



**OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**

PROTECTING AND PROMOTING PUBLIC EDUCATION IN OTTAWA

KEY PRIORITIES

“School board trustees have been representing the democratic ideals of students and their families since 1807. We believe in and advocate for the integrity of local publicly funded schools which includes sustainable funding to meet local needs. Our collective goal is to ensure an inclusive, safe and caring learning environment where every student has the opportunity to achieve his or her fullest potential.”

**Shirley Seward, Chair
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
November 2017**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Sustainable Capital Funding

RECOMMENDATION: Implement a multi-year capital funding cycle to support effective and predictable capital planning and protect capital investments with sufficient facility maintenance funding.

Providing High-Quality Accessible Child Care

RECOMMENDATION: Increase the number of subsidized spaces, ensure appropriate and equitable funding for operators and consult with school districts directly.

Autonomy of School Boards

RECOMMENDATION: That the Government of Ontario return meaningful authority to school boards so that school boards can effectively manage resources and respond to local needs and represent the electorate in their communities.

Availability of French Teachers

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Investigate working with Faculties of Education to implement DELF assessments for teacher candidates seeking FSL qualifications; boards would continue to determine required proficiency levels for their FSL programs.

Increase the number of teacher candidate positions in Bachelor of Education programs with special emphasis on French as a second language teachers.

Supply and Availability of Qualified Replacement Teachers and Education Workers

RECOMMENDATION: That the province review, in partnership with trustee associations and others, the challenges of attracting, funding, and deploying replacement staff to best support student learning and well-being.

Executive Summary

The OCDSB shares the government's commitment to building an education system that helps students learn and grow and prepares them to compete in the changing global economy. Our shared vision is evident in the synergy between our five strategic objectives and the government's Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario. Our multi-year strategic plan lays out our vision and our annual work plans and budget process ensure that we establish priorities and allocate resources to achieve that vision.

We have worked hard to support the implementation of new initiatives such as full-day kindergarten, a vibrant extended day program, special education programs, and a well-being framework. Our success is possible because of the work of our teachers, support staff, principals, vice-principals and administrators.

To build on this success, students and educators need the best-in-class facilities to teach and learn. Our staff needs timely access to information as well as professional learning opportunities to better understand the complex needs of our students. Our families need to know that their local school board has high-quality programs that meet the needs of their children in their community. Those with the highest needs in our community need to know there are resources and supports available to assist them.

Finally, our community needs to know that the elected Board of Trustees has multi-year funding commitments, which ensure sustainability of our capital infrastructure and continuity of service.

SUSTAINABLE CAPITAL FUNDING

RECOMMENDATION: Implement a multi-year capital funding cycle to support effective and predictable capital planning and protect capital investments with sufficient facility maintenance funding.

Capital funding is an area which requires a regular and sustainable long-term funding model. The OCDSB has revised its capital planning policy to use a criteria-based process for the development of capital priorities. However, the Ministry approval process continues to be ad hoc and requires annual submissions which may be subject to additional terms and conditions and considers criteria other than district needs. The current annual process creates instability, uncertainty and precludes careful long-term planning.

The current process also favours the “first district” to build in high growth areas. Students migrate to that school from other districts, resulting in overcrowding and subsequent capital grants to that “first district” to add pupil places, instead of recognizing other districts’ needs to establish a school in that community. A capital funding model that emphasizes new pupil spaces in growth communities and underfunds annual school operations, renewal and maintenance, disadvantages districts, such as the OCDSB, that have an established building infrastructure.

The successful management of facilities renewal and capital funding dollars requires careful planning. While we appreciate the interim and special purpose funding, spending the funds within short timelines is problematic. Unlike many other public sectors, school districts are further constrained by the limited window of time in July and August during which major capital renewal and facilities construction can be undertaken without disrupting the learning environment.

If the Ministry requires School districts to undertake five-year capital planning cycles, the Ministry should be able to do the same with respect to providing funding information. A multi-year capital planning cycle would better position school districts to make appropriate medium and long-term decisions with respect to their priorities within a known and predictable funding environment.

It is vital that the Province allocate sufficient operating funds to protect its investment in schools to revitalize public infrastructure. Sufficient maintenance and operating funding must be in place to keep schools as safe and healthy places to learn. We appreciate that provincial funds are limited, therefore alternative models for funding must continue to be explored. This includes community partnership opportunities and new revenue tools such as expanding the permitted uses of Education Development Charges.

CAPITAL FUNDING BASED ON DISTRICT NEEDS

Meeting capital requirements, such as the renovation or expansion of schools, following an accommodation review are a particular challenge within the current, ad hoc capital funding model. A five-year capital planning cycle would better support the work of school districts in structuring and scheduling the accommodation reviews and planning for and undertaking the capital projects that typically follow the review decisions.

PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY ACCESSIBLE CHILD CARE

Recommendation: Clarify the operating model for the delivery of infant, toddler and preschool child care programs and increase funding for child care for infants.

Over the last year, the government has made a number of significant investments in child care. Many of these investments addressed or were responsive to the issues that the OCDSB identified as concerns last year. We are very appreciative of the progress in this area, specifically:

- Increased subsidized funding for childcare spaces in Ottawa for children aged 0-6 - this is an important recognition of the high level of need in our community and is essential in terms of increasing equitable access to child care, particularly for families in need; and
- Capital funding for additional childcare spaces - the increase in the number of spaces across our community will ensure safe and reliable care is more accessible to all families.

The OCDSB is already the largest provider of extended day child care programs in Ottawa. Current Ministry funding and policy directions indicate expansion of Infant Toddler Preschool (ITP) programs to schools. If we are expanding our programs to include ITP childcare, we need to consider resource implications beyond capital funding. The operation of childcare spaces in schools requires a series of complex operational decisions including partnerships with third parties and other regulators and planning and building spaces. While we believe that schools are an excellent location for both ITP childcare and Extended Day programs, we are concerned about the workload implications for our school and central administration teams. Principals have very demanding roles and the addition of childcare programs at schools extends their workday and increases responsibilities. These decisions also have huge workload implications for our human resource, finance, and planning departments.

The other area of concern is with respect to the sustainable funding of infant child care. With a 1:3 staff-to-child ratio, infant child care is the most expensive program to deliver. For example, the OCDSB has recently made an application to retrofit five childcare program spaces. The OCDSB directly operates two ITP childcare programs. Both of these programs are currently operating at a loss and we would have to increase fees by approximately 1/3 to break even. The high cost of infant childcare programs was historically offset by kindergarten and school-age programs. Without the capacity to combine the operating costs of our various childcare programs, the school district essentially is subsidizing infant care for a small number of families in our community. This is both inequitable and a diversion of funds from other purposes and responsibilities. Our staff has approached the Ministry staff to consider the blending of Infant Toddler program fees with the Extended Day program in order to achieve cost-recovery with respect to the Infant Toddler programs.

AUTONOMY OF SCHOOL BOARDS

Recommendation: That the Government of Ontario return meaningful authority to school boards so that school boards can effectively manage resources and respond to local needs and represent the electorate in their communities.

In the same way that Members of the Legislative Assembly collectively represent the voters of Ontario with regard to governing the province as a whole, the trustees of the four school boards serving the City of Ottawa represent the entire electorate with regard to local education. It is our responsibility to meet the needs of our students by establishing programs, services and policies that direct scarce resources with sufficient flexibility to meet unique local needs and priorities.

At present, school boards do not control their revenues, are limited in their practices by standards that are set provincially, and are constrained in collective bargaining. School boards are held accountable for operating a complex organization within revenues that do not reflect true costs.

There is a lack of consistency between school boards' apparent accountabilities and the authority that they are able to exercise; such a situation is dysfunctional. School boards are close to the communities that they serve. Boards must be given meaningful authority to exercise real autonomy for local decision-making and resource management.

Furthermore, given the high level of responsibility and public trust assumed by trustees upon election, the base honorarium for trustees is unreasonably low and reflects a lack of respect for the role. The current trustee honorarium is completely at odds with the remuneration of other municipally elected politicians, such as city councillors. Raising the base honorarium to be commensurate with the level of responsibility of trustees could attract more diverse and skilled candidates in future elections. Importantly, acknowledging the depth and breadth of knowledge a trustee must develop in order to effectively and justly govern in the public trust is a sign of respect to the office and its role in delivering world-class public education.

AVAILABILITY OF QUALIFIED FRENCH TEACHERS

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase the number of teacher candidate positions in Bachelor of Education programs with special emphasis on French as a second language teachers.

Investigate working with Faculties of Education to implement DELF assessments for teacher candidates seeking FSL qualifications; boards would continue to determine required proficiency levels for their FSL programs.

The OCDSB has the highest proportion of French Immersion (FI) students and the highest overall number of students registered in FI programming in the province. Unlike some school districts in the province, the OCDSB does not limit or cap French as a second language sites, programs, or student participation. This policy decision provides equitable access to French programs and increases the capacity of our graduates to speak French, which is of particular importance in the bilingual context of the National Capital Region.

Unfortunately, there is a shortage of French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers in the Province of Ontario. As the popularity of FSL programs, in particular French immersion, increases, so does the challenge of hiring qualified FSL teachers to meet the growing demand. This issue is not unique to the OCDSB or public school districts. It is also not unique to teachers; we also need early childhood educators with FSL qualifications.

Although we are fortunate to have ready access to qualified FSL teachers through the University of Ottawa, our district undertakes an aggressive recruitment campaign across the teacher education programs throughout Ontario as well as in some of the programs in the province of Quebec in order to find sufficient qualified FSL teachers. This is an excellent strategy, but cannot overcome a fundamental shortage of supply.

Expanding the pool of teachers who demonstrate an interest in gaining FSL qualifications would be an important first step in addressing the shortage of qualified FSL teachers. This could be achieved by increasing the number of teacher candidate positions in Bachelor of Education programs with special emphasis on French as a second language teachers.

Our district has had considerable success as the pilot site for the administration of the Diplôme d'études en langue française (DELF). This test assesses the proficiency of students in French at the end of grade 12. We encourage the province to consider the use of the DELF assessment for teacher candidates. This would achieve two things:

- i) a common standard measurement of the proficiency for FSL teacher candidates; and
- ii) an increase in the number of teachers qualified to teach FSL courses.



The implementation of the DELF would create a provincial standard for proficiency while still allowing school districts to implement variable standards based on local program requirements.

We are aware that the Ontario Public School Board Association has established the FSL Labour Market Partnership Committee to investigate the province-wide shortage of FSL teachers and we are participating on this committee. The OCDSB also has representation on the Provincial FSL Committee which is overseeing the province's ten year action plan for FSL. The hope is that the two groups will serve to inform each other. While establishing these committees is an important step in addressing the shortage; implementing solutions will require cooperation, leadership, and active support from many parties, including the provincial government.

SUPPLY AND AVAILABILITY OF QUALIFIED REPLACEMENT TEACHERS AND EDUCATION WORKERS

Recommendation: That the province review, in partnership with trustee associations and others, the challenges of attracting, funding, and deploying replacement staff to best support student learning and well-being.

The OCDSB is fortunate to have highly qualified and professional staff in our schools and administrative offices. In order to provide a safe and caring learning environment which supports student achievement and well-being it is essential that our schools are fully staffed every day. The OCDSB, like other school districts across Ontario is experiencing challenges in the supply and availability of qualified occasional teachers, Early Childhood Educators and Educational Assistants. This has an adverse impact on school operations and is disruptive to the learning environment for children.

Unlike many other types of organizations, schools must have replacement workers for classroom-based positions in order to meet provincial regulations. If qualified replacement workers are unavailable, classes must be combined, administrators must assume classroom assignments, special support workers may have to be redeployed, and/or professional development sessions must be cancelled in order to meet regulations and support students.

Historically, this has been a recurring issue which surfaces in the spring, but more recently this has become a challenge earlier in the school year. At the OCDSB, we have already had to implement several strategies to address an almost daily shortage of occasional teachers. There are likely a complex range of factors which contribute to this including, absenteeism, the number of qualified replacement teachers, the restrictions of Regulation 274, changes to sick leave plans, the impact of a two-year Bachelor of Education program, and the changing dynamics of the workforce.

In the case of Early Childhood Educators (ECE), there is a province wide shortage. At the OCDSB, that shortage is compounded by the fact that our district runs the largest Extended Day Program (EDP) in Ontario using a delivery model that emphasizes continuity between the EDP and the regular school day – exactly as envisioned by Dr. Charles Pascal. However, there are cost implications to this and the challenges in recruiting and retaining casual or replacement ECEs undermines the value of the delivery model.

While our district is actively pursuing a range of strategies to address these issues, many of these challenges may be rooted in broader systemic or structural policy directions and funding issues. School districts can only manage within the parameters established by the province. Therefore, to fully address the ongoing challenges related to attracting, funding and deploying replacement staff, the Province should work with trustee associations and



other partners to undertake a study examining the root causes of these challenges. This would help to inform how to make effective changes, which may include regulatory revisions, the number of candidates accepted into related post-secondary educational programs, and other policy directives. This is a critical investment in student safety, student learning, staff well-being and the sustainable delivery of high quality instructional programs in our schools.

In Summary

School districts are highly complex, multi-faceted organizations. A key element to our success lies in effective resource allocation to offer sustainable high-quality programs based on community need. The OCDSB community critically needs a school board that is empowered by multi-year capital funding cycles in order to effectively plan for the development of new and maintenance of existing facilities; a plan for addressing the province-wide FSL teacher shortage; a review of current challenges related to replacement staff, access to high-quality and accessible child care; and a board of trustees that is endowed with meaningful authority to govern and make decisions in the local interest.

As such we make the following recommendations:

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