

*Association Template Letter*

November XX, 2016

The Honourable Mitzie Hunter, M.P.P.  
Minister of Education  
Ontario Ministry of Education  
900 Bay Street  
22<sup>nd</sup> 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 these cuts, 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, emergency 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.

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,

Cc: TCDSB Board of Trustees  
Angela Gauthier, Director of Education  
Cristina Fernandes, Superintendent, Special Services  
Education Council