Appendix C: Discussion Points to Frame the Research and Consultation Process

The following information was contained in a discussion paper posted on the task force website and distributed to members of the Stakeholders Advisory Committee and other participants in the consultation process.

In determining whether the current funding approach meets its original objectives, the task force will consider questions that relate to the achievement of these five principles. The questions raised in this guide are designed to prompt discussion. However, discussion does not need to be limited to these questions; nor need the recommendations only reflect the answers to these questions. Your input is needed to develop effective and practical recommendations. All aspects of the funding formula are open to discussion.

Quality of Student Learning and Achievement

The review of the student-focused approach to education funding recognizes that the funding formula is not an end in itself. The purpose of the funding formula is to serve as an instrument to ensure that all Ontario’s schools have the appropriate resources to advance the highest quality of student learning and achievement. In this regard, the student-focused funding mechanism should reflect relevance, stability, and efficiency in the structure of cost benchmarks.

The Education Equality Task Force is considering questions such as:

- What core programs and services are essential to your definition of a quality education?
- How effective is the current funding approach in providing appropriate and stable support to these programs and services, including personnel costs, transportation, English as a second language, special education, and continuing education, among others? In other words, does per pupil funding reflect the cost of per pupil programs and services needed to achieve a quality educational experience?
- Should boards have some access to local revenue, in an equitable fashion, to deal with discretionary programs and services beyond the education programs and services covered by student-focused funding?

Equity and Fairness

One of the key objectives of student-focused funding is to ensure that all students have access to a quality education. Some of the questions that arise are:

- How effective is the funding mechanism in responding to different needs of students and different needs of school boards in urban, northern, and rural areas; among small and large urban boards; and among public, Catholic, French-, and English-language school boards?
- Are there differences among school board costs that require funding to be more responsive?

Responsiveness to Local Needs

As indicated in the discussion of equity and fairness above, there is a great diversity in Ontario that affects learning opportunities and costs. A system that responds to local needs and preferences will encourage local participation and accountability. Areas of focus include:

Student Transportation

The Transportation Grant model predates the benchmark-based funding formula. The Ministry of Education has been working with school boards
and transportation providers to revise the transportation component of the funding formula.

- What elements should be included in a new model?
- Would incentives be appropriate and effective to encourage boards to form partnerships to deliver transportation services?

**Special Education**

These needs vary from student to student and board to board. Individual boards therefore offer a range of programs to meet student needs. To improve the match between board funding and student needs, the government has undertaken a review of Intensive Support Amount funding to inform decisions about the Special Education Grant for 2003–04. In this regard:

- How should the government assess boards’ needs for funding to support special education programs and services?
- How can funding be distributed in a way that is both responsive to students’ needs for services and administratively efficient?
- What approach to special education funding would be effective in balancing demonstrated need and efficiency?

**School Renewal**

The Pupil Accommodation Grant includes a School Renewal component to finance the cost of repairs and renovations. All boards receive grants for school renewal. The grant is based on data reported by school boards in 1997.

- Has the grant for School Renewal effectively provided funding for repairs and renovations?
- How frequently should the data for the School Renewal grant be updated?
- Are the criteria currently included in the Pupil Accommodation Grant comprehensive enough to address issues of school repair and maintenance?
- How can new pupil places be dealt with in a fair and equitable manner?

**Accountability**

The education system must be accountable to students, parents, and taxpayers for the resources it uses and the results it produces. A number of mechanisms were introduced to promote accountability, such as the “enveloped spending” provisions, which require school boards to direct funding toward specific expenditure categories. Some of the questions that arise are:

- How effective are the current accountability parameters such as reporting requirements, legislative parameters, etc., in improving learning outcomes?
- Is reporting of expenditures sufficiently transparent?
- How effective are current funding envelope requirements at providing appropriate support to specific programs and services?
- Should the government give boards the flexibility to remove or restructure expenditure envelopes?
- Should the Local Priorities Amount (introduced in 2001–02) be expanded to give boards increased flexibility to provide for local discretionary programs?
- Are there other changes that should be considered to provide boards with a more appropriate level of flexibility?
- If the government provided boards with multi-year funding, would that give boards greater flexibility and improve their planning processes?

**Affordability**

The cost of education in Ontario, like the quality of education, should be comparable with the most effective school systems in other jurisdictions.

Under student-focused funding, school boards’ revenues are largely driven by enrolment, and both operating and capital revenues are determined by formulas that include provincial cost benchmarks.
The government has introduced annual refine-
ments to the funding model to address cost pres-
ses and to implement policy changes. The Local
Priorities Amount, first created in 2001–02, will
allocate $400 million to school boards in 2002–03 in
proportion to their share of the total enrolment.
This funding is flexible, and can be used by boards
to address local priorities, including cost pressures.

The cost benchmark for salaries of teachers and
most other board staff was increased by 1.95% in
2000–2001. All other cost benchmarks are cur-
rently at 1997 levels.

• What is the best approach to recognize
  increased costs, while continuing to give
  boards incentives to use resources efficiently?

• Student-focused funding determines each
  board’s allocation without regard to the source
  of revenue. Should this approach be main-
tained, or should boards have access to other
  sources of revenue to increase their flexibility?

• How can cost benchmarks be kept updated?

• How can stability in funding be sustained to
  assist planning?

• Are there alternative approaches to bargaining
  that would achieve fairness while promoting
greater stability and improved budgeting?