

2025-26 Education Funding Engagement Guide

October 2024

INTRODUCTION

The government is committed to delivering a world-class education system built on strategic investments that are aimed at boosting student achievement by focusing on strengthening reading, writing and math, and other STEM disciplines. The government continues to implement measures that will continue to focus school boards on academic achievement and the development of life and job skills.

Through Core Education Funding, the government continues to focus on going back-to-basics and preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow, by investing a projected \$29.1 billion in education funding for the 2024-25 school year.

For more information about the Core Education funding model, please see [Education funding, 2024-25](#) on the Ministry of Education's website.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The government remains committed to discussing education funding reform in Ontario with education stakeholders and partners through a process that allows stakeholders and partners to provide the benefit of their expertise, experience, and ideas.

This year's guide focuses on:

1. Core Education Funding Model Reform
2. Special Education funding

3. Efficiencies and Reducing Administrative Burden
4. Community Use of Schools
5. Student Safety and Well-Being

However, you may also submit feedback on education funding topics not outlined in this guide.

To ensure your feedback is considered, please forward your electronic submission by **November 8, 2024** to: EDULABFINANCE@ontario.ca. If you have questions about this process, please send them to the email address noted above.

CORE EDUCATION FUNDING MODEL REFORM

For the 2024-25 school year, the Ministry of Education introduced Core Education Funding (Core Ed), a transformed funding formula intended to support two goals:

1. Streamlining the funding formula to make it simpler to understand
2. Strengthening school board accountability

The Core Ed funding model also introduced a renewed enveloping framework to bring greater clarity to how funding is to be used to support student achievement and well-being.

Considerations:

i. Now that the Core Ed funding model has been implemented, please provide your feedback on the reform. For example, did it achieve (or in time do you expect that it will achieve) the two goals set out above of simplification and strengthening accountability?

The change has made the grant package more complex for school board staff. The grants were easily identifiable under the GSN framework and now are scattered throughout different sections of the Core Ed framework. This runs the risk of error when trying to ensure that enveloped grants are fully taken into account.

ii. In the refreshed enveloping framework, the ministry introduced limits on funding that can be applied towards student transportation and school facilities expenditures. What opportunities or challenges is this presenting to school boards?

No issues, concerns or major challenges at this point, it is too early to tell.

iii. Are there other ways in which school board accountability can be further enhanced, either through the Core Ed Funding model itself or other mechanisms?

The uniform code of accounts document (in particular schedule 10 mapping) should be reviewed to ensure its completeness and ease of use by reframing it into a proper data mapping table.

iv. In the 2024-25 Education Finance Information System (EFIS) Estimates reporting cycle, Data forms B, C, and D were suppressed. These schedules provide detailed information on school board expenditures versus funding allocations. Should the ministry re-introduce these forms in the future, what are key considerations to ensure consistency and comparability between school boards that would provide meaningful information to the ministry?

Yes. Data forms B/C/D provide a valuable tool in evaluating the board's financial situation.

SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

The Ministry of Education currently provides district school boards with the majority of special education funding through the Special Education Fund. The Special Education Fund is for the additional or incremental costs of the programs

and services provided by school boards. This supports equity for all students with special education needs.

For the 2024-25 school year, the Special Education Fund is projected to increase to approximately \$3.71 billion, representing an increase of \$154 million, or 4.3 per cent, over 2023-24. An additional \$10 million is also being invested to support students with extraordinarily high special education needs, as part of the modernization of the Special Incidence Portion (SIP) component.

Considerations:

i. School boards are given flexibility to use the Special Education Fund and other funding to support their special education policies and priorities to meet local priorities. How are school boards prioritizing ministry supports to meet the special education needs of their students? What other Core Ed funding are boards using to complement their Special Education Fund?

Part of Special Education funding is the Differentiated Needs Allocation. Historically, the SMCDSB has always been funded at a higher level than comparator boards since the

needs of the region are so high. The algorithms used to determine this level of funding are not addressing the current demographics of the region which is leaving the SMCDSB in a position of significant deficit with respect to Special Education funding. The Statistical Predication Model and the Measures of Variability (MOV) need to be reviewed/adjusted to reflect what the trend is in our region. Funding is simply not appropriate for the current needs in the region.

ii. Is there a way to allocate the Special Education Fund (or portions of this fund) more effectively and/or efficiently, without creating the need for new provincial funding or increasing administrative burden?

In previous years we were able to submit claims based on the needs of the board. We were able to generate about 1.2 million dollars in revenue during this process. If 10 million dollars is being spread out across the boards, this will not come close to addressing the current intense needs we are seeing in our school board.

iii. How can the ministry further support school boards in the accurate reporting of students with special education needs and associated expenditures to ensure consistency among school boards?

Overall, boards do not provide reports, unless it is SIP. The MOE funds the boards based on overall student population with some recognition within the SEPPA and DNA amounts. The way of fully recognizing the individual revenue needs of each school board based on the needs needs to be overhauled.

EFFICIENCIES AND REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

The ministry is committed to continuous improvement in looking for ways to reduce administrative burden and further streamlining reporting for the education sector. Part of this work includes reviewing how the ministry measures ongoing program effectiveness as part of its strong financial accountability, all while trying to avoid urgent and/or stand-alone requests to school boards.

In addition, transferring funding from Responsive Education Programs (REP) to Core Ed provides predictability for school boards in financial planning. However, related data reporting requirements are generally reduced during this process to further reduce administrative burden.

Considerations:

i. How can the ministry best collect data from school boards in the following instances:

a. Information that is infrequently requested (e.g., during the pandemic, to support central bargaining)

Online / Electronic forms (Google, laserfiche) are the best means by which to collect and share information.

b. Programs particularly in the early stages of transition from REP to Core Ed

EFIS is probably the most appropriate means of collecting financial data but non-financial data should be collected from the program areas (Spec Ed, Curriculum, etc)

ii. Are there other areas where there is potential or opportunities to find new reporting efficiencies, within EFIS or other reporting requirements to the ministry?

EFIS inputs can be daunting (even with the ability to interface from excel). Ensuring that data is used by the Ministry for monitoring and decision making is crucial (eg. Is school by school reporting of FTEs for Principal, Vice-Principals and School Secretaries needed?)

Eliminating the use of Appendix H for benefit trust payments. This is a cumbersome task and since we now have several years of historical data based on actual usage a transition should be made to eliminate the use of Appendix H for this purpose.

COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

Community Use of Schools (CUS) provides funding to school boards to reduce rates for, and/or increase access to school space for community not-for-profit groups during non-school hours. CUS funds are to help school boards with the costs involved with keeping schools open after hours such as heating, lighting, and cleaning. School boards are responsible for matters related to the use and access of school space and resources.

Considerations:

I. What criteria do you use, to determine rates for use of school space?

The School Facility Cost Recovery Pricing Model is utilized, which was developed as a methodology for determining fees for the use of spaces in Ontario's publicly funded schools.

The cost recovery model incorporates lease rates by square foot and hourly rates by space type. The model utilizes direct and indirect costs, space size calculations, operating hours, and multiple data sources to provide a fee structure for implementation. The rate is based on achieving cost recovery only.

The rising costs over the last several years have impacted how many user groups and permits can be subsidized. The number of permit requests far outweighs the amount of subsidy funding available. The subsidy allocations are requested to be reviewed and **increased** in future years to benefit the greatest number of organizations possible.

II. What criteria do you use to prioritize access to school space, if any?

A staged application process is utilized with non-profit organizations submitting ahead of for-profit organizations. Non-profit organizations may submit for a limited number of permits initially, with a follow-up for additional permits based on availability.

III. How do you make your rates and access policies known to the public?

Rates and policies are available on the board's website.

IV. What criteria do you use to identify which schools are available to book?

Schools that have custodial staff assigned during the Community Use of Schools hours are available to book.

STUDENT SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

The Urban and Priority High Schools Program (UPHS) **We do not receive this Grant.**

UPHS is delivered in 41 schools in 12 English and French school boards in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, London, Ottawa, Waterloo, and Windsor. Participating schools develop and implement action plans coordinated by a steering committee composed of the principal, staff, students, parents and local partners to support student leadership, parent/community engagement initiatives, and programs dedicated to improving students' attendance and performance in the classroom.

Protective factors supported through UPHS include:

- Increased access to after-school or extra-curricular activities
- Support for academic achievement

- Increased access to mental health and other intra-personal supports
- Increased access to mentorship and volunteer opportunities to develop leadership skills
- Increased awareness of conflict resolution and other practices for positively contributing to school climate

Considerations: [We do not receive this Grant.](#)

For those school boards that receive this funding:

- Do you conduct any independent evaluation of the effectiveness of funding such as UPHS?
- Are there any areas where funds are underutilized or overutilized?
- Are there any gaps that the current UPHS funding levels can't fill?
- Are there any emerging needs that UPHS could be better positioned to address?

Safe and Accepting Schools

The Safe and Accepting Schools Component provides funding for: [Grant \\$577k](#)

- Non-teaching staff (child and youth workers, social workers, educational assistants and attendance counsellors) to work with students who are at-risk of suspension or expulsion (risk factors include mental health/family challenges or living in precarious housing).
- Programming to support academic and non-academic needs of students who have been expelled or are on long-term suspension.

Considerations:

- What portion of your school board funding is generally dedicated to offering suspension and expulsion programming as required by PPM 141 and PPM 142? And how much of this funding supports prevention, positive behaviour supports and alternatives to suspension programming?

[We have our Long-term Suspension/Expulsion Academic Support Program facilitated by an outreach teacher team \(Pathways Teachers\). We provide this support, along with non-academic support provided by, if accepted by the family, by our clinical staff.](#)

- How is the funding generally split across the two elements (staffing versus programming supports) in your school board?

[This is in the region of 82% staffing and 18% program support expenses.](#)

iii. Are there any emerging needs that your school board is addressing through this funding?

Anti Human trafficking training, VTRA training for staff.? In March, the provincial government announced \$300,000 over three years for our board to enhance school security, including cameras, vape sensors, and security lighting upgrades. Whilst this will provide some much needed assistance to put into perspective this would provide for 150 cameras across our school. There is no ongoing funding commitment for annual license fees and to fully equip schools with cameras and vape sensors.

Although the sector has made great strides in the area of cyber security given the ever changing threat/risk level we believe this is another area that should receive greater funding.

iv. Is there enough flexibility within this component to address student behavioural needs in your school boards and suspension and expulsion policies/programming?

The funding does provide some flexibility to address staffing and program needs, however we are still significantly underfunded. Additional funding would enhance our capacity to support student needs.

FURTHER FEEDBACK: (As advised, you may also submit feedback on education funding topics not outlined in this guide.)

Board Leadership Development Strategy Funding: Post covid, the role and pressures put on school administrators has increased multifold. Demanding parents, special education supports, staffing shortages, increased workload and lack of mentoring supports have greatly impacted our ability to attract and maintain leaders in our schools.

We need to re-ignite an Ontario Leadership Strategy in order to be able to effectively:

- attract and recruit the right people to leadership roles;
- develop personal leadership resources in individuals and promote effective leadership practices in order to have the greatest possible impact on student achievement and well-being;
- develop leadership capacity and coherence in organizations to strengthen their ability to deliver on education priorities;
- develop and implement a robust mentor program to support those leaders early on in their careers;
- develop collective leadership capacity through collaborative learning and frontline-led improvement

The BLDS funding would provide school boards with the funds and opportunities to identify and support our leaders in strengthening school accountability, reducing

administrative burden and improving student safety and well-being, as outlined in this Education Funding Engagement review.

As Michael Fullen has indicated, "The principal needs to be able to work through the leadership of others, using the group to change the group. The principal's main impact is when they create a collaborative group that they themselves are learners within that group. The key role of the principal is to be able to create those conditions.....In order for them to do the improvement work in an integrated way, they need to be able to create the conditions in their own school, and then they need to be seen as a system player, where they share and learn from what is happening in other schools."

The only way we can effectively do this work is by having the ability to gather, share and learn from one another. And the only way we can do that is by having the funds available to facilitate this sharing and learning.

Temporary Accommodation

Developing bricks and mortar infrastructure takes time and the interim solution to accommodate students for growth Boards is with portable classrooms. Over the last number of years, the Ministry has tightened the eligibility of many of the funding streams provided to Boards leaving temporary accommodation as the funding option for adding growth related portables. This funding is significantly insufficient for most boards and the cost of portables is rising. Boards need the Ministry to support temporary accommodation in a manner that matches growth patterns around the province.

We believe that many of the recommendations and information outlined above would benefit from a collaborative approach to ensure all stakeholder requirements have been identified, similar to the LEAN philosophy. We would recommend that the Ministry convene expert panels of Ministry, Board, and other relevant stakeholder representatives to create the most value-added processes possible with the greatest opportunities for success.

There are growth Boards with a critical immediate need for funding to support temporary accommodation for 2025-2026. We believe the Ministry should reach out to these Boards to review their needs and provide funding to allow these needs to be put in place in time for September 2025. This would bridge temporary accommodation needs until the process referred to above can be implemented

Municipal Approval/Requirements Process

Municipal review of school board applications is currently similar to the review of a private development application, including the applicable fees. As schools are a matter of provincial interest, funded by the province, and approved through a provincial approval process, including the acquisition of land leading up to the construction of the building, school boards should be considered agents of the Crown, similar to Colleges and Universities. This would result in an exemption from municipal site plan processes and reduce costs, timelines and red tape to provide a more economical, expedient, efficient and predictable process for delivering the project.

If school boards cannot be considered agents of the crown, establish a provincial template for site plan requirements for new schools:

- Establish an abbreviated process for development standards.
- Establish a provincial ombudsman to assist in processing applications with the municipality.
- Exempt temporary accommodation (portables) from the municipal review process, Reduce municipal review of building permit applications for portables to zoning and building/fire code issues only. Providing this review with no costs attributed to school boards would allow the restricted temporary accommodation funding to be allocated to the purchase/ repair of portable units.

Designating school sites outside of typical greenfield secondary plan processes can be challenging and is becoming a more frequent requirement to accommodate existing and future enrolment due to increased density, brownfield development, etc. It would be beneficial to create a consistent provincial policy framework for schools in Official Plan and Zoning Bylaws as well as permit school use as of right in all zones.

School Nutrition Program

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), food insecurity is one of the social determinants of health. Adequate nutrition is necessary for students to function and achieve potential in education. Although there are a number of charitable organizations that support school nutrition programs there is inconsistency and inadequacy in many school communities. With the federal government announcement and commitment to support school nutrition through provincial/territorial governments there is an opportunity for the Province of Ontario and Ministry of Education to provide universal and adequate support to ensure that each student in our publicly funded schools in Ontario have access to and provision of adequate nutrition.

Board Admin and Governance

Funding increases need to be made to cover increases for the departments that support the school board, i.e., HR, finance, ICT etc. Costs of annual fees have increased e.g. annual fee for HRIS software, but there has been no increase in funding to cover this. Growing school boards are taking on an exponential increase in transactions but no additional funding is being provided to hire more staff to manage the increased workload. Boards are trying to implement attendance support programs but are not able to address unmanageable workloads leading to burnout and increased illness. Failure to provide funding for support staff/departments is resulting in indirect costs (illness & retention issues) and the inability to cover the basic costs of doing business.

CONCLUSION

As always, we thank you for your continued collaboration and partnership to support Ontario students. We remain committed to working closely with you to facilitate the next school year, with the best interest of Ontario's students in mind.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide, and we look forward to receiving your submission.