



**Waterloo Region District School Board**

51 Ardelt Avenue  
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wrdsb.ca

June 27, 2023

Hon. Stephen Lecce,  
Minister of Education  
315 Front Street,  
14th Floor Toronto,  
ON M7A 0B8

Re: School Board Funding

Dear Minister Lecce,

Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) Trustees have approved the 2023-24 school year budget. In doing so, the Board was forced to make some very difficult decisions regarding staffing and resources for next school year, and we would ask that the Ministry examine its funding approach and address some of the critical gaps we have identified, which are putting pressure on our staff and students to achieve better outcomes.

Trustees acknowledge the critical importance of fiscal responsibility and assure you that staff have undertaken a thorough review of expenditures in order to present a budget that aligns with the shared goals of the Ministry and our board, and complies with Ministry budget regulations. That being said, the following areas represent significant financial pressures for the board, and we believe the Ministry has a shared responsibility in terms of addressing these as we move forward.

To begin, we wanted to draw your attention to some of the challenges created by the new student transportation funding model. While the new funding model represents a positive step forward in terms of allocating funding based on a common set of standards and benchmarks, the model as presented in 2023-24 is creating some additional pressures for the WRDSB and other school boards across the province. Our existing contracts with operators, which were competitively procured, have increases built-in that are tied directly to the consumer price index (5.8%); the new funding model does not address the specific escalation clauses transportation consortia have built into their agreements. The new funding model also does not recognize passenger vehicles (minivans and taxis specifically) as a funded mode of transportation. In our area, Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region (STSWR) primarily uses these passenger vehicles to transport students with exceptional needs, because we recognize that depending on the student's exceptionalities, a small passenger vehicle may contribute to a better educational experience overall (shorter route times, quieter environment). Like many boards, the WRDSB continues to regularly overspend our transportation budget to meet the



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needs of the students in our district, but with the introduction of the new funding model in 2023-24, our deficit in transportation has increased from approximately \$1.49M (2022-23) to \$2.92M (2023-24).

To help maintain the cleanliness, maintenance and day-to-day operation of our schools, we ask that the Ministry examine its benchmark funding for school operations within the Grants for Student Needs (GSN), which have not kept up with inflation. As you are aware, some contractual obligations, such as school bus operator contracts, are tied to the rate of inflation through the consumer price index (CPI). Others, such as construction tenders or contracts that come up for renewal on an annual basis (technology licenses, maintenance services and supplies), reflect the anticipation of sustained price increases (inflation). In our facility services area, several contracts are renewing this summer for consumable supplies such as paper towels and cleaning supplies, and the anticipated increase in costs for 2023-24 is approximately 15% (commodity and contract specific). Similarly, renewals for various software licenses are also impacted by price inflation, with year-over-year increases ranging from 5-7%. Our utility costs are also expected to rise significantly as global demand for various energy sources (natural gas) exceed current supply and the federal carbon tax increases. While we appreciate the 2% non-salary benchmark increase that has been provided for 2023-24, it is insufficient given the price escalations we are experiencing on a day-to-day basis.

The [Canada Pension Plan \(CPP\) enhancement](#), introduced in January 2019, is designed to help increase retirement income for working Canadians and their families. As you are aware, school boards and employees contribute equally to the CPP, and these costs are funded through the salary and benefits benchmarks provided by the Ministry of Education. As the CPP enhancement has been phased-in over the past number of years, there is no evidence that Ministry funding benchmarks have increased to reflect the higher employer contributions that are required. For the 2023-24 school year, we are estimating the incremental cost to the WRDSB is approximately \$1.26M. As CPP remittances are a statutory requirement, we are asking the Ministry to examine its benefits benchmarks to ensure that they provide sufficient funding to cover the obligations boards have under this program.

Lastly, we want to draw your attention to the ongoing operational and financial impacts of employee short-term sick leave plans. Prior to the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, there had been a consistent upward trend in short-term supply staff costs across the province. The onset of the pandemic disrupted this trend and staff at the WRDSB noted a significant decline in utilization of short-term sick leave across all employee groups in the latter part of the 2019-20 school year and the entire 2020-21 school year. This disruption continued in the early part of 2021-22, but since then, we have witnessed a return to pre-pandemic utilization and the financial and operational pressures associated with short-term sick leave. Through the GSN, the WRDSB is projected to receive \$11.11M in funding to cover short-term supply costs (teachers



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and DECEs); for 2023-24, our forecasted expenditures in this area are \$21.99M, creating a pressure of approximately \$10.88M for these two employee groups alone. While we appreciate that you have acknowledged the pressures associated with short-term sick leave, school boards have limited options to address this challenge since sick-time provisions are centrally negotiated. We are asking the Ministry to review the benchmarks included in the Pupil Foundation Grant to ensure they adequately support the sick-time provisions that have been centrally negotiated.

Minister Lecce, we respectfully request the Ministry of Education consider these requests to support the WRDSB and other Ontario public school boards with similar budget pressures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joanne Weston".

Joanne Weston  
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees  
Waterloo Region District School Board

cc: WRDSB Trustees  
Ontario Public School Boards' Association Member Board Chairs  
Local Members of Provincial Parliament  
Deputy Minister of Education  
Regional Manager - West, Ministry of Education  
Assistant Deputy Minister, Capital and Business Support Division, Ministry of Education  
Region of Waterloo Regional Chair  
Local Mayors