

Ministry of Education

Minister

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Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre

Édifice Mowat
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2



September 18, 2017

Dear Ms. Battaglia,

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the Autism Ontario's Toronto Metro Chapter about the Toronto Catholic District School Board and special education funding. Please know that your commitment to students with special education needs is appreciated. I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

Our government is committed to ensuring that every student has access to the supports they need to succeed in school, including students with special education needs. We are making changes to be more responsive to the needs of all students and to increase our focus on supporting their achievement and well-being.

As you know, the Ministry of Education provides Ontario's 72 publicly-funded district school boards with additional funding through the Special Education Grant (SEG) for students with special education needs to support the incremental costs of the additional programs, services and equipment required to meet their educational needs and to support positive outcomes. This enables equity for all students with special education needs. SEG funding is incremental to the Foundation Grants and other special purpose grants of the ministry's education funding model, the Grants for Student Needs (GSN). School boards have the authority and flexibility to use other GSN funding, as well as the SEG, to meet their responsibility to support students with special education needs. It is important to note that school boards have flexibility in how they use funding for program delivery. Thus, while the ministry is responsible for setting the funding policy that directs allocation of funds to schools boards, it is up to school boards to allocate resources for each school or program according to local needs.

The SEG is projected to increase to approximately \$2.856 billion in 2017-18. This represents an increase of approximately \$69.2 million or 2.5 per cent over 2016-17; and \$1.23 billion or 75.8 per cent since 2002-03. SEG funding is enveloped for special education programs, services and equipment. Any unspent special education funding must be treated as deferred revenue for special education.

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In the case of Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), its total SEG funding is projected to be over \$120.2 million in 2017-18. This represents an increase of over \$41.4 million or 52.6 per cent since 2002-03.

As you know, the new Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount (DSENA) allocation (formerly the High Needs Amount) was introduced in 2014-15, to better reflect the variation among boards with respect to students with special education needs and boards' ability to meet these needs, thus making the DSENA allocation more fair and equitable. The new DSENA allocation uses three components to reflect this variation: the Measures of Variability, the Special Education Statistical Prediction Model and a Base Amount for Collaboration and Integration. Ministry staff have consulted with stakeholders on the evolution of the DSENA allocation, and we will continue to do so over the coming school year.

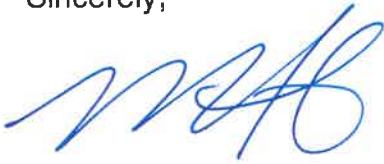
While this transition to a more fair and equitable DSENA model is provincially fiscally neutral, it will have redistributive impacts among boards. As you acknowledged, TCDSB is one of the school boards that is projected to be impacted by this new formula. To mitigate this impact, the new DSENA model is being phased in over four years (2014-15 to 2017-18), and despite declining enrolment in some school boards, the ministry held the provincial DSENA total allocation at \$1.05 billion from 2014-15 to 2016-17, the first three years of the transition to the new model, while increasing the DSENA allocation to \$1.065 billion for 2017-18. These redistributive impacts are the result of phasing out the historical High Needs Amount per pupil amount funding, established in 2006-07, and phasing in the new funding allocation for DSENA. These impacts will result if the board's demonstrated level of need under the new DSENA model and its various factors is different from the funding allocated based on the school board's historical High Needs Amount per pupil amount that dates back to 2006-07.

In addition, as a result of the education sector labour negotiations, the ministry has agreed to establish a Local Priorities Fund (LPF) of \$218.9 million provincewide in 2017-18. The LPF will allow boards to address a range of priorities, including more special education staffing to support children in need, "at-risk" students and adult education. These funds could support about 875 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers and about 1,600 to 1,830 FTE education workers across the province. The actual staffing will vary depending on specific agreements, local discussions and compensation specific to each board, as well as job security provisions, staffing reductions related to declining enrolment and other exceptions. Toronto Catholic District School Board is projected to receive nearly \$10.1 million in LPF funding for 2017-18.

With respect to autism supports, since 2006, the ministry has invested \$120 million through targeted funding outside the Grants for Student Needs to strengthen school board capability to implement PPM 140 and improve the learning environment for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Of this \$120 million investment in ASD, nearly \$57 million has been allocated to training educators to support Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) in classrooms/schools. Through the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years, approximately \$39 million of additional funding is being invested in school boards to help support students as the province transitions to the new Ontario Autism Program (OAP). This investment for student-specific and school-based team support and after school skills development programs will facilitate appropriate transition planning and/or programming.

Once again, thank you for writing to share your concerns and recommendations with me. Please be assured that I understand your concerns, and will keep them in mind as we move forward. I hope you find this information helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'MH', is positioned above the typed name.

Mitzie Hunter, MBA
Minister