



**THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE AND THE EXECUTIVE BOARD REPORT TO THE
TORONTO & YORK REGION GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2016**

Special Education “Realignment” Means Cutbacks

Although the Ministry of Education announces that the investment in Ontario’s publicly-funded education system continues to increase, this has not necessarily been the case in the Catholic and Public School Boards in Toronto and York Region. Our Boards have seen cuts and insufficient funding to special education programs from Kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12), and are projecting school closures over the next several years. In fact, during the budget setting process recently, these school boards have announced cuts to both staffing and programs in order to balance their budgets. It is very clear that any “new investments” the Ministry is making are not reaching/impacting as intended, the K-12 schools in the Catholic and Public School Boards in Toronto and York Region - schools which attended by a quarter of all students in Ontario.

Funding cuts to these Boards have resulted in a lack of resources, and in job losses. Our most vulnerable students with special needs are those most directly affected by these cuts. Insufficient funding for special education programs is very concerning. Education workers will be overburdened attempting to maintain an “inclusive” classroom setting for the diversity of students with special needs. Those call for the support of a special education teacher and education support staff, and when necessary several other professional support staff, such as Child and Youth Workers (CYW), speech pathologists, social workers and psychologists.

Currently, there are six components of Special Education Grants (SEGs) from the Ontario Ministry of Education to local school boards, each supposed to address specific supports and/or programming for students. The Ontario Ministry of Education maintains that overall funding will remain consistent over the next few years but will be realigned to better equalize the distribution of funds. In reality, the change to the model will reduce funding to all Toronto and York Region School Boards. A further concern is the “realignment of monies” allocated under the High Needs Allocation (HNA) funding.

This “redistribution, or realignment” of funding has resulted in less monies for all school boards. This reduction in funding diminishes supports and increases pressures on boards, schools, teachers and ultimately students. There is a real concern that school boards and education workers will be unable to deliver an individualized program to students and especially to those with special educational needs, yet this is their legal requirement. Moving forward, it is

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incumbent on all educational workers to speak openly about these concerns with parents, caregivers, guardians, school board officials, Trustees, SEAC committee members and MPPs.

Insufficient funding from the Ministry of Education and lack of resources has already placed teachers and education workers in difficult, even unsafe, situations when dealing with students with exceptionalities and/or students at risk. There is no doubt that cases of violent behaviour have escalated and will continue to do so due to the lack of funding for adequate programming, staffing and resources. The frustration of students and educational workers escalates these behaviours and affects everyone's learning and working conditions.

The Education Committee and Executive recommend that Labour Council:

1. Continue to work with local school board Trustees, Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) member organizations, Members of Provincial Parliament, and the Ontario Ministry of Education to ensure that there is proper and sufficient funding in special education in all school boards to meet student needs.
2. Encourage parents, caregivers, and guardians to advocate for proper support and sufficient funding for staffing, programming, equipment and resources.
3. Continue to address the Ontario Ministry of Education's funding cuts to educational staff and programs which has resulted in insufficient services. These cuts place workers and students in difficult and unsafe situations.
4. Continue to address the Ontario government regarding revenue or funds that could be used for special needs programs, or alternatively, funding priorities that could be shifted. For example, the government could elect to redirect monies from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) budget of up to \$250 million by changing Ontario's provincial testing to a random-sample model, or by eliminating some or all of the province-wide tests at grades 3, 6, 9, 10.