



January 27, 2020

Halton District School Board submission to the 2020 Provincial Budget Consultations

Honourable Rod Phillips
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Province of Ontario

I would like to extend our sincere thanks for being included in the provincial budget consultation, and having the opportunity to provide feedback for the education sector as it pertains to Halton. I certainly appreciate that the province is in a deficit position and with education being the second largest expenditure of the province, we are all responsible to identify efficiencies and determine how we make the best use of taxpayer funds.

There were a number of questions included in the invitation, we would like to comment on a number of them, as follows:

1. Where are your budgets stretched the most, and how can the government further ensure you can keep more money in your pocket?
 - Special education -- supporting our most vulnerable students. The allocation is based on old census data and statistics, which do not reflect the changing demographic of the Halton region and the growing needs within our system. Our funding allocation is more than \$19 million lower than our current expenses. Halton students achieve very well, however, the gap between them and the students with special needs remains stubbornly unchanged. The Ministry of Education has acknowledged the importance of investment in this area, by providing additional support through the Priorities and Partnership Funding, both for special education professionals and paraprofessionals, but also for mental health. It should be noted that school boards are the largest providers of mental health support for children and youth. The Priorities and Partnership Funding however, is a temporary funding, announced year to year, and school boards cannot plan long term for the availability of this funding.
 - School renewal backlog -- with aging facilities come increased cost to operate and maintain. The current backlog on all 107 buildings, over the next 5 years is \$296 million. We currently receive \$29 million in annual school condition improvement and school renewal grant, which is approximately 10% of the current need.

2. Are there barriers that prevent the growth of business, and creation of jobs, in your own communities?
- The Halton District School Board is not only the largest employer in Halton, but also one of the largest business partners for many local businesses, trades and professionals. The many reductions in funding this past year resulted in 189 less jobs, and many reductions to contracting work.
 - One aspect to consider here is the backlog of capital projects, which does not just put pressure on accommodating students in our growth areas, but it also created a gap in tendering construction projects province wide. School boards work with many skilled trades, creating many local jobs. School boards are also the stepping stones of preparing students for trades, and due to the significant increase in secondary class sizes, many trades or other non compulsory classes had to be cancelled, due to their lower enrolment.
 - We can also address here the many challenges we see in terms of the increased construction costs above the funding benchmark, causing future learning spaces to lack specialized classrooms, promoting the use of inferior quality materials in order to reduce upfront costs, but lead to higher operating and replacement costs down the road.
3. Our government has a plan to **prepare people for jobs**. We are modernizing the skilled trades sector, making it easier for employers to offer apprenticeship opportunities, and ensuring postsecondary programs are geared towards labour-driven outcomes.
- We struggle to support many specialized classes given the increased in provincial class size. These type of courses tend to have lower class averages than the provincial funding would allow, which would mean we may incur high class sizes in mandatory courses or not be able to run these programs at all.

I appreciate, as I said, the costs of education are challenging, but I would point out there is good value for those costs. As demonstrated by PISA results, Canada does extremely well in world ratings, Ontario does better than Canada as a whole, and Halton does even better than Ontario. We are very proud of our education system. As the government pointed out, there have been 300,000 jobs created in the last year; those who successfully filled those jobs, as well as the creators of those jobs are predominantly graduates of an Ontario public education system. Together we can continue to make a difference and prepare our children and youth for the jobs of tomorrow.

Stuart Miller,
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Halton District School Board