December 3, 2010

Dear Board Chair,

I am pleased to provide you with details on the upcoming consultation for the 2011/12 Grants for Student Needs (GSN).

As you know, we consult annually with the education sector on how to improve the funding formula for the coming year, and this year will be no different. Since 2003, our government has implemented a variety of recommendations to improve the funding formula, including significant funding increases. Funding to school boards has increased by almost $6 billion, or 40 percent, that translates into a per-pupil increase of over $3,500 a student, or almost 50 percent.

These increases have led to results for our students, with test scores and graduation rates going up and class sizes going down. We are committed to ensuring that our children get the best education that allows them to become high-skilled, knowledgeable citizens.

In keeping with various recommendations, and with your guidance and support, we have made a series of significant investments and structural changes. These adjustments make the formula more responsive to the needs of students, schools and school boards, and include:

- introducing measures to support student achievement and reduce gaps in achievement
- moving to a more school-based funding formula
- aligning grants and school board costs
- providing better support for rural and northern schools, and
- improving the condition of our school buildings

We have also increased the number of teachers and staff in the system – despite a decline in enrolment – and we have used the funding formula to support eight years of labour peace and stability.

With your help and advice, these reforms will continue. That is why we are again seeking your views and suggestions on changes to continue to improve the funding formula.

Despite the current economic climate, we have expanded our annual GSN consultation sessions to meet our commitment of reviewing the funding formula in 2010/11. With stakeholders’ input, we have established a working group to review the functioning of the School Board Administration and Governance Grant. And, consistent with the mandate of the Provincial Discussion Table (PDT) Agreements, we have initiated a review of the School Operations Allocation with our PDT partners.
We have also launched a comprehensive consultation on the Special Education Grant and have held regional sessions throughout the province for labour organizations, school boards, trustees and advocacy organizations to gather feedback and ideas.

I am pleased to announce that representatives of major education sector organizations will be invited to take part in two dedicated one-day sessions to discuss special education and declining enrolment funding. The special education session will offer a chance for the ministry to present its findings and the feedback it received from this year’s consultations. The declining enrolment funding session will focus on ensuring that our approach reflects the realities on the ground.

For the 2011/12 GSN consultations, in addition to topics that you may wish to address, I ask you to focus on three questions:

1. In light of the province’s fiscal challenges, are there measures that could reduce expenditures and/or make the system more efficient and effective?
2. What areas of the funding formula that support the government’s student achievement agenda should we focus on for further reforms?
3. Are there changes in reporting that could make the system more transparent and accountable while ensuring that we are streamlining the number of reports boards are required to submit?

I am asking trustee associations to submit their formal comments and suggestions to the ministry by January 31, 2011. I welcome receiving your views, which you can direct to Didem Proulx, Director of the Education Finance Branch, at didem.proulx@ontario.ca. You may also wish to provide your comments through your trustee association.

We expect the consultation sessions will conclude by the middle of January, with the results, along with what we receive from sector submissions, being used to develop the 2011/12 GSN regulation. We are planning to release the regulation in the early spring after the 2011 Provincial Budget.

As a government, we have made great strides in fixing the education funding formula. With your continued support, goodwill and generous counsel, we will continue to refine the funding formula in a way that reflects the needs of our students and the education sector as a whole.

Sincerely,

Leona Dombrowsky
Minister of Education

c. Directors of Education