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REPORT TO

Select Committee

SEAC REQUEST FOR COMMUNICATIONS TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

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Created, Draft	First Tabling	Review
December 8, 2016	December 15, 2016	Click here to enter a date.

[Click here to enter name and position of Lead Author.](#)

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

Vision:

At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.

Mission:

The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community uniting home, parish and school and rooted in the love of Christ.

We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.



R. McGuckin

Associate Director of Academic Affairs

A. Sangiorgio

Associate Director of Planning and Facilities

C. Jackson

Executive Superintendent of Business Services and Chief Financial Officer

Angela Gauthier

Director of Education

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides two template letters that Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) recommended by the committee to be sent to the Minister of Education. The first on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the second letter be provided to the associations with representation on the Special Education Advisory Committee for submission to the Ministry.

This cumulative staff time dedicated to developing this report is 4 hours.

B. PURPOSE

1. On November 16th, 2016, at the regular meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee, a motion was passed to send a response letter to the Minister of Education communication dated August 24, 2016.
2. This report contains two template letters to be submitted to the Minister of Education. The first letter (Appendix A) would be submitted on behalf of the Board of Trustees.
3. The second communication is an Association Template letter (Appendix B) which would be provided as a template to the Associations with representation on SEAC for their submission to Ministry of Education.

C. BACKGROUND

1. The two letter templates included in this report were drafted in response to the reduction to the former High Needs Amount, currently called the Differentiated Special Education High Needs Amount (DSENA) of the Grants for Student Needs (GSN).

D. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the letter templates provided in this report be approved for submission to the Ministry of Education and to the Associations that currently have representation on SEAC in order that they may advocate for the families they represent.

December XX, 2016

The Honourable Mitzie Hunter, M.P.P.
Minister of Education
Ontario Ministry of Education
900 Bay Street
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Hunter:

We have had the opportunity to review your letter of August 24, 2016, in response to the Toronto Catholic District School Board's written request for the Ministry of Education to reconsider the significant cuts being made to Special Education funding that is adversely impacting the 17,000 students with exceptionalities who receive essential learning support services.

The Ministry claims the overall increases in Special Education Grant funding benefits boards across the Ontario. For the record, the real fact is that this has been achieved on the backs of major urban boards like the TCDSB. A prime example is the Special Education High Needs (HNA) funding now called the DSENA Grant, has been spiralling downwards over the past three years: from \$51.7M in 2012-13 to \$47.4M in 2016-17. That is \$4.169M which has been taken from the TCDSB budget and redistributed to other school boards!

Special Education funding has also not kept pace with the special needs associated with Ministry's introduction of new programs such as Early Years learning (aka FDK). There has been a marked increase in the number of students in Kindergarten arriving with special needs. Many of these students have higher needs requiring additional human resources and intensive support programs. In particular, this is reflected in the 35 percent increase in the number of students diagnosed with autism since the Ministry mandated introduction of FDK. However, due to the nature of the age of these students, they are supported within the regular classroom which places significant pressures on in-class support for all students.

Over the past two years, ongoing Ministry of Education cuts to TCDSB's Special Education High Needs (HNA) Grants totalled close to \$7 million. This chronic underfunding by the Ministry jeopardizes the TCDSB's ability to provide adequate support to its most vulnerable students and poses a significant challenge supporting the growing number of special needs students.

Despite this underfunding, the TCDSB has made a concerted effort over the past two years to reduce its overspend in special services programming. These reductions have come at a

significant cost to schools and school communities who are feeling the strain of having to do more with less staff.

The Board has not only reduced support staff, but also eliminated 90 percent of agency workers. In addition, Educational Assistant usage has been cut by approximately 100 staff members to deal with the removal of \$1.5 million high needs amount funding (Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount). This is an untenable situation as the number of students requiring special learning support services identified through an IEP has grown exponentially to 17,433 students, or close to 20 percent of the TCDSB's total student population of 90,000.

Your attention to this urgent request is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Cc: TCDSB Board of Trustees

Angela Gauthier, Director of Education

Cristina Fernandes, Superintendent, Special Services

Education Council

December XX, 2016

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Once again, we urge your Ministry to honour the rights of special needs students. The **<insert # of members>** members of **<insert name of association>** respectfully request that your Ministry reconsider the cuts you have made and restore Special Education HNA funding to previous levels.

Should the Ministry continue to refuse to restore Special Education funding to appropriate levels, we will have no option but mobilize the thousands of parents of special needs students through our association and other partners to ensure this is top of mind for all voters and candidates during the next provincial election.

Your attention to this urgent request is appreciated.

Sincerely,