



Response: Education Funding Engagement Guide 2019-2020

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.

It is because we are the largest and most diverse school board in the country, that we have a unique set of needs when it comes to what is required to best support our students and communities.

Our new Multi-Year Strategic Plan consists of five pillars. Each of these pillars represents our evidence-based decision making. Each pillar has measurable outcomes that are confirmed through our student census data, student academic achievements, and strategic allocation of resources:

1. [Transform Student Learning](#) – We will have high expectations for all students and provide positive, supportive learning environments.
2. [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.
3. [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.
4. [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.
5. [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 know 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.

An example from our Multi-Year Strategic Plan are the Action Plans dedicated to Special Education, wherein we are committed to outcome-based planning to support our most vulnerable students. The goals include, each school will welcome all students, providing an open and inclusive learning environment that recognizes that most students can be served effectively within their community school. This includes continuing to provide intensive support programs for students with more specialized learning needs. Strengthening collaboration with parents and engage effectively in the decision making process regarding their child's program, placement and well-being. Increased employment opportunities and outcomes for all students with Low Incidence Exceptionalities (Intellectual Disabilities, Physical Disability, Low Vision, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Health/Medical).

In addition to answering the Ministry's questions, we would like to focus on the following areas of interest for the TDSB:

1. Transportation;
2. Renewal Funding Backlog; and
3. Education Development Charges.

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 experienced in September 2016 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 observance and other unexpected and planned absences. The Transportation Unit 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 students are our most vulnerable students, with the greatest service needs and for whom the cost per pupil is appreciably higher than other standard transportation.

In order to address retention of drivers, the Ministry implemented a driver retention bonus based on service benchmarks. With this bonus set to expire and nothing yet offered to attract and retain drivers, it is of concern to the industry, as well as the Boards, that we may face a larger than normal number of retirements and/or staff movement to other jobs with steadier work conditions.

The review of transportation services and funding started two years ago, still has not reported out on its findings.

2. Renewal Funding Backlog

The province has provided multiple years of additional funding for school repairs. We are appreciative to the province for this funding, which has allowed us to address

emergency issues in our schools. Unfortunately, it has not been sufficient to decrease the repairs backlog.

Currently, the TDSB faces a staggering \$3.9 billion repair backlog as a result of years of inadequate funding. If additional funding provided over the last 3 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 should be taken into consideration in establishing construction benchmarks.

3. Education Development Charges

The TDSB is advocating for access to Education Development Charges (EDCs) as a source of revenue to sustain our ability to make adequate investments in our schools as development continues in the city.

As you know, school boards must meet several conditions before being eligible to require developers to pay EDCs. The first condition is that the board must show that the number of students that it needs to accommodate is larger than the space available. The TDSB does not meet this condition because there is surplus space across the system. However, city intensification plans mean that many neighbourhoods are growing and putting additional pressure on schools in these areas that are already full.

In addition, current legislation mandates that EDCs can only be used for the purchase of land to support schools in growth areas, not to support the cost of building new schools or renovating existing schools. We advocate for a change in this regard as well.

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

Toronto City Planning figures indicate that approximately 290,000 residential units are in the review process or under construction, which could generate EDC revenue of over \$300 million in funding for school improvements. Toronto is one of Canada's fastest growing cities. Overlooking the use of EDCs to fund badly needed school repairs is a lost opportunity. We once again ask the Ontario government to amend the EDC regulations to ensure that the TDSB can capture this revenue and use it to build and repair schools.

TDSB's Response to Ministry of Education Consultation Questions

The *Education Act* provides the authority and responsibility for student achievement and well-being to school boards. The TDSB accepts this responsibility and works with its communities to develop programs and supports to achieve these goals with the available funding provided by the Ministry of Education. It is important for school boards to have flexible available funding to ensure that they can meet the local needs of their communities.

Under the *Education Act*, boards also have responsibility for their multi-year strategic plans. Any outcome-based funding would need to honour these commitments made and approved by the Board.

It is critical for the TDSB to have accurate information on possible changes to funding as early as possible. Currently, the TDSB has to make school staffing decisions in early March to meet collective agreement timelines and to ensure that our schools are ready for the upcoming school year. As the Ministry noted in their consultation document, efficient, outcomes-based and value for money decisions are required to ensure resources are spent effectively on student achievement and well-being. School boards need the Ministry of Education to provide their annual funding allocations in sufficient time so that school boards can do this within collective agreement timelines. The result of notification of these allocations would be more efficient decisions by school boards regarding the number of staff required in their schools.

Provided below is the TDSB's response to the themes contained in the Education Funding Engagement Guide, 2019-2020:

- a) Efficient Price Setting;

- b) Outcomes-Based Funding;
- c) Accountability and Value-for-Money; and
- d) Other Education Funding Efficiencies.

a) Efficient Price Setting:

Considerations:

1. Are there areas of the Grants for Student Needs (GSNs) which currently use efficient price setting which could be re-evaluated for further efficiencies?

Efficient pricing is an economic model that suggests that perfect information is known to set a price. The concern with the example provided, 'class size', is that it only addresses averages and space usage, not student achievement outcomes. The TDSB would ask: What information was used to set current benchmarks and was student achievement and well-being data used in the calculation? At the TDSB our Multi-Year Strategic Plan is focussed on student achievement and well-being outcomes.

2. Are there allocations of the GSN which currently do not use efficient price setting, but should be considered for reform?

Efficient price setting involves ensuring that all information is known about the factors impacting price (i.e. benchmarks). It is difficult from a provincial perspective to set pricing that addresses the diverse needs of individual school boards. It could be argued that given class size, pricing has different impacts on student achievement and well-being in northern Ontario vs downtown Toronto.

b) Outcomes-Based Funding

Considerations:

1. Are there areas of the GSN which could be reformed to an outcomes-based model (e.g. Learning Opportunities Grant)? How would the outcome be measured?

Funding based on outcomes would be a significant departure from the initial purpose of the GSN which was to create equity of funding for students across the province. A funding model based on outcomes would return boards to a similar place prior to the GSN, but this time it would not be based on the ability to tax but on your social economic challenges impacting student achievement and well-being. The TDSB has developed a Multi-Year Strategic Plan to improve student achievement and well-being based on data driven outcomes. Further to that, the TDSB utilizes census data from students, parents and staff to guide where to invest to support the board's five pillars.

2. How can the funding model do a better job of indicating whether the investments made have maximized returns in achievement?

The funding model is a method of providing funding to school boards. Boards use local flexibility with the funds to address local needs that support student achievement and well-being. The TDSB would suggest that the funding model is not the tool to indicate the impact on achievement. Other data points or reports can provide this information.

c) Accountability and Value-For-Money

Considerations:

1. Are there parts of the funding formula that are not core to the delivery of education in Ontario? If so, what are they?

It is important to remember that the Ministry has stated that the GSN is to support schools boards to meet their local needs delivering the curriculum to students and school boards are responsible for their student achievement and well-being. As such, school boards use their GSN allocation strategically to make choices that best support improving student achievement. The TDSB believes that through development of local programs and supports aligned to its strategic plan it is meeting its legislative requirement. The Ministry has yet to inform school boards on how it identifies its core commitments to student achievement and well-

being. Once these are known, school boards can better address this question.

2. Should the government explore ways for alternative access to non-core programming?

TDSB students come to school with a wide variety of needs that we must address in order to create learning environments in which students can succeed and have a strong sense of well-being.

Therefore, the TDSB is always looking for partners to assist in creating effective and efficient learning environments for our students. We would suggest that the government better coordinate support for families and students to ensure that the student comes to school ready to learn and able to succeed in their education. We need to look at the whole student to understand those factors that impact their learning. If we want to use public funds effectively and efficiently we need to address barriers to learning from both inside and outside the school.

3. Should the Ministry undertake a review of targeted areas of the funding formula to increase accountability and value-for-money? If so, what are they?

The TDSB agrees with the concept of accountability for the use of funding to support student outcomes. The TDSB has created a Multi-Year Strategic Plan that is based on evidence and has measurable outcomes that hold the Board accountable. Value for money is important. This is the concept that is used by the TDSB to ensure that the limited resources provided to school boards are allocated effectively and efficiently to support student achievement and well-being.

d) Other Education Funding Efficiencies

Considerations:

1. Are there areas of overlap or duplication within the GSN? If so, what are they?

We do not believe there is any overlap within the GSN. The TDSB fully utilizes all funding to support student achievement and well-being. TDSB has created an evidence-based and outcome-driven strategic plan to ensure its resources align to its five pillars:

- 1. Transform Student Learning;*
- 2. Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being;*
- 3. Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for all Students;*
- 4. Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs; and*
- 5. Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being.*

2. Are there areas of overlap or duplication with other funding streams (e.g. Education Programs – Other, other ministries, other levels of government)? If so, what are they?

The significant overlap is not with funding, but with the administrative reporting needed to support Education Program – Other (EPO) and other levels of government reports. The funding is important to support student achievement and well-being, but the administrative burden on reporting needs to be reduced.

Also, we believe some areas of EPO funding should be permanently moved into the GSN to increase efficiency for the money spent while also increasing transparency. The Community Use of Schools grant is a great example of a program that has been working for years, is a highly efficient use of money, and would benefit from more stable funding. Moving these long-term, highly effective and efficient programs into the GSN would stabilize this funding, reduce the administrative burden for school board reporting and on Transfer Payment oversight within the Ministry.