Transportation Initiative for Children and Youth in Care
Call for Applications

Program Intent

As outlined in Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario, Ontario schools need to be places where all students can succeed in a culture of high expectations. It is particularly important to provide the best possible learning opportunities and supports for students who may be at a higher risk of not succeeding. The Minister of Education’s 2016 mandate letter reiterates the renewed vision’s commitment to close the achievement gap and improve graduation rates for underrepresented groups of students, including children and youth in care (CYIC).

According to the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS), in 2012-13, only 46% of Crown wards ages 19 and 20 had graduated from high school. Though not directly comparable due to differences in methodologies, the provincial rate of students graduating within five years of starting high school was 83% in 2012-13 (the current 2015-16 five-year graduation rate is 86.5%).

When children and youth in care experience moves between placements (e.g., due to placement breakdown), this can result in school and school board changes within a school year. This instability may make it difficult for children and youth to focus on their studies as they adjust. One of the recommendations of the Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario’s Child Welfare System¹ was to provide “support, including transportation, to allow children and youth to stay in their schools of origin if this is the best option for them.”

Such challenges could be mitigated by providing the student transportation from their new residential placement to their home school, on a temporary basis until a more natural transition time (e.g., until the end of the current semester or for the remainder of the school year in question).

Program Details

The Ontario 2017 Budget committed funding for the implementation of education liaisons and transportation supports to assist in improving educational outcomes for children and youth in care.

School boards are expected to collaborate with children’s aid societies, including Indigenous societies, to determine what transportation arrangement would be in the best interest of the child or youth. This includes coordination through the education liaison or other society representative if an educational liaison is not in place². The

¹ In 2013, the MCYS established Youth Leaving Care (YLC) Working Group, made up of youth in and from care and community partners, released its final report, the Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario’s Child Welfare System, http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/childrensaid/youthleavingcare.pdf .
² New funding to support education liaison positions in Societies was announced October 23rd, 2017;
consent and voice of the student must also be a key consideration when determining what is in their best interest. Promoting the best interests, protection and well-being of children is the paramount purpose of the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)\(^3\) that sets out the framework for services to support children and youth in care.

Transportation supports and education liaisons are expected to build on progress made to date in strengthening local relationships and programs to support CYIC. This includes collaborative work done through the Crown Ward Education Championship Teams and the local joint protocols for student achievement (JPSA).

**CYIC Transportation Funding: Eligibility Criteria**

Funding is being made available to provincially funded school boards for student transportation based on the criteria below.

- **To allow a student to remain in their home school on a temporary basis** until a more natural transition time.

- **When an in-year change of residence results in a change in school.** This would also include when a change of residence occurs in the final year before a transition year (e.g., in final year before a transition between primary and secondary school or within final year of graduation from secondary school).

- **The student wishes to remain in their home school and it is in the best interest of the student** to remain in the home school based on relevant factors (e.g., strong supportive relationships in home school; risk to student achievement and/or well-being posed by changing schools in-year; feasibility and safety of transportation from new residence to home school; a specific program/activity that contributes to a CYIC’s well-being is only available at a home school, etc.,)

- **The best interest** decision would be made through **collaboration** amongst the school board, education liaison or other Society representative, student, caregiver, and other relevant key stakeholders

- Reasonable cost of transportation (based on comparative regional costs, mode of transport, distance, etc.)

**Student Eligibility:**

- **Eligible students include** youth in out of home care (e.g., Crown ward; Society ward; in kinship or customary care; under a Temporary Care Agreement/Custody Order) attending provincially-funded schools.

- Consideration should also be given to include First Nation children and youth attending provincially-funded schools under Education Services (Tuition) Agreements when home placement changes.

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\(^3\) To be replaced by the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 (not yet proclaimed) which modernizes the current legislation by putting children at the centre of decision-making and supporting more accountable, responsive and accessible child and youth services.
• **Non-eligible students include** youth who are receiving services from a Society but have not been removed from their home (even if they move).

Eligible Transportation Options:

• School boards may have existing transportation options that can be adjusted to allow students to be transported. For example, transportation for self-contained gifted classes, adding a bus stop to a pre-existing bus route, or rerouting a school bus if feasible.

• Transportation by a foster parent, relative or other adult who is reimbursed through established agreements

• Public transportation monthly passes (if appropriate, including taking into consideration the student's age and stage of development)

• Private transportation company, or through the school board’s existing transportation consortium, contracted to provide a van, car or additional bus

Consideration of the appropriate transportation options/arrangements should be based on the specific circumstances of the student and be in collaboration with the school board, the student, society and other key stakeholders. **As always, safety is a priority. Any service providers must comply with all applicable laws, policies and safety expectations.**

Funding will **not** be made available for transporting the student to the home school when the following applies:

• If the student is still eligible for transportation under current school board policies including transportation as a result of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or acceptance into a specialized program in the school board for which transportation is provided

• If student is eligible for transportation under existing policy parameters of the school board (e.g., the student’s new placement would remain within the attendance area of the home school)

• To allow a student to attend a school of choice (i.e., a school that is not the home school the student was attending before the change in residence)

Additional guiding principles to support school boards and societies when assessing whether a student is eligible and it is in their best interest have been provided in Appendix A.

**Application Process**

School boards must agree to participate by submitting an application based on the eligibility criteria above. Boards should complete the provided template below addressing the following information:

• School board's plan to collaborate with education liaison or other society representative, student, caregiver, and other relevant key stakeholders, including the local Society to determine best interest.
• Dedicated school board/consortium personnel to communicate and work with the education liaison/society to review each individual case.

• Anticipated transportation options that may be considered to accommodate students in need. School boards should reference any transportation practices used in dealing with similar cases (e.g., use of existing board/consortia policies and procedures)

• Anticipated number of children and youth in care that may require transportation (based on trends from past records and in consultation with local societies)

• Anticipated costs

• How the school board would ensure value for money and assess impact on stability and well-being of the child

**Reporting and Accountability**

This targeted Education Program Other (EPO) funding is separate from transportation funding provided through the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) and, as such, requires tracking and reporting on actual costs using a template that will be provided by the ministry. Once the application has been approved, a transfer payment agreement will be sent for the Director of Education's signature to release the funding.

As this is the first year of the transportation initiative the ministry will provide a proportion of funding upon signing of the agreement and the remainder would be held-back subject to any requested in-year adjustments and the school board's final report. The ministry recognizes that ‘best interest decisions’ would be made locally on a case-by-case basis and will provide flexibility to allow for in-year adjustments. Final payments will be made based on actual expenditures provided in the final report and unspent funds will be required to be returned to the ministry.

Should a school board realize during the year that its actual expenditures will likely be much higher or much lower than estimated in the application, the ministry would appreciate being informed without delay in order to ensure a better allocation of available funds to meet actual needs within the school year.

Reporting by school boards will also inform the ministry’s future planning for transportation funding and how to best support school stability and educational outcomes for children and youth in care. The ministry will be requesting through transfer payment agreement reporting data on measures such as the number of students needing transportation, approximate cost per student, mode of transportation, student stability, improved education and well-being.

Ministry staff are available to review and discuss boards’ application or any associated issues, at any point before, during or after applying for this funding. If you have any questions or require additional information regarding this program, please contact Melanie Van Hees, Senior Policy Analyst, at 416-327-9617, melanie.vanhees@ontario.ca or Jennifer Crawford, Senior Policy Analyst at 416-325-2671, Jennifer.Crawford3@ontario.ca.
Application Template
Transportation Funding for Children and Youth in Care

1. BOARD CONTACT

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Board Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mailing Address</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board Contact Name</td>
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2. APPLICATION

1. Describe how the school board plans to collaborate with the education liaison (or other society representative), student, caregiver, and other relevant key stakeholders to determine best interest.

2. Confirm that there are dedicated school board/consortium personnel to communicate and work with the education liaison/society to review each individual case.

3. Provide the anticipated transportation options that may be considered to accommodate students in need. Reference any transportation practices used in dealing with similar cases (e.g., use of existing board/consortia policies and procedures).

4. Estimate the anticipated number of children and youth in care that may require transportation based on trends from past records and in consultation with local societies.

5. Describe how the school board will ensure value for money and assess impact on stability and well-being.

3. PROPOSED BUDGET

Please provide a budget estimating costs through the full school year (September 2017 to June 2018). Rows may be added as needed. Funding can only be used for expenses directly related to the administration and provision of transportation supports for children and youth in care to remain
temporarily in their home school when it is in their best interest. All funding must be utilized within the 2017-18 school year, for the intended purpose and any unspent funds will be returned to the ministry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Details (required)</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportation costs</td>
<td>e.g., methods of transportation; explanation of administrative costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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<td>Administrative support, including data collection and reporting (not to exceed 10% of the total funding)</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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**Total funding request: $**

**Authorized Signatory**

Name: 
Position: 

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________________
Additional Guiding Principles for CYIC Transportation

1. Does the student meet the eligibility criteria?
2. Are there strong collaborative relationships between the home school, Society and other key partners that support the student’s stability that do not exist in the new school?
3. Has the student been consulted on the school change, the impact, and which school is preferred?
4. How deep are the child’s ties to his or her current school?
5. How anxious is the child about having been removed from the home and/or any upcoming moves?
6. How long is the child’s new home placement expected to last?
   - What is the child’s permanency plan?
7. How many schools has the child attended over the past few years? How many schools has the child attended this year? How have the school transfers affected the child emotionally, academically and physically?
8. How strong is the child academically?
9. Does the home school have programs and activities that address the unique needs or interests of the student that the new school does not have?
10. To what extent are the programs and activities at the new school comparable to or better than those at the current school?
11. Would the timing of the school transfer coincide with a logical juncture such as after testing, after an event that is significant to the child, or at the end of the school year?
12. How would changing schools affect the student’s ability to earn full academic credit, proceed to the next grade, or graduate on time?
13. How would the length of the commute to the school of origin impact the child?
14. What school do the child’s siblings attend?
15. Are there any safety issues to consider?