

Friday, February 22, 2019

Dear Minister Thompson:

I am writing in response to a letter the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) staff received on January 11, 2019 advising us of a change to the Community Use of Schools - Priority Schools Initiative (PSI) Education Programs - Other. As you are aware, this grant subsidizes school boards so that free permitting for after-hours community use of 23 TCDSB schools can be offered.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, we are deeply concerned by not only the reduction of the grant from \$982,000 to \$613,750, but also by the timing of this announcement. Given that we are currently halfway through the fiscal year and staffing has already been established for the school year, this reduction makes it more difficult for the TCDSB and other school boards to continue to support students from families facing socio-economic challenges, while still maintaining a balanced budget.

Permits for the school year have already been released to permit holders, based on the existing community use of schools policy. Permits for March Break are released by the end of January 2019, while summer permits are typically released in May 2019. The decision to cut funding mid-year puts crucial community programming at risk for these needy communities without a subsidy from the province. Many of these programs would not be able to continue if a permit fee were charged to the groups using our facilities.

Last year, PSI funding for this program allowed the TCDSB to provide community use of space to approximately 188,000 youth. These programs provide families in priority neighbourhoods with safe, engaging and accessible summer learning and care for young children and youth, as well as providing meaningful employment and on the job leadership training for youth who live in priority neighbourhoods. Once again, the timing for program funding is important so that Boards can plan accordingly.

The Community Use of Schools grant reduction comes after the government has already cancelled a number of programs also geared to serving hundreds of our most vulnerable students. These include:

- Focus on Youth after school program which provides approximately 52 at-risk students with training and leadership experience within a safe and positive employment environment;
- Re-engagement 12 & 12+ program that encourages students that have left school to return to complete their diploma graduation requirements;
- Pilots on equitable access to support students who may want to go to Post Secondary Education;
- Speak Up projects that empower hundreds of students to take action and support student engagement, equity, achievement and well-being through an experience within the school community; and
- Community Use of Schools – Outreach Coordinators.

The combined impact of this reduction in funding will hurt our most vulnerable students. We also have yet to hear from the Ministry about the continued funding for the Summer Focus on Youth Program which provides approximately 250 students with meaningful employment.

Student achievement and well-being have always been at the core of everything that we do. Equitable access to programs and services are key to the future of our students, and these funding cuts will impact the Board's ability to level the playing field and ensure that all students and youth have opportunities to succeed.

I encourage you to take another look at how these programs have impacted families and youth in the Province, and particularly our most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people. The decisions made by the government today will have a lasting impact on the lives of young people and their families.

Sincerely,

Mario Rizzo, Chair