



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

2016-17 Education Funding Consultation Submission from Fix Our Schools

November 30, 2015

Dear Kate,

Fix Our Schools is a grassroots, non-partisan, parent-led campaign asking for **safe, well-maintained Ontario public school buildings** that are funded as an **integral part of our public infrastructure – on par with transit**.

All 72 publicly funded School Boards in the province face capital repair backlogs, for a total of over \$15-billion of disrepair in Ontario schools. The \$11-billion in capital grants to School Boards over ten years is insufficient to address this unacceptable disrepair. New funding solutions must be found. Please give immediate consideration to:

- Revising O. Reg. 20/98 to **allow all School Boards to access EDCs** and use EDC money for repairs, capital projects **or** land purchase
- Allocating some of the promised **new federal infrastructure funding** to increase investment in repairing and rebuilding Ontario's public schools
- **Allocating the capital costs of maintaining school buildings and associated green spaces used as Community Hubs**, in proportion to usage by various public and community entities

The 2-million children who attend Ontario public schools deserve to have safe, well-maintained buildings; as do the countless children who attend **childcare/early learning** programs in these same schools; the adults who work every day in these buildings; and the community members who rely upon these buildings as important **Community Hubs**.

We trust that Kathleen Wynne's provincial government will take the lead in **working together** with School Boards, Municipalities, other Ministries, and the Federal Government to find the funding solutions needed to **fix our schools**.

Kind regards,

Krista Wylie – Co-Founder, Fix Our Schools Campaign; 416-525-1540



A. EFFICIENCIES AND REINVESTMENTS

Areas to Find New Efficiencies and Savings

1. The entire public sector must plan (and operate) in a more integrated way so that communities can benefit from **effective** use of public schools, while governments can be assured of **efficient** use of these public assets. Therefore, please:
 - a) **Continue to operate an ongoing central function** within the provincial government that is dedicated to Community Hubs, to encourage co-operation and co-ordination between all Ministries involved.
 - b) **Develop a new school utilization rate calculation**, which would reflect both school and **community** uses of a school building and attribute each use to a School Board, Municipality, Ministry, or Community Entity.
 - c) **Allocate the capital costs of maintaining school buildings and associated green space to respective School Boards, Municipalities, Ministries, and Community Entities in proportion to usage** identified in the new school utilization rate calculations proposed above in A.1-b. School Boards cannot shoulder all the capital costs of maintaining the public assets we call schools. All public sector and community entities using schools as Community Hubs must share the load.
 - d) **Change O. Reg 20/98 so that every School Board can benefit financially from new residential and commercial development within its boundaries; and can use Education Development Charges (EDCs) for repairs, capital projects, or purchasing new land.** To use school buildings efficiently, they must be kept in a state of good repair and EDCs are a funding source that could help achieve this state.
 - e) **Ensure School Boards receive the same financial benefit whether they sell an inefficiently used school building to a private developer or to another public entity.** Citizens paid for public buildings to be built; and expect these assets to be used as efficiently and effectively as possible, regardless of which public entity owns a given asset at a given time.
 - f) **Continue to identify and address the barriers that prevent School Boards, Municipalities and Ministries serving the same communities from making efficient use of schools and associated green space.** For instance, School Boards and Municipalities spending public money on OMB hearings is inefficient and does not serve the best interest of citizens.



2. While acknowledging the principle of “respect for collective bargaining”, **please negotiate union contracts that allow for capital renewal costs to be competitive and fair at School Boards across the Ontario.** If any Ontario parent or 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. Ideally, the Facilities Departments in all School Boards would focus exclusively on custodial and maintenance services for their schools.

Where might reinvestments be most effective in supporting ongoing efficiencies or improving programs?

1. **Please prioritize the repair and rebuilding of Ontario schools to eliminate the \$15-billion repair backlog** as an upfront investment to achieve long-term efficiencies. For 2015-16, the Province is allocating less than 5% of what is needed to fully address the disrepair in Ontario’s schools, which means the \$15-billion repair backlog will continue to grow and the urgency of repair items will increase.

The Province must find funding solutions to prevent money from being wasted on reactive repairs, which are estimated to cost 173% more than proactive repairs. One partial funding solution is for the provincial government to use some of the promised **new federal infrastructure funding** to increase investment in repairing and rebuilding Ontario’s public schools.

2. Please design and build new schools with the foresight and intention to use these public assets as Community Hubs in the future, weighing the costs and benefits of building for Community Hub use vs. retrofitting later.



B. CONTINUING TO MAKE MORE EFFICIENT USE OF SCHOOL SPACE

First, we'd like to positively acknowledge:

- The substantial increase in capital funding provided by the provincial government to School Boards for the 2015-16 year via SCI funding.
- The change in the distribution of SCI funding to School Boards such that this money is now allocated based on a school board's identified renewal needs.
- The changes to the provincial policy governing the Proceeds of Disposition from the sale of surplus School Board properties such that the use of these proceeds is now restricted to renewal work.

Does it make sense to incorporate utilization into the funding approach for SCI to support efficient use of space?

1. Current utilization rate calculations do not reflect community use of schools and furthermore, are flawed for calculating school use. For example, FDK has decreased utilization rates of school buildings by increasing capacities of schools in the following disingenuous, unacceptable ways:
 - Rooms that were previously unloaded and arguably should never be counted as viable learning spaces (basement rooms, rooms with no windows) were converted to FDK classrooms and consequently became loaded
 - Capacity loadings of kindergarten rooms were changed from 20 to 26 students, even though the square footage of these rooms did not change.

Therefore, utilization rates should not be incorporated into the allocation of SCI funding. Instead, please:

- a) **Change utilization rate calculations for school use immediately so that the following type of space is not loaded: non-rotary classrooms in basements; any classroom with no window.**
- b) **Provide constructive and comparable feedback to every Ontario School Board on its capital plan.** Trustees, staff and parents alike must know where their School Board stands in the eyes of the Province in terms of "efficient use of space" if they are to be motivated to move quickly on "right-sizing". Any feedback must include how the provincial mandate to realize schools as Community Hubs corresponds to each School Board's capital plans.



Feedback on O. Reg. 444/98

1. We agree with the identified barriers and subsequent recommendations made by Karen Pitre's Advisory Panel to the Province if public schools are to be realized as Community Hubs. **Please continue to work with Karen Pitre to identify, understand and address all barriers to realizing schools as Community Hubs.**
2. **Please determine the details on how a School Board would be made "whole" via a provincial revenue tool or funding mechanism in the case where a school is sold below fair market value.** This detail must be fully fleshed out and understood before School Boards would reasonably want to extend the property circulation period; and expand the list of public entities to receive notification of surplus property disposition. We note that the Ministry has already started consultation on recommendations on O. Reg. 444/98 without communicating how School Boards would be made "whole", which seems preemptive.
3. Please create a central list of all provincial public assets that could be used as Community Hubs. Move all surplus schools to this central list, at which point the utilization rate of these surplus schools would stop being included in that School Board's average utilization rate. **Once a school was moved to this provincial central list of potential Community Hubs, School Boards must be made "whole" and receive fair remuneration for the asset.**

Central and transparent communication of all available public space to School Boards, Municipalities, Ministries and Community Entities would help in planning and co-ordination for creating Community Hubs.



Are there any issues you feel the Ministry needs to address in order to simultaneously promote the efficient use of school space through SBEM while supporting the expansion of Community Hubs?

1. As mentioned already in Section A. of this submission, current calculations for school utilization rates that are important for SBEM are flawed for school use and do not reflect community hub utilization. Therefore, to align the goal of using schools effectively as Community Hubs with the goal of using schools efficiently, **please develop a new school utilization rate calculation**, which would reflect all school and community uses of a school building and attribute each use to a School Board, Municipality, Ministry, or Community Entity to **acknowledge that both school and community use of school buildings constitutes an “efficient” use of space.**



C. EXPANDED ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

The Province holds power over both the funding of public schools and most of the rules that guide the delivery of public education in this province. Over the past twenty years, under the funding and watch of the Province, every single one of Ontario's publicly funded School Boards has accumulated a capital repair backlog, for a total of \$15-billion of disrepair in schools across this province.

Many repair items included in this \$15-billion repair backlog pertain to fire suppression/alarm systems, electrical systems, heating/cooling systems and structural issues. While these types of repair items are often invisible, **if there is failure in these systems before repairs can be done, the risk to student safety is far greater.**

Therefore, before an Ontario student gets seriously injured, please:

- a) Take accountability for the provincial government's role in the \$15-billion repair backlog in Ontario schools and work with School Boards, Municipalities, and our new Federal Government to find funding solutions to resolve this \$15-billion problem.
- b) Provide data once per year on the capital repair backlogs of all Ontario School Boards to every Ontario School Board's Director, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Facilities Officer, and Chair; and ensure this data is made public so citizens can see and understand the disrepair that exists in school buildings in their communities.
- c) Develop health and safety standards for children in schools - much like the workplace health and safety standards for adults - and fund those standards accordingly.