

Qs & As

GRANTS FOR STUDENT NEEDS

WEBCAST

1. If enrolment is going up, why are we closing schools?

- A. Although enrolment is going up provincially, this rate varies from school board to school board. Some school boards, such as those in northern and rural regions, are still expected to face declining enrolment over the longer term. Some boards are experiencing different rates of growth in different areas within their boundaries. We do expect all boards to continue to look for opportunities to make better use of their school space, which could include closures and/or consolidations.

2. The GSN increase is more than what was announced last year. How can the government afford such a large increase in tight fiscal times?

- A. Publicly funded education continues to be a major priority. Our goal remains to improve the achievement of all our students, and increase public confidence in our schools. Strong publicly funded schools are at the core of our strategy to build an inclusive and caring Ontario with a strong competitive economy.

Despite the challenging fiscal picture, this year's funding numbers are powerful evidence of our continued commitment to education in Ontario.

Since 2002-03, the government has increased annual funding for Ontario boards by over \$8B, an increase of 56% in operating funding compared to the 2002-03 school year.

3. How many boards are seeing their funding increase/decline?

- A. All 72 school boards will see their funding increase in 2014-15 compared to 2013-14, even when 2013-14 GSN funding is adjusted to add in the FDK funding in EPO.

This is mainly due to the following factors:

- The increase in FDK enrolment;
- The components of the 2012-14 labour framework that impact 2014-15 (e.g., no unpaid days, ETFO catch-up);
- Investments to keep up with costs such as transportation and utilities

4. What can you tell school boards who say that the funding announced is not enough to cover their increased costs?

- A. We remain confident that with over \$8B more in GSN funding in board budgets since 2002-03, including an increase of 3.1% over last year, school boards have the resources, the capacity, and the expertise to meet their costs while pursuing further efficiencies in the system.

As well, we are increasing funding in key areas to help boards keep up with costs. For example,

- the non-salary benchmark of the School Operations Allocation will be increased by 2% to help boards manage increased energy costs as well as insurance costs;
- more funding will be allocated specifically to help school boards with projected increases in electricity costs;

- there will be an increase in construction benchmarks; and
- there will be increased funding for transportation.

It is also worth noting that we are continuing to protect funding for student transportation from the full impact of declining enrolment.

5. Can we assume that the increase of 3.1% in the 2014-15 GSN is due to the elimination of unpaid days and to pay for the ETFO catch-up?

- A. In addition to the components of the 2012-14 labour framework that impact 2014-15, such as no unpaid days and the elimination of the salary differential between ETFO and non-ETFO teachers, the increase in GSN funding in 2014-15 is as a result of the full integration of FDK into the GSN as well as some other underlying changes related to enrolment across the province.

6. For clarification, regarding the increase in the School Ops benchmark (2% non-salary component, 7.3% electricity), can you provide details behind the calculation?

- A. The 2% increase to the non-staff portion of the School Operations Allocation benchmark to help boards manage increases in commodity prices and insurance costs is consistent with the approach taken in previous years.

The electricity increase is based on the Ministry of Energy's Long-Term Energy Plan, which forecasts electricity costs and prices for Ontario. The Ministry of Energy recently revised this document, which is available on their website, with new forecasts.

7. Can you provide more information on the top-up changes?

- A. As you know, there are two levels of top-up funding: base top-up and enhanced top-up.

All schools operating below full capacity and older than five years of age are eligible for base top-up. Schools at, or less than 65% utilization are to be provided a 10% top-up rate. Schools above 65% utilization are to be provided a 15% top-up rate up to a maximum of 95% utilization rate.

Enhanced top-up is provided to schools that are designated as rural or supported. The changes to the 2014-15 GSN do not impact funding levels for schools receiving enhanced top-up.

8. Will the FDK transitional funding be continued in 2014-15 for the final year of the FDK roll out?

- A. Transition funding was one of the components of the incremental FDK funding provided through Education Programs – Other (EPO). It was funding to support the phase-in of FDK. This phase-in period started in 2010-11 and is now ended with full implementation of FDK in 2014-15. The funding allocated through this Transition

Grant has been transferred to the GSN and is now being allocated through the various GSN grants.

9. Is the \$750 m for school consolidations to be part of the regular capital grant process?

A. In support of the School Board Efficiency and Modernization (SBEM) initiative, the government has established a new, four-year, \$750M School Consolidation Capital (SCC) program to help boards manage their school space more efficiently. Details regarding the allocation of this new funding will be available shortly.

10. Is it the intention of the school consolidation guideline review to reduce required timelines?

A. The Ministry has received a significant amount of feedback from school boards, parents, students, and community members about accommodation review processes. Partly in response to this feedback, the Ministry has established the Capital Advisory Committee (CAC) that is composed of sector representatives. One of the tasks of the CAC is to review of the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG). The Ministry is seeking input into possible options to revise the PARG to make the process more flexible for school boards, while still balancing the need for community input.

11. Regarding the proposed changes to top-up funding and the related capacity utilization calculations: will the Ministry be adjusting the classroom weightings in SFIS to align with the different class-size requirements for FDK, primary classes, etc.?

A. As FDK will be fully implemented in the 2014-15 school year, we expect boards to add and report additional capacity over the spring and summer of 2014 and report, at a facility level, their enrolment projections for 2014-15. These updates will be captured in the top-up calculations for the 2014-15 GSN. Since FDK was launched, capital funding decisions for individual projects have been based on the capacity loadings attributed to FDK classrooms (loading of 26) and enrolment numbers that are based on head count.

12. Is the renewal grant going to be allowed to be non-capital expenditures on major maintenance projects?

A. The additional funding on renewal that relates to School Condition Improvement must be spent on capital expenditures that meet the TCA guidelines. For the regular renewal grant, boards will still have flexibility as in the past, but will be limited to prior years' spending patterns.

13. Why can't the EFIS forms come out the same day as the GSN announcement?

A. The forms in the past have been released shortly after the GSN announcement to allow for implementation once the regulations have been filed. We are expecting the forms to be released within the same time frame as in the past.

14. How does the base top up funding relate to space used by community use during the school day?

- A. To encourage new partnerships, school boards are required to remove only 50% of their on-the-ground (OTG) capacity that is occupied by partners during the day (for six months or more) from the School Facility Inventory System (SFIS). The remaining OTG capacity retained in SFIS continues to be eligible for top-up funding. For additional details, see memorandum 2010:B1.

The changes announced for the 2014-15 school year do not impact this policy. While we will continue to engage stakeholders on ways that the GSN can support, and drive, more efficient use of school space, we also intend to consult with other provincial Ministries to develop a policy on how best to promote the sharing of space with a wider range of partners.

15. Can you give us a breakdown of the 3.1% overall increase please?

- A. The increase of 3.1% over 2013-14 is mainly due to the following factors:
- The increase in FDK enrolment as full implementation occurs in 2014-15;
 - The components of the 2012-14 labour framework that impact 2014-15 (e.g., no unpaid days, ETFO catch-up);
 - Investments to keep up with costs such as transportation and utilities

As well, the increase in GSN reflects underlying changes related to enrolment across the province.

16. What is the most significant decrease in special education funding a Board will realize in 2014/2015?

- A. Information on the impact of the 2014-15 GSN on school boards can be found in the GSN regulations, the technical paper, and board-by-board school board funding projections for 2014-15, all of which available on the [Ministry website](#).