



Introduction

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is Canada's largest and most diverse school board. Every day, we welcome more than 246,000 students to 582 schools across the City of Toronto. We also serve more than 140,000 life-long learners in our Adult and Continuing Education programs.

As the largest and most diverse school board in the country, we have a unique set of needs when it comes to what is required to best support our students and communities. To ensure we are best supporting our students, we developed the Multi-Year Strategic Plan to set direction and identify system goals. The focus of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan is to ensure that every student has equitable access to programs and resources and increased opportunities that lead to success.

The Multi-Year Strategic Plan consists of five pillars. Each pillar has measurable outcomes that are confirmed through our student census data, student academic achievements, and strategic allocation of resources:

- [Transform Student Learning](#) – We will have high expectations for all students and provide positive, supportive learning environments.
- [Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being](#) – We will build positive school and workplace cultures that support mental health and well-being — free of bias and full of potential.
- [Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students](#) – We will ensure that all schools offer a wide range of programming that reflects the voices, choices, abilities, identities and experiences of students.
- [Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs](#) - We will allocate resources, renew schools, improve services and remove barriers and biases to support student achievement and accommodate the different needs of students, staff and the community.
- [Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being](#) – We will strengthen relationships and



continue to build partnerships among students, staff, families and communities that support student needs and improve learning and well-being.

Measuring our success is critical to knowing if we are making a difference for students. Our expectation – and our goal – is that everyone improves. We expect to:

- Close the achievement and well-being gaps while keeping expectations high for all students because we are providing access to the programs, resources and learning opportunities that students require, while removing systemic barriers that may exist for them.
- Transform student learning to ensure students improve in literacy and math and strengthen essential skills including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, citizenship and character (known as global competencies).
- Increase engagement of students, staff, parents and communities because we are honouring voice, experience, identity and expertise, and we are willing to adjust our directions and plans because of this engagement.

Real change happens in the classroom and with this coordinated and strategic approach, we are confident that each and every student will be successful. For example, in the Special Education section of the plan, we outline how the TDSB is committed to outcome-based planning to support our most vulnerable students. However, the gap between what the TDSB spends to support students who require special education supports and the amount of funding we receive from the province continues to grow. Last year, the TDSB spent approximately \$47.8M more on Special Education than we were funded by the province.

We would like to focus on the following areas of interest for the TDSB. Please note that the order in which these items are presented in this report does not reflect priority or importance.

- Transportation;
- Renewal Funding Backlog;
- Education Development Charges;
- Class Sizes;
- E-Learning;
- Challenging Streaming;
- Supply Staffing;
- Special Education;
- Reducing Administrative Burden; and



- Funding to Support Parent Engagement and Consultation.

1. Transportation

Transportation service in many urban school boards is an increasing challenge. In the City of Toronto, the service challenges are compounded by traffic congestion and road construction.

The driver shortage issue continues to be a concern of boards as carriers struggle to maintain a sufficient number of core drivers (as well as spare drivers) to cover absences for vacation, illness, religious observances and other unexpected/planned absences. The Transportation department continues to leverage technology to improve the level of service for our communities. Parents have high service expectations and the demand for service is outstripping the supply of available drivers. School boards that try to amend their current model of service levels face incredible push back from parents who rely on the service.

In the absence of provincial funding benchmarks for transportation, school boards have no guidance to support a change in service expectations and the inequity among coterminous boards is left unaddressed because boards will continue to use transportation as a means to compete for students. In addition, the TDSB is advocating that transportation for students with special needs be identified and funded separately. The TDSB is the largest provider of transportation services for students with special needs in the province. These are our most vulnerable students, with the greatest service needs and for whom the cost per pupil is significantly higher than standard transportation.

In order to address the issue of driver retention, the Ministry of Education has implemented a driver retention bonus based on service benchmarks. Our concern is that the program is only guaranteed to continue for the current year. There is concern in the industry, as well as concern from school boards, that we may face a larger than normal number of retirements and/or staff movement to other jobs with steadier work conditions. This is of significant concern given that we are already dealing with a driver shortage.



The Ministry's review of transportation services and funding that started three years ago, has not reported out on its findings yet. We urge the province to complete this review and report on its findings to make changes that would address these concerns.

2. Renewal Funding Backlog

The province has provided multiple years of additional funding for school repairs, which has allowed the TDSB to address emergency issues in our schools. Unfortunately, the additional funding has not been enough to decrease the TDSB's repairs backlog.

Currently, the TDSB faces a staggering \$3.5 billion repair backlog as a result of years of inadequate funding. If additional funding provided over the last 4 years (SCI) is discontinued and/or reduced, and no additional funding is provided, we estimate that the TDSB's renewal repairs backlog will grow approximately \$0.6 billion per year. It is imperative that the province commit to providing predictable and sustainable funding for school repairs so that the TDSB can continue to implement our long-term plan for renewal, lower our current \$3.9 billion repair backlog and modernize our schools. Current industry standards are that 2 to 4%¹ of the replacement value of buildings should be budgeted for renewal expenditures. Costs in high density urban boards for maintenance and construction work are significantly higher than either suburban or rural boards and this should be taken into consideration in establishing construction benchmarks.

3. Education Development Charges

While other school boards in Ontario are allowed to collect EDCs, the TDSB does not qualify because it has excess capacity when assessed on a district-wide basis, regardless of significant capacity pressures and challenges faced in many neighborhood schools. This puts the TDSB at a disadvantage.

EDCs are a critical funding tool that would help the TDSB meet growth-related infrastructure needs. Many of our schools are over capacity as a result of significant residential intensification in certain areas.

Lack of sufficient space in local schools in some areas of the City has forced the TDSB to adopt different accommodation strategies for managing enrolment growth, including redirecting

¹ Reversing the Cycle of Deterioration in the Nation's Public School Buildings, Council of the Great City Schools, October 2014.



students from new residential developments to other TDSB schools located outside the area, the use of portables, and program and school boundary changes.

In our view, the same way that developers pay for services such as roads, transit, water, sewer infrastructure and community centres, they should also contribute to education. In other words, growth should pay for growth.

For all school boards, including the TDSB, it is vitally important to assess and plan for long-term student accommodation on the basis of neighbourhood needs, not on a jurisdiction-wide basis. Section 10 of Ontario Reg. 20/98 does not serve the purpose of either the *Education Act* or the original purpose of EDC funding, which was meant for new developments to fund new school sites.

Without the restrictions found in Section 10 of Ontario Reg. 20/98, the TDSB would qualify for EDCs and generate revenue of approximately \$400 million over the next 15 years, which would help us meet growth-related infrastructure needs. Given the invaluable role that schools play in each community, such an investment would benefit all citizens of Toronto.

We strongly recommend that the government modify or remove the restrictions in Section 10 of Ontario Regulation 20/98 to allow all school boards to qualify for EDCs and be able to use those funds for expansion of existing schools or building of new schools.

4. Class Size

The government's class size increase is concerning to the TDSB on a number of levels, most importantly its impact on students. At both the elementary and secondary level, we have heard concerns from parents, students and staff on the negative impact of larger class sizes on student learning, and we share these concerns about student achievement. At the secondary level, larger class sizes and less teachers means a reduction to the course offerings, especially in smaller schools. In the first year of this increase, many TDSB schools experienced this course offering reduction. This situation will be further exasperated in future years due to the large number of small schools in the board. Until the Program Area Review process is re-established by the Ministry, the TDSB has no way of reducing the impact of increased class sizes on program offerings in schools.

From a financial perspective, the TDSB is concerned that the Ministry did not account for restrictions under teacher collective agreements that prohibit some boards, including the TDSB,



from increasing class sizes. For example, when the Ministry increased class sizes in Grades 4 to 8 and reduced the number of funded elementary teachers, the TDSB, and other boards, were financially penalized. For the TDSB, this financial penalty amounts to \$9.6 M for the 2019-20 school year.

We urge the Ministry to:

- Commit to listening to the results of the Ministry consultation on secondary school class size and pay close attention to the analysis you are now getting regarding the impacts on programs, course offerings and student supports;
- Put on hold the decision to increase average class sizes in high schools and put on hold the reductions to high school teachers until such time that there is system wide and school-board-by-school board data on the impact on high school programs and course options and the concern school boards have with regard to the potential negative impact on graduation rates; and,
- Compensate boards, including the TDSB, whose collective agreements require a smaller average class size in Grades 4-8 than the average class size level being funded by the Ministry of Education.

5. E-Learning

The TDSB has serious concerns with the government's plan to introduce mandatory e-learning courses for all secondary students. Since the plan was announced, school boards have not received any further information, which has raised very serious questions and concerns by parents/guardians, students and our own staff, including how the plan will be implemented and how it will be equitable for all secondary students.

The TDSB is not against e-learning, recognizing that it plays an important role in our system. We do, however, have serious concerns about the mandatory nature of this plan, the timing and the general lack of information available for parents/guardians, students and staff.

In just a few short months, secondary students will begin selecting courses that will lead them to graduation. Our concern is that the lack of information on mandatory e-learning courses and the increase in class sizes could harm our students' achievement and well-being levels and, ultimately, hinder their graduation and post-secondary education plans. This is a major concern



considering our most recent census data tells us that students are already expressing challenges with mental health, belonging and accessing a caring adult in schools and the role of technology in relation to their overall well-being. Decisions with such a significant impact should not be made before a thorough review, including a complete understanding of all consequences and outcomes, has been conducted.

We also know that our current e-learning program is mostly accessed by higher achieving students and that means we know little about how students with more learning needs may fare in a program that is about to become mandatory. We would like some clarification as to how the issue is being addressed by the government's plan.

To ensure we are reflecting the concerns of our students, parents/guardians and staff, we will be consulting our school communities about mandatory e-learning courses for all secondary students. We value the input of our communities and feel an obligation to provide your government with this information. The results of our research will be available this upcoming winter. We hope to hear more from the government about the plan to implement mandatory e-learning as soon as possible.

6. Challenging Streaming

The TDSB is committed to setting high expectations and increasing access to programming for all students. These principles must begin in the early years and include changes to special education programming and student discipline, transitions to secondary school and Grades 9 and 10 programming.

Establishing a strong foundation in early literacy and numeracy is an essential component of TDSB's approach to challenging streaming. We are committed to working with our youngest learners to ensure that all students in Grade 1, regardless of their social identity, will be able to read with confidence, fluency, understanding and enjoyment. Similarly, we are working to ensure that all students in Grade 2 will acquire the foundational skills and concepts in mathematics so that they may continue to be successful in later grades.

We are transforming the way we provide special education programs and services to be more inclusive. Our model of inclusion recognizes diversity within all educational cohorts and embraces the opportunity to meet individual students' needs as locally as possible in neighbourhood schools. Inclusion also means the continuation of having congregated classrooms to meet the needs of some students with exceptionalities that are beyond the scope and expertise of a



regular classroom. We will continue to serve all of our students in the most appropriate learning environments.

Student discipline also plays a role in success in school and in streaming students towards specific pathways and outcomes. We are committed to reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions and addressing the over-representation of some groups who are suspended and expelled, while maintaining safe, positive and welcoming schools. We are addressing key issues like systemic racism, anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and poverty by putting different processes in place to support change, such as creating a culture of restorative practices, with a focus on cooperative ways of resolving conflict.

Academic pathways is a plan to support the majority of Grade 9 and 10 students to study at the academic level. Research shows that students in an academic program of study generally experience more positive outcomes than those in an applied program of study and experience higher achievement in courses beyond Grade 10. Students also have greater success in post-secondary programs and maintain increased pathway options beyond high school (e.g. college, university, apprenticeship, workplace) when they study at the academic level. Overall, an academic program of study provides more opportunities for students, which is why we are committed to this important work.

It is important that the Ministry commit to providing additional funding in these areas so that we and other boards can continue to increase student achievement and help students to be successful in their chosen academic program.

7. Supply Staffing

The current funding levels do not adequately support school boards actual costs in all areas of staffing. Collective agreements allow for 130 days of absence with staff only being reduced to 90% of earnings after 11 days of absence. There has been an increase in usage of sick time since the new policy was established. School boards need further funding support to address this shortfall.

8. Special Education

The TDSB has consistently spent more than its full grant on Special Education. Last year, the TDSB spent approximately \$47.8M more on Special Education than we were funded by the province. This means that we are using resources from other areas of the budget to ensure that we meet the needs of students who require special education support. Meeting the needs of



students who require special education support is a legal requirement under Ontario's Education Act. Most Boards in Ontario spend more on special education than they are funded by the Ministry. The TDSB, like other school boards across Ontario, urges the province to recognize this significant funding shortfall and provide adequate funding for special education.

At the TDSB, we believe in the inclusion model for special education, where appropriate. We welcome and support all students with special education needs within well-resourced neighborhood schools. The TDSB is committed to ensuring that all students learn in a supportive and inclusive environment where all voices are valued and heard. The inclusion model, however, requires significant financial investment, including classroom teacher training, that we ask the province to recognize and fund.

The bottom line is that special education is not funded appropriately by the province. In order to ensure that all of our students receive the support they need, we urge the province to reconsider the special education funding model and make the appropriate enhancements to meet the financial needs of school boards and the educational needs of the students of Ontario. This is becoming even more essential as the demand for special education continues to grow. The number of students requiring special education support becomes greater each year and this puts even more financial pressure on school boards that require adequate funding to support their needs.

9. Reducing Administrative Burden

The TDSB actively looks for administrative efficiencies on an ongoing basis to ensure that as many dollars as possible reach the classroom and support students.

The TDSB cut \$17 million from last year's budget in the areas of central administration, senior team and centrally-assigned staff were effected. These reductions significantly impacted the level of service within the school board.

With increased reporting demands and requirements, finding these administrative efficiencies is becoming more and more difficult. An example of this is the Ministry's extensive reporting requirements for major maintenance and capital projects into their databases. Another example is delays in approval to proceed on construction projects adds to the administrative burden as school boards have to update stakeholders, construction costs and revise work plans. If



approvals to proceed were provided in a more timely manner and reporting streamlined, these would assist improving efficiencies.

To ensure School Boards operate efficiently and effectively, investments in Administrative Information Technology are needed to be made. The investment would provide benefits in such areas as improving operating efficiencies, reducing staffing costs and providing access to timely and accurately information for decision making.

School Boards require sufficient funds to support the administrative functions to ensure an effective and efficient school system.

We therefore recommend that the province enhance funding in this area to help school boards invest in new technologies that streamline administrative operations and improve efficiencies.

10. Funding to Support Parent Engagement and Consultation

We have heard from our parents/guardians that the reduction to the Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant over the last couple of years is impacting their ability to engage in meaningful ways within the education sector. These grants are vital to our schools' ability to engage with parents, which is a key factor in the enhancement of student achievement and well-being. When schools, families and communities work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and enjoy school more. And, when parents are actively engaged in supporting their child's success in school, students are more likely to be motivated, earn higher grades, have better behavioural and social skills and continue their education to a higher level. Parents/guardians also have concerns around the lack of notice about the 2020-21 Grant for Student Needs consultation. They are concerned about the impact that further cuts to the PRO grant will have on their ability to provide meaningful feedback to both the TDSB and Ministry.

We ask that the Ministry consider restoring past funding levels and returning back to the grants-based model for the 2020-21 school year. A full restoration of these grants will ensure we are able to continue to support initiatives designed to break down barriers to parent engagement and further support our students, schools and communities.