

Appendix A: 2023-24 Education Funding Consultation Draft Responses for November 15, 2022 Ministry Submission

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is Canada's largest and most diverse school board, with approximately 233,000 students at 583 schools. We also serve more than 130,000 life-long learners in our Adult and Continuing Education programs.

As the largest and most diverse school board in the country, we have unique needs when it comes to what is required to best support our students and communities. Our students need safe and modern learning environments, appropriate special education supports, targeted supports for mental health and well-being, and access to reliable and up-to-date technology. It is critical that school boards receive adequate support to help address widening gaps in student achievement, and mental health and well-being needs in the post-pandemic environment.

TDSB's Response to Education Funding Guide Questions

Question 1: EFFICIENCIES AND REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

i) What other initiatives could support the reduction of administrative burden or further streamline reporting for the education sector?

Although the implementation of the Transfer Payment Ontario System (TPON) Online Platform has provided some efficiencies around the reporting process, there are still possible areas of improvement. For example, the TPON functionality should allow for notifications, workflow management and delegation. It would be ideal if the system could allow Multi-Project Transfer Payment Agreements (TPA) to be shared with different program owners for review and acknowledgement prior to final sign off by the Director of Education. Also, the reporting templates should be provided to school boards at the same time as the Transfer Payment Agreements, so that staff know what information is required at the start of the funding period. This will help facilitate information gathering and expense tracking.

The Ministry may also consider aligning ad hoc Priorities and Partnerships Funding (PPF) reporting deadlines to the Board's Ministry financial reporting timeframes to streamline the financial reporting involved.

For funding that is announced mid-year, school boards should be provided with sufficient time to plan and utilize the funds, or flexibility to carryover unspent funds. It has been a challenge to achieve full funding utilization (e.g. the tutoring support funding in 2021-22), especially when the funding is used for staffing or mass procurement of goods (e.g. ventilation units). Time required for recruitment and procurement should be considered when determining the funding timelines.

The Ministry could consider reducing the reporting requirements for PPFs by, for example, requesting only one consolidated year-end report instead of multiple reports with different timelines.

ii) What are the areas where there is potential or opportunities to find new efficiencies?

It would be preferred if some of the recurring PPFs that the TDSB receives annually, such as the Focus on Youth funding, be transferred to the Grants for Student Needs (GSN). This will help alleviate budget uncertainties and program planning delays. It will also allow the department to hire appropriate staff to manage the program.

Question 2: CAPITAL: REDUCING TIME TO COMPLETION FOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

i) What are relevant considerations and opportunities to shorten each phase of planning and construction (planning, design, municipal approvals, approval to proceed (ministry approval), procurement, construction, opening?)

Discussions should occur between provincial ministries to identify ways to expedite the municipal approval of school projects. For example, legislation could be amended to exempt school projects from the Site Plan Approval (SPA) process, or school projects that meet certain conditions could be exempt, such as replacement buildings. Another approach could be requiring municipalities to fast track school projects through the SPA process to significantly reduce overall timelines. In Toronto, school projects should automatically be put into the “Quick” or “Routine” accelerated process by the City and receive a decision within three or four months from submission of a complete application.

The Ministry approval process is longer now due to the fact that a majority of projects are over the construction benchmark, even though buildings are typically designed to be approximately 10% below the Facility Space benchmark. Regular adjustments to the Ministry's construction funding and the “Benchmark” cost per square foot must be updated to reflect current market conditions and 2022 construction costs. In addition, the Ministry must acknowledge and fund the higher construction costs in Toronto, including the impact of building on smaller, more restrictive sites with older infrastructure and often heritage designations; the requirements of the City of Toronto's SPA and Toronto Green Standards (TGS); and, generally higher construction labour costs.

The Ministry should consider completing their review and approval of Facility Space Templates (FST) in a much shorter time frame. Approvals should not take as much time as the FST is based on programming only, prior to the start of design. By reducing the approval time to ideally one week, school boards will be able to engage architects quickly. As an example, the Sugar Wharf FST was submitted to the Ministry on June 7, 2022 and approval has not yet been received.

The length of time for Ministry approval to award a construction contract has necessitated a longer irrevocable bid period (90 to 120 days), which has in turn contributed to contractors and subcontractors submitting higher prices in order to offset the current market uncertainty. A faster contract award approval timeline would allow school boards to shorten the bid period and in turn, minimize contractors' sense of risk and create a competitive irrevocable bid period.

Given the uncertainties in the current market, with supply chain issues, increased manufacturing, transportation and labour costs, many school boards are using a construction management approach, rather than the more traditional stipulated sum approach. Both methods are well-established in the construction industry and are supported with Canadian Construction Documents Committee (CCDC) contracts.

The construction management method provides transparency with construction costs, as many sub-trades are unwilling or unable to lock in a price for work that will not be executed until 6 to 9 months after the contract has been awarded. Construction management can also result in a more compact design development/tender/construction process as packages of work are designed and issued for tender while the rest of the building continues to be designed. However, to take full advantage of this compacted process, the Ministry's Approval to Proceed (ATP) process would need to change as there would not be the time to reach 80% design development and provide a Class B estimate. For example, the Ministry needs to develop a more flexible approval review process based on both Class C and Class B estimates that would be achievable within the sequential tendering approach.

Question 3: CAPITAL: JOINT USE OF SCHOOLS

i) What impediments do school boards face when considering opportunities for Joint-Use schools with their co-terminus school boards?

Due to the unique circumstances of joint-use facilities in an urban environment, there are several issues related to the capital needs of boards and the cost of transportation that need to be considered. The best example of joint-use is a truly integrated model where the needs of both boards are met. The challenge is that both school boards must be experiencing accommodation pressures in the same part of the city to facilitate building a joint facility. In Toronto, that only occurs in areas of the city where intensive urban development is being built, such as the Canoe Landing and Downsview areas in Toronto.

Establishing a joint-use facility in a school that has capacity faces the challenge that likely the co-terminus board is not seeing growth in the immediate area either.

While there may be opportunities in some cases for a joint-use facility, there are many considerations that need to be determined, such as: size of site, retrofitting of school so that both schools have unique spaces and facilities, sufficient space to accommodate drop-off/pick-up, staff parking, and school ground use for a large number of students and possible child care.

We would recommend that the Ministry establish a working group to further explore and recommend standards and practices that would assist school boards when evaluating this type of project. The working group would also look at capital submission criteria that would be used when school boards submit a business case to the Ministry for capital funding, including accommodation funding to relocate current students during construction.

ii. There are a number of successful joint-use arrangements in place. What are the elements of success (governance, administrative practices, conflict resolution, etc.) that can be replicated and scaled up across current and potential joint use arrangements?

TDSB Response:

Designing of innovative joint facilities with schools and community partners will allow for efficiencies through the sharing of elements such as below grade parking, service entries, physical plant, and even spaces like gymnasiums.

Canoe Landing is a good example of four programs co-existing in a joint facility. This facility involves a TDSB school, TCDSB school, childcare center and community center. The programs share the site spatially, including playgrounds and gymnasiums. The plant facility is centralized making for a more efficient building.

Projects of this type require project management leadership that can engage the highest levels of authority. Without high-level support, the project would not be able to move forward.

Agreements need to be established for all aspects of designing, constructing and operating a joint facility. This includes development, construction, operating, shared space, maintenance, and governance agreements, as well as agreement on the accommodation of shifts in enrolment experienced by the schools in the joint facility. A third-party facility service firm should be engaged to help set up the agreements.

It is important to have consistent involvement of academic representatives (Superintendents and Principals) in the design process and the establishment of the agreements. A Principal should be assigned well in advance of the school opening to support these processes. Additional funds should be provided to school boards to support dedicating principals to these projects.

The successful operation of a joint facility requires the principals of the schools in the building to be experienced collaborators: able to work in partnership with the co-located principal; able to develop solutions to issues that benefit both schools in the building; able to communicate with multiple stakeholders; and, able to be flexible.

With the provincial focus on housing, there is an opportunity to redevelop school sites into mixed-use developments, integrating schools and residential units. This needs to be supported by infrastructure funding for schools.

OTHER PRIORITY AREAS

In addition to answering the Ministry's questions above, we would also like to further highlight the following priority areas for the TDSB:

1. Continuation of Staffing Support and Supports for Students Fund
2. Technology and Cyber Security
3. Lifting the Moratorium on School Closures
4. Addressing Inflation and Cost Increases

Please note, these priority areas are not listed in order of importance. While there are many areas of priority for the TDSB, these four items have been selected because the Ministry's immediate attention is required.

Continuation of Staffing Support and Supports for Student Fund

The expiration of Investment in System Priorities funding and Education Workers Protection Fund on August 31, 2022 has resulted in significant staff allocation reductions, particularly school-based support staff in 2022-23. Fortunately, the extension of the 2022-23 Supports for Student Fund and COVID-19 Learning Recovery Fund for additional staffing support has helped offset some of these negative impacts.

Student mental health and well-being, Special Education support, student re-engagement and ESL support for newcomers continue to be key priorities in 2023-24. The TDSB requires sufficient professional support staff to assess the needs of students, and to collaborate with school communities to strengthen school engagement. As the number of students requiring Special Education support increases each year, there is more financial pressure on school boards. The TDSB continues to face a funding shortfall in Special Education each year.

Addressing student re-engagement and mental health needs from the long-term impacts of the pandemic will take time. To ensure students receive the support they need, we urge the Ministry to continue providing the staffing support and Supports for Student Funding in 2023-24. We also ask that the Recent Immigrant Supplement continue until the enrollment levels return to pre-pandemic levels. In addition, TDSB also requests flexibility in the use of these funding as needs of our students continue to evolve.

Technology and Cybersecurity

To support programming for students and 21st century learning, ongoing investments in IT hardware devices and digital resources are required.

In September 2021, the TDSB launched the 1:1 Student Device Program for students in Grades 5 and 9. The program offers students a district-owned and managed Chromebook for educational use. This device is assigned directly to the student and will stay with them over a four-year period, 24/7. Students are able to take them home each night, on weekends and over holidays, and are required to bring them to school each day to support their in-class learning.

This board-wide initiative supports learning through technology, digital citizenship and our commitment to equity of access to technology. This investment is critical to student learning and requires a significant investment of resources to maintain on an annual basis.

In addition, it is important that investments into cyber security protection are also made in conjunction with this increase in student technology. With the rapid increase in the use of technology and online tools, additional resources are required to promote cyber resilience, so that students and educators can operate in a safe digital learning environment. A robust Broadband and Cyber Protection Program will also help mitigate against risk of loss resulting from cyber threats and incidents.

These technology investments need to be supported with additional Ministry funding so school boards can provide a safe and effective learning environment for our students.

Lifting the Moratorium on School Closures

Since 2017, there has been a moratorium on school closures imposed by the Ministry of Education. The TDSB requests that the school closure moratorium be lifted so that boards can review schools with low student enrolment. These schools face programming challenges that limit our students' choices as well as a financial burden to the Board. The lifting of the moratorium would also help facilitate long-term planning and prudent utilization of resources. In addition, the TDSB recommends revisions to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines (PARG). The recommended revisions include providing the opportunity for student voice and input when a school closure is considered, and standardized tools for assessing information received during a Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) process.

Addressing Inflation and Cost Increases

Since the start of the pandemic, school boards have experienced significant supply chain and inflation pressures. The soaring inflationary costs have been seen across various areas, including school and technology supplies, food, transportation, natural gas and utilities costs, maintenance and construction materials, cost of external skilled trades, etc.

Also, in 2022, the CPP maximum pensionable earnings and employer rate increased by 0.25% and there will be another 0.25% increase in 2023. This increase is anticipated to result in an additional \$2.5M negative budget impact in 2022-23, this pressure has been growing since 21-22 with no funding increase. In prior years, the TDSB was able to absorb the increase to CPP and EI costs through operational savings, but given TDSB's deficit position, additional funding is needed to cover these cost increases. The Ministry has not provided funding to cover CPP cost adjustments, hence this will continue to be a cost pressure for school boards in years with a high increase in rates.

In addition, currently the employer contributions for OMERS pension are not funded by the Ministry. Starting in January 2023, non-full-time employees will be eligible to enroll in the plan and it is anticipated that this plan change will increase the TDSB's contribution costs by approximately \$0.4M per year.

We ask that the Ministry provide additional funding to support these incremental costs (e.g. employer portion of CPP, EI, OMERS) which the Board has no control over and review the salary and benefit benchmarks.

The sick leave entitlement changes in 2012, which provided employees with additional sick days per year, has also resulted in a gradual increase in employee absenteeism. This includes short term sick leave, work related injuries and long-term disability and illness (LTDI). This has resulted in cost pressures for the TDSB as supply costs, premiums and LTDI claims continue to increase. To address increasing costs in these areas, school boards require resources to manage absenteeism, and to ensure staff have the support and accommodations they need to return to work.