

June 16, 2023

The Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Ministry of Education  
438 University Ave., 5th Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Lecce,

The funding allocation provided by the Ministry of Education is insufficient to cover the costs of operation that the Halton District School Board (HDSB) faces. Specifically, it does not sufficiently account for mandatory increases to statutory benefit enhancements, inflation, funding for remote learning, increases in special education supports, the rising costs of supply teachers and increases in transportation costs. As such, the HDSB is facing reductions in services and a small deficit budget in order to continue providing quality education for our growing, high-performing school board.

Halton's base Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding this year is projected to be 9.6% higher than it was in 2018-19 on a per-student basis. While this sounds good, inflation between April 2018 and April 2023 was 17.3% and will likely run above 3% again in the coming year. As such, we are facing a real cut of approximately 10% per student over the last five years, when accounting for inflation.

At a draft budget presentation held on May 24, many pressures were brought to the attention of Trustees. Key areas where the Ministry's funding allocations have not been adjusted to match actual expenses, putting pressure on our budget, include:

- Special Education and Mental Health (approx. \$17.5 million over funding)
- Student Transportation (approximately \$2.8 million over funding)
- Statutory Benefits (CPP enhancement) (\$7 million increase unfunded)
- Temporary Student Accommodations (approximately \$1.2 million over funding)

As a result of these and many more funding pressures, we are facing a reduction in classroom teachers and Early Childhood Educators this year despite a growing student population. Further, our budgets for School Operations (Facilities) and Library and Guidance will be impacted in very serious and negative ways. If the Ministry were to address the four items above, it would allow us to dramatically reduce cuts to and eliminate the small deficit in this year's budget.

This is not an issue of Halton receiving above-average supports; the HDSB currently receives the second-least GSN funding per student among the province's 72 school boards. To further the budget pressures, non-GSN revenues (e.g. tuition fees, rental income, interest income, etc.) have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. In short, this is a structural funding issue affecting school boards across the province.

The Ministry has publicly stated their focus on supporting student learning and improving graduation rates. However, a funding shortfall will result in fewer supports to students, impacting the ability of the HDSB to continue to provide the highest quality education, demonstrated in part by EQAO scores well above the provincial average scores and high graduation rates.

The Trustees request that the Ministry revisit their provisions for inflation within the GSN and provide funding to cover the mandatory statutory benefit increases. With these investments, critical learning supports and programs could be maintained to continue to address student needs. In addition, as part of the 2024/2025 budget planning, the Trustees request that the Ministry revisit the transportation allocation, special education allocation and the temporary accommodations allocation.

The HDSB has always been fiscally responsible. However, we currently face a structural deficit - i.e., the need to cut permanent staff to achieve a balanced budget - which is created by shortfalls in the GSN. This will impact student learning and mental health for the future as well as student programs and supports for special education, as the funding shortfall continues to increase every year.

Sincerely,



Margo Shuttleworth  
Chair

Cc: Effie Triantafilopoulos, MPP  
Natalie Pierre, MPP  
Parm Gill, MPP  
Stephen Crawford, MPP  
Ted Arnott, MPP  
Cathy Abraham, President, Ontario Public School Boards' Association  
OPSBA Member Board Chairs