



2020-21 Grants for Student Needs Announcement

Introduction

The Ministry's Grants for Student Needs (GSN) announcement was much later than usual this year. Normally released in March or April (at the latest), the GSN release finally came on June 19, 2020. The lateness of the announcement has caused problems as boards have already initiated their staffing processes for the Fall without knowing what their funding would actually be. School Boards' budgeting processes have also been delayed because of the late release of the GSN.

Overall GSN funding is projected to be \$25.5 billion this year, a 2.97% increase from last year. Per pupil funding is increasing by \$250/student, which represents a 2% increase over last year. This increase will cover the cost of all union settlements in the sector (including wage and benefit costs and changes to class size), inflation, and increases to enrolment. That is, the funding increase is based on commitments that have already been made, or because of factors that are beyond the control of the government.

Last year saw the largest cut in per pupil funding since 2012-13 (the year of Bill 115, which imposed concessions and wage freezes on unions in the sector). In real terms (adjusted for inflation and enrolment growth), per pupil funding this year is still lower than it was in 2018-19. We will need to continue to pressure the government for additional funding for school boards to meet existing needs and add staff to improve quality of education.

Every school board will see increased overall funding next year. This will help us resist job cuts for the coming year. Even in boards with declining enrolment there will be a nominal increase in funding, which gives CUPE the opportunity to argue against job cuts and for the preservation of service levels. That being said, some boards will see cuts to specific grants or allocations. Additional analysis of board level cuts to specific grants will be sent to locals soon.

Overview of Changes

Overall this announcement represents a status quo GSN. There have been some superficial changes to the GSN, for example moving funds from existing grants to create new grants, or changes to the names of some allocations. Total funding (adjusted for inflation and enrolment growth), however, has effectively only been restored to the just below the 2018-19 levels. That is, real per-pupil funding is still lower in year 2 of the Progressive Conservative government than it was in the last year of the Liberal government – which was itself too low to meet school needs.

Aside from a small investment of \$25 million to meet some COVID-19 related needs, there is no additional funding dedicated to meet increased needs due to the pandemic. Dedicated funding for additional cleaning, or to provide additional supports to students with special educational needs, or for additional administrative needs was not announced. Although the Ministry also released its guidelines for reopening schools on the same day as the GSN announcement, it is not clear how boards will pay for all of the additional supports that the Ministry recommends.

Highlights:

- Increased benchmark funding for wages and benefits, and funding to cover changes in class sizes. The Supplementary Area Factors for base school operations will also be adjusted to reflect changes in class size.
- Response to the COVID-19 outbreak: \$25 million in new funding for “extraordinary costs” (\$10 million for mental health supports and \$15 million for technology related costs).
- Creation of a new grant, the Support for Students Fund (SSF). CUPE’s portion of this fund is referred to in the Central Agreement as the Investment in System Priorities (what had been called the Local Priorities Fund).
- Increase in cost benchmark of 2% for the non-staff portion of the School Operations Allocation to reflect increasing prices of electricity, natural gas, insurance and other costs.
- Student transportation funding will be maintained at last year’s level, with an adjustment for enrolment growth. There is a reduction in the 2019-20 Student Transportation Grant (\$24.8 million) because of reduced fuel costs during the COVID-19 shutdown.
- \$54.4 million is being transferred to the GSN from other funding sources (namely the PPF). This will include funding for mental health workers (\$24.8 million), experiential learning (\$12 million), the Northern Supports Initiative, which supports students with special education needs in all northern school boards (\$7 million), curriculum and assessment implementation (\$4.3 million), executive compensation (\$3.9 million), and funding for licencing of educational software (\$2.4 million).
- The Program Leadership Grant (PLG) is being moved from the School Board Administration and Governance Grant (SBAGG) to become a new grant. Superficially this makes it appear as if the SBAGG is being cut. However, the new PLG is larger than the apparent cut to the SBAGG, meaning that funding for school board administration is actually being increased.
- Funding for school condition improvement and school renewal remains at \$1.4 billion.

The GSN provides the bulk of funding for school boards in Ontario. Also released on June 19 was the announcement about the Priorities and Partnership Fund (PPF), formerly known as Education Programs – Other (EPO). The Ministry plans on allocating over \$300 million in PPF money but has only committed to approximately \$117 million right now. Additional announcements will be made at a later date.

Funding through the PPF includes money for Indigenous education (\$3.98 million), Math (\$40.26 million), Mental health and wellbeing (\$9.67 million), special education (\$11.15 million), assisting students' transition to post-secondary education (\$23.7 million), supporting vulnerable students to stay in school (\$14.71 million), and money to find education system efficiencies (\$12.32 million).

Overall Funding Trends

Overall funding for education is increasing to meet commitments the Ministry has already made in central bargaining, and cost increases that are beyond its control. This represents a slight reversal of the cuts that were made last year, although does not completely restore real per-pupil funding to the level set prior to the election of the Conservative government. Every board will see an increase to overall funding, however some boards will see a cut in individual grants. This might trigger potential layoffs for the coming school year. Locals that are facing job cuts should work with their National Representative and staff assigned to the school board sector to support the fight against any cuts to CUPE staff.

Funding Changes to Grants

Pupil Foundation Grant

The largest grant in the GSN is the Pupil Foundation Grant, the per-pupil allocation that funds in-class staff including Educational Assistants (EAs), Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECEs), teachers. This grant also covers the costs of textbooks and classroom supplies. The PFG is being increased by 6.7% this year to reflect the change in class size negotiated by the teacher unions. This has also meant that money that was in the teacher job protection fund has been moved from the Cost Adjustment and Teacher Qualification and Experience Grant (which accounts for the apparent cut in that grant).

School Foundation Grant

The School Foundation Grant is created to fund school office support staff, as well as funding for principals and vice-principals and office administration supplies. Overall funding for the SFG is being increased by 0.8%

Special Education Grant

The Special Education Grant is one of the few grants that is "sweatered". That is, money allocated through this grant can only be spent on special education. There are 6 allocations¹ that make up

¹ The 6 allocations in the Special Education Grant are: Special Education Per Pupil Allocation (SEPPA), the Differential Special Education Needs Amount (DSENA) the Special Equipment Amount, the Special Incidence Portion, the Care, Treatment, Custody and Correctional Amount, and the Behaviour Expertise Amount.

the Special Education Grant. Boards have some flexibility on how to allocate this money but must spend it on special education. This grant is being increased by just under 2%.

School Operations Allocation

This allocation covers the cost of cleaning and maintenance of schools as well as non-staffing costs such as heating and lighting. Overall funding is being increased by just under 2%.

Other Funding

Other funding for CUPE positions is found in the many allocations that make up various grants of the GSN. Some detail on this funding can be found in the Technical Paper that is released with the GSN. Deeper analysis of trends in those funding areas is complicated by the fact that many allocations have been moved from one grant to another. Analysis of these trends will be coming soon, along with greater detail on board specific grant allocations. Where boards are indicating that they are planning on laying off CUPE members locals are encouraged to contact their National Representative and staff assigned to the sector to assist with fighting back against cuts.

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