodial workers to do routine plumbing, and common electrical and carpentry work, freeing trades workers to focus on more complex tasks within their scopes of practice. An initial investment of \$36 million for training and to add additional hours for custodians to perform preventative maintenance will be required.

10. Fund the hiring of additional maintenance workers to address the existing \$16 billion in deferred maintenance needs (approximately \$81 million for additional staff). The province will also need to develop a plan for eliminating deferred maintenance needs to protect infrastructure and provide the highest possible quality spaces for students to learn.

The benchmark funding for maintenance that was established in 1997 has not been fundamentally changed and has merely been adjusted for inflation over time. In 2015 the Auditor General estimated that the ongoing maintenance needs for schools was \$1.4 billion per year, but the province had only committed between \$150 million and \$500 million on school maintenance from 2011 to 2015.¹³ Over time this shortfall in funding has led to an accumulated deferred maintenance bill of \$15.9 billion as of 2017. Due to continued insufficiency of funding this number is now over \$16 billion in deferred maintenance.

Poorly maintained buildings are not good learning environments. Buildings with heating or cooling problems, with leaky roofs, or broken plumbing are inhospitable environments for education. Deferred maintenance causes health and safety risks for students and workers alike. Maintaining quality buildings is a necessary starting point for a quality education system. Our members take pride in the work they do. But understaffing of trades, maintenance, and custodial staff, and underfunding of school maintenance and repair means there are external limits to what can be accomplished.

The province needs a plan for eliminating the current infrastructure deficit in schools. To forestall the possibility of future infrastructure deficits the Ministry will need to update benchmarks used to determine funding to reflect the actual costs of each school, including properly factoring in differing regional costs, as well as different costs associated with the age of buildings. Hiring additional maintenance staff to address ongoing upkeep and repairs will assist with controlling future deferred maintenance costs. We recommend an initial investment of approximately \$81 million to hire additional maintenance staff at all boards in the province.

11. Additional funding for student supervision (approximately \$62 million for and average of 0.5 FTE per elementary school). This will help enhance student safety and reduce workloads of other staff who can use this time to focus on the core duties of their occupations, focusing on student needs.

The need for physical distancing, smaller class sizes and smaller student cohorts, created by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increased need for student supervision staff. Reducing the education worker-to-student ratio is a necessary component of any strategy to effectively run in-class learning safely during a global health crisis.

Even prior to the pandemic the need for additional student supervision staff was clear. Education workers have seen increasing demands to add student supervision to their daily

¹³ Office of the Auditor General, *Annual Report 2015*.

workload. These demands take time away from other core functions of their job descriptions. DECEs have been required to supervise students not in Kindergarten, taking them away from the core function of their job, and taking away paid preparation time that they require. Educational Assistants are put on general supervision duty, taking time away from the students they directly support, denying them preparation time and other time they need for their jobs. It is not uncommon for staff in other jobs to be taken away from their core duties for student supervision.

We agree that student supervision is necessary and should be adequately staffed. It should not, however, come at the expense of other education workers ability to focus on their core job functions and areas of expertise. We strongly recommend that an average of 0.5 FTE permanent student supervision staff be hired for every elementary school in the province. This would add an additional 3.5 hours of student supervision (on average) to each school, help with ensuring student safety, and allow other education workers the ability to focus on the jobs for which they were hired. As with other positions, the deployment of additional staff might vary from school to school, and local unions should be consulted on how best to allocate additional staff.

12. Additional funding to ensure all DECEs have a minimum of 35 hours per week for full-time jobs (approximately \$25 million)

The accepted standard work week for a Designated Early Childhood Educator is 35 hours, which gives time for face-to-face interaction with students as well as non-instruction time for preparation and evaluation, often done in conjunction with a Kindergarten teacher partner. However, that standard is not met at all boards. Some boards schedule “up to” 35 hours per week, regularly scheduling for fewer hours. In some cases, DECEs are only scheduled for 30 hours per week, depriving students of the time they deserve with the DECE, and denying the educator the non-instruction time necessary to fulfilling the requirements of the job.

We recommend that the Ministry take measures to ensure that the standard of 35 hours per week is met for DECEs, and provide the necessary funding so that all boards are able to meet this standard.

13. Ensure that there is one ECE in each Kindergarten class, including classes with fewer than 16 students (approximately \$55 million)

Currently not all Kindergarten students in Ontario gain the benefit of having a DECE in their classroom. Regulations allow school boards to have a one-educator model of instruction in classes with fewer than 16 students. The two-educator model of one DECE and one Kindergarten teacher was established because it was recognized that our youngest learners benefited from play-based learning as well as curriculum-based learning. Having specialists in both approaches in the classroom establishes a strong base for lifelong learning and student success. Denying some students access to the two-educator model simply because they are in a relatively small class is arbitrary and unfair. Leveling the playing field and extending

opportunities to all students would require increased staffing and regulatory changes that mandate that a DECE be assigned to every single Kindergarten class, regardless of the number of students in the class.

14. Enhance funding for Community Use of Schools

During the last two rounds of central collective bargaining, CUPE/OSBCU negotiated Community Use of Schools funds in recognition of the fact that schools are vital community resources that should be made available for public use. These funds are used to ensure custodians are provided hours to keep schools open and clean for community events. This funding has demonstrated the value of having custodial staff on-site whenever schools are occupied by community groups or others who use schools for meeting spaces. Although community use of schools will be restricted until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be a time (with care and good management that time can be relatively soon) when schools will once again play a more expansive role in the life of communities in addition to being sites of learning. We recommend that additional dedicated funding be made available to school boards to ensure that custodians are scheduled to be on-site whenever someone is using a school.

15. Funding to improve wages to address recruitment and retention problems at school boards, and boards' inability to maintain an adequate number of supply and casual staff in all classifications (approximately \$100 million).

As discussed above, school boards have faced significant recruitment and retention problems for many job classifications. This includes problems in filling permanent positions at boards and difficulties in maintaining lists of casual and temporary employees to cover shorter term vacancies. In no small part recruitment and retention problems are rooted in wage rates that are uncompetitive or unappealing based on labour market conditions or comparisons of wages to working conditions (including required qualifications). Successive governments' use of legislation infringing on the right to free collective bargaining and imposing wage restraint on education workers, including the lowest paid employees in the sector, have exacerbated the problem to the point of creating significant inefficiencies in the sector.

There are cases across the province where employees of two school boards in the same geographic region, who have exactly the same job, have different wage rates. In some cases these wage differentials, within the same education system, are substantial.

The CUPE/OSBCU central collective agreement contains a provision that allows school boards and local unions to negotiate wage improvements to redress recruitment and retention problems. We recommend that the Ministry make available funding to school boards to all for locally based adjustments to wage rates.

Issues Arising Out of the 2021-22 Education Funding Guide

Although our highest priority recommendations for education funding are outlined above, the Ministry has identified several issues on which it would like feedback. Our responses to the most relevant of those issues is below.

Covid-19 Outbreak Response

- How do we ensure that the GSN remains agile to continue to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak?

Making the COVID-19 funding permanent will provide school boards with the resources necessary to the ongoing responsibility to make schools safe for students and staff during the pandemic. Recommendations 2, 4, and 6 (above) outline how this would assist with the health and safety aspects of the COVID-19 response. Recommendations 5, 7, 11 (and others) address other staffing recommendations that will help with student achievement and can remedy some of the challenges associated with transitioning between online and in-class learning.

We would also like to once again reiterate our recommendation that the most effective way to ensure schools can open safely is to contain community spread. It is widely recognized that in-class learning for students is a necessary precondition for many parents' participation in the labour market. Parents' ability to earn (while their children learn) requires a place for students to go, safely, during working hours. Global evidence is absolutely clear that school safety in the pandemic is predicated on controlling community spread.¹⁴

Containing community spread will require significant income supports for workers whose earnings are reduced or eliminated due to public health measures. Expansion of public, affordable childcare will be a necessary precondition for containing community spread. It will require paid sick leave for all workers in the province. It will require improvements to the Long-Term Care sector, including immediately establishing a minimum standard of care and conversion of all for-profit enterprises into publicly owned and operated LTC facilities. In short, fully addressing the pandemic and allowing for schools to operate at the highest level of safety will require government action beyond mere changes to the GSN, even though the changes to the GSN that we recommend will make a material improvement to the education system (including the COVID-19 response).

¹⁴ See for example, Jennifer Couzin-Frankel, Gretchen Vogel, and Meagan Weiland, "School openings across globe suggest ways to keep coronavirus at bay, despite outbreaks", *Science*, July 7, 2020, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/07/school-openings-across-globe-suggest-ways-keep-coronavirus-bay-despite-outbreaks>

- What's required to successfully help students post COVID-19?

Again, we point to the recommendations we make above. Students will need additional supports when we are finally able to transition to a post COVID-19 world. Education workers will play a central role in mitigating learning loss. Our members will be central to strategies to help students with exceptionalities through the transition and support them in the next new normal.

Online Learning Adjustment

- As future adjustments to the funding methodology for online learning courses are to be confirmed through the 2021-22 GSN, do changes and/or adjustments need to be made to the Online Learning Adjustment in order to be more responsive.

We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our opposition to mandatory online learning for all secondary students. This requirement was made with the primary goal of saving money. It was not made based on pedagogical considerations or the best interests of students. While there is room in the system for online learning to be offered on a voluntary basis for students who might excel with this mode of instruction, it has become even more clear over the past 10 months that many students struggle with online learning. During a global pandemic, when flexibility in curriculum delivery might be necessary, remote learning can be a strategy to help keep the education system functioning. However, beyond those circumstances where remote learning might be necessary, mandatory online courses will not serve the best interests of students.

Priorities and Partnership Fund

- Are there further opportunities to improve the administration of transfer payment agreements to continue supporting a reduction in administrative burden?
- Are there other PPF initiatives that should be transferred to the GSN?
- What potential areas of overlap exist within currently funded programs? What opportunities might there be to streamline funding, and to streamline reporting?

Adequacy of funding and sweatering of funding are more important considerations than the method of transferring funds to school boards. Transferring PPF allocations to the GSN could achieve both of those goals, so long as our other recommendations (e.g. recommendation 1) are adopted. Transferring funding to the GSN would have the added advantage of giving greater certainty that funding for PPF initiatives would be relatively permanent. This would allow boards greater opportunities for long term planning on these initiatives.

School Board Administration and Governance Grant

- Are there areas of overlap between this grant and other grants within the current funding formula to support school board administration and governance? Are there opportunities to streamline funding to eliminate duplication and find savings?
- How can compliance with the enveloping provisions of this grant be consistently measured across school boards?

The most important considerations for the SBAGG are funding sufficiency and protection of staffing levels. Like all education workers, board office staff play an important role in the functioning of the education system. Any changes to the SBAGG should only be made if staffing levels are sustained. Where necessary, funds should be increased to meet existing needs.

Census Data

- How should allocations within the GSN be adjusted to reflect updated census data based on the re-distributed impact to school boards? Should any updates be phased in? If yes, what is an appropriate phase in period and why?

Using census data for calculating allocations within the GSN has risks because it is essentially a predictive model for funding. It is not based on a measure of actual need. There is always the potential that actual needs within schools will be greater than what can be projected using census data. Using outdated census data amplifies that risk by making predictions on data that cannot be guaranteed to be reliable.

Any change in the method of calculating allocations within the GSN compounds that risk. School boards have come to rely on a certain level of funding for service delivery and staffing. Updating the census data could, in some cases, increase some boards' allocations, giving them a greater opportunity to meet the actual needs at their boards. However, some boards might see reductions in funding, meaning staffing and service cuts that will rob students of the supports on which they have come to rely.

If the Ministry changes any of its calculation methods there must be mechanisms to ensure that no board sees funding cuts as a result of the change, and to build in measures of actual need. As we have recommended elsewhere in this submission, funding needs to strike a balance between stability of service and employment levels and meeting the actually existing needs in schools. This will require adding factors on top of (or perhaps instead of) census data. Ultimately changes of this magnitude, which have the potential to result in large swings in education funding for many boards, should only be done with a more comprehensive review of the education funding formula, akin to the one that has been regularly recommended by unions, policy analysts, parent and education advocates, and the Auditor General.

Conclusion

The recommendations we make in this submission are consistent with, and necessary conditions for meeting the Ministry's stated goals in the 2021-22 Education Funding Guide: "All students deserve to have every opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically, with access to rich learning experiences that provide a strong foundation of confidence that continues throughout their lives." CUPE Education workers are committed to achieving the highest possible standards for students, enhancing student achievement, and building a world class education system in Ontario. We make that a part of our everyday contribution to schools across the province. But in order for us to continue to provide the highest quality services to students; for us to be able to help students "reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically" we need the government to do its part by fully funding all needs in schools and making additional investments into the system, such as the ones we recommend here. Students deserve nothing less.

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