



TO:

Kate Gooding, Coordinator, Education Finance Issues
Education Finance Branch, Ministry of Education
20th Floor Mowat Block
900 Bay Street, Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

CC:

Donna Quan, Director of Education, TDSB
Carla Kisko, Associate Director of Finance & Operations, TDSB
Angelos Bacopoulos, Executive Officer – Facilities Services, TDSB

SUBJECT:

2015-16 Education Funding Consultation Submission from Fix Our Schools

Dear Kate,

Fix Our Schools is a parent advocacy group that believes every TDSB student should attend school in **safe, well-maintained buildings** and that public schools should be considered an **integral part of our public infrastructure**.

With over \$3 Billion in outstanding repairs and maintenance, TDSB schools are in unacceptable condition.

Please accept our input on 4 of the topics outlined in the Ministry 2015-16 Funding Consultation Guide. We trust that the Ministry of Education will give thoughtful consideration to our submission and will start to **work together** with the TDSB to ensure safe, well-maintained buildings for the 12.9% of Ontario's students who attend TDSB schools each day. The backlog of outstanding repairs and maintenance throughout TDSB schools is untenable and inexcusable. We look to our Provincial government to take a leadership role in resolving this issue.

Kind regards,

Krista Wylie – on behalf of Fix Our Schools



Identifying Efficiencies:

1. While acknowledging the principle of “respect for collective bargaining”, we encourage the Ministry of Education to please negotiate union contracts that allow for capital renewal costs to be competitive and fair at the TDSB. If the TDSB or any TDSB Parent Council finds that work can be done for a lower cost if completed by outside vendors, then “inside” vendors should be made to account for this cost differential or else risk losing the work.
2. Ideally, the TDSB Facilities Department would focus exclusively on custodial and maintenance services for its 600 schools. The current model of the TDSB Facilities Department also being responsible for capital renewal projects up to \$1.5 Million and school additions up to 500 square feet makes no sense – and it certainly makes no sense for the TDSB to operate a window fabrication facility! The TDSB is in the business of education and not in the business of construction. We encourage the Ministry to help the TDSB divest itself of the responsibility of managing capital renewal projects up to \$1.5 Million, additions up to 500 square feet, and window fabrication – all of which would more efficiently be handled if put out to competitive tender to third party vendors.



Making more efficient use of school space

1. Underutilized schools can mean many things...

- It could mean the half-empty high school in Penetanguishene that also happens to be the only high school for that community. In this case, we urge the Ministry to keep this school open. You must give more than lip service to your goal of “improved student achievement and well-being” and your pursuit of Community Hubs (see “Developing a Community Hubs Policy” from the mandate letter from Kathleen Wynne to Liz Sandals). Rather than ignoring the many alternate uses for a school that can benefit a community and create a community hub, we urge the Ministry to start **counting** that use in its calculation of utilization rates of schools. To close the only secondary school in a small, remote community, forcing that community’s high school students to travel distances to attend high school is surely not in those students or that community’s best interest?
- It could mean one of the 200 TDSB schools showing a utilization rate of less than 60% capacity that is using “empty space” to house programs such as childcare, ESL programs funded by MCIIT, LINC programs funded by the Federal government, or Adult Education programs funded by TCU for adult literacy and basic skills. Since the Ministry does not “count” spaces used for these non-TDSB pursuits, these schools show up as underutilized spaces and therefore are deemed an “inefficient use of school space”. We urge the Ministry to fully support its mandate to use “schools as community hubs”. The Ministry must start to “count” the space that is used in Ontario schools to teach recognized programs; provide childcare; or meet any other suitable community need towards the utilization rates it cites when pressuring school boards to close schools. We do not to accept the Province’s response that the TDSB cannot receive additional funding for capital renewal because its schools are underutilized because the utilization calculations are flawed and must be recalculated.



Community Partnerships:

1. We urge the Ministry to provide incentives to Cities and Municipalities to work WITH school boards. For example, in the TDSB, we would like to see the City share in the costs of building, improving and maintaining the valuable green spaces provided to all Torontonians via TDSB properties. For many communities in Toronto, TDSB green spaces are the primary source of parkland in that neighbourhood so it makes no sense that the TDSB should shoulder the entire cost of its maintenance and any improvements required.
2. If the Ministry is to pursue its idea of “school as community hubs” in earnest then, as stated in the previous section, we insist that the Ministry must start counting community use towards its utilization calculations.

Accountability

1. We urge the Ministry to work with the TDSB and the City of Toronto and take a leadership role in being accountable to the students of the TDSB and ensuring they attend school in safe, well-maintained buildings. Calling upon the TDSB year after year to sell off schools to pay for the required repairs and maintenance is not working as schools fall further and further into disrepair. We urge you to take accountability for this issue and stop hiding behind the refrain, “respect for lower tier government” in favour of “respect for students”. The TDSB needs your help in solving this problem.
2. We urge the Ministry to take accountability for developing health and safety standards for children in schools - much like the workplace health and safety standards for adults - and we urge the Ministry to fund those standards accordingly. It is disgraceful that in Ontario, there are children attending schools in such a state of disrepair as we commonly see throughout the TDSB.
3. We urge the Ministry to take some accountability for the dysfunction of the TDSB, which has struggled to function effectively since the Province mandated amalgamation over 15 years ago. The 250,000+ students of the largest school board in Canada look to the Ministry to provide leadership in working with the TDSB to finally get this mammoth ship on course.