

Ministry of Education

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2017: B09

MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities

FROM: Joshua Paul
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Capital and Business Support Division

Andrew Davis
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Education Labour and Finance Division

Cathy Montreuil
Assistant Deputy Minister
Student Achievement Division

DATE: June 28, 2017

SUBJECT: Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education

We are writing to inform you of the province's Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education, which includes an in-year enhancement to the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding for the 2017-18 school year, effective September 2017.

NOTICE:

Some of the elements and proposals set out in this memo can only take effect if certain regulations are made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council under the Education Act. Such regulations have not yet been made. Therefore the content of this memo should be considered to be subject to such regulations, if and when made.

The plan responds to feedback received during the government's recent rural engagement and comprises process improvements and funding enhancements designed to better support:

- Quality rural education;
- Sustainable use of school space in rural communities; and
- Decision-making around school closures.

This memorandum provides details about the rural engagement and the ministry's five policy responses, namely to:

- Introduce a new Rural and Northern Education Fund;
- Further incentivising boards to share space;
- Improve planning among school boards and community partners;
- Strengthen the pupil accommodation review guideline (PARG); and
- Develop new pedagogical supports for instructional practice in small schools.

Rural Engagement

From April 21st to June 9th, the province hosted a province-wide rural engagement to seek input from parents, students, communities, municipal governments and school boards on how to strengthen education in rural and northern communities in Ontario.

Public and stakeholder engagement sessions were held in 10 rural and northern communities across the province:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| - Amherstburg | - Merrickville |
| - Honey Harbour | - Nipigon |
| - Lakefield | - Picton |
| - Markdale | - Thedford |
| - Markstay | - Wawa |

Based on these sessions, as well as the online surveys and written submissions, the province is pleased to announce the Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education which will:

- Strengthen processes that school boards use to plan with their communities and make decisions about school closures; and
- Enhance funding available to school boards to support rural and northern education.

Details of the government's five initiatives to support rural students and communities now follow.

Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF)

Starting in September 2017, the ministry is investing an additional \$20 million through the RNEF as an enhancement to the GSN. This funding will be dedicated for school boards to further improve education for students from rural communities.

Funding will be allocated to school boards based on the number of rural students and two factors measuring the density of rural student enrolment in the board (see Appendix B for further details on the RNEF methodology).

The RNEF will represent an average increase of about \$55 per rural student in 2017-18 (see Appendix A for the board by board allocations of the RNEF). This would be in addition to the \$432 or 3.7% estimated average increase in per pupil funding that the

government is providing to all students across Ontario in the 2017-18 school year. School boards will use the funding for rural education based on local needs and report publicly on how the funding is used, such as:

- Improving programming and support services in rural schools (e.g., French immersion, arts education and guidance counselling);
- Continuing the operation of rural schools; or
- Enhancing student transportation options such as late bus runs and mobile e-learning through tablets or Wi-Fi.

School boards will be able to spend funding allotted to the board using a preliminary school list from the ministry. The list is comprised of schools in which at least half of their students are from rural communities (the list of rural schools for each school board will be communicated directly to directors of education by the end of June). This list can be modified, however, through board motion based on the following parameters:

- Where the school is the last one in the community served by the board.
- There are no other public services in the community (such as a hospital, library, etc.).
- It is remote from other schools of the board and the board has determined it to be an unreasonable distance to travel.
- Where the board has determined that rural students make up a large portion of the student population of that school.

Boards will be required to publicly post details of RNEF expenditures as well as those schools in which RNEF funding was spent.

Incentivising Boards to Share Space (Joint-use Schools)

The ministry will supplement its current joint-use school incentives by:

- Doubling existing funding for the Joint-Use School Seed Funding Program to support school boards to explore and develop joint-use opportunities.
 - o Proposals involving rural and northern schools will be prioritized.
 - o Upon approval, each board involved in the joint use school proposal will receive an allocation of \$20,000 to support costs associated with exploring the potential for a joint-use school such as legal, consulting and facilitation services.
- Providing \$1 million in operational funding for project management services.
 - o Once a joint-use school project is approved through the ministry's Capital Priorities process, boards may request \$100,000 from the ministry to fund one joint-use project manager per ministry approved joint-use school project.
 - o The project manager could be tasked with coordinating all aspects of the planning, design and construction of the joint-use school on behalf of all participating boards.

- Allowing a greater portion of ministry capital funding to be allocated to joint-use school projects. Rather than fund each joint-use school based on its combined student population, this incentive would treat each school board's student population as two or more component schools and thereby increase the total capital funding allocation generated according to ministry capital construction benchmarks.
 - o For example, if two boards submit Capital Priorities requests for one new 500 pupil place joint-use school, comprising 250 pupil places from each board, a capital funding allocation equivalent to 250 pupil places would be generated for each board, rather than one shared capital funding allocation for a 500 pupil place school.
 - o This additional capital funding will enable boards to include features unique to joint-schools, such as separate entrances or innovative joint-use spaces, in joint-use school buildings.

- Encouraging all school boards to consider collaborative capital project arrangements between school boards. This includes maximizing the opportunities of co-location, particularly in rural and northern communities. The ministry will be reviewing all capital proposals submitted by boards for ministry funding for new schools, additions or consolidation projects to ensure joint-use opportunities between boards have been explored before funding is granted. Further details can be found in memorandum 2017: B7 *Request for Capital Priorities Project Funding Submissions*.

Planning among School Boards and Community Partners

Working with partner ministries and key stakeholders, the ministry will support improved co-ordination of community infrastructure planning by:

- Building upon the Ministry of Municipal Affairs' ongoing integrated local planning work to better facilitate local relationships and partnerships, including between school board and municipal governments, particularly in rural and northern communities.

- Revising its Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG) in order to encourage joint responsibility for integrated community planning, with a focus on communication between school boards, municipal governments and community partners about boards' capital plans; highlighting the potential for community use of open and underutilized schools.
 - o In early fall 2017 the ministry will engage with key stakeholders to seek input on a revised version of its CPPG and how it can align with integrated local planning efforts.
 - o The ministry will require school boards to revise their CPP policies as soon as possible after the revised CPPG is complete.

- Continuing its ongoing work with the Ministry of Infrastructure to support delivery of recommendations in *Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*. For example, the ministry has already improved opportunities for

community partners to buy or lease surplus schools via amendments to Ontario Regulation 444/98 *Disposition of Surplus Real Property* and has provided additional capital funding for school boards to promote community use of schools.

Strengthening the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline

The ministry will revise its Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) to create a stronger, more collaborative process that better promotes the well-being of students and better recognizes the impact of school closures on rural and northern communities.

The aim of the revised PARG is to promote inclusion of community impact alongside the focus on student achievement and well-being. The ministry will achieve this by:

- Considering amendments to introduce: longer minimum timelines; more recommended pupil accommodation options; clear roles for school board trustees and municipal governments; and an increased student voice.
- Providing a new toolkit and resources for school boards to standardize and validate data.
- Providing templates for community partners to engage school boards.

In early fall 2017 the ministry will engage with key stakeholders (including partner ministries, school board and municipal sector representatives) to seek input on a revised version of its PARG. Once the revised PARG and supporting resources have been released, school boards will revise their PAR policies and consult on these revised PAR policies for several months before approving them.

School boards will not start new PARs until the revised PARG is complete, unless PARs are required to support a joint-use school initiative between two school boards. For PARs that are already underway, a board may either continue with the PAR process initiated under its existing PAR policy or wait until the ministry releases the revised PARG to continue. School boards will not have to reconsider past decisions.

New Pedagogical Supports for Instructional Practice

Combined classrooms in rural and northern schools can be complex environments with a larger volume of curriculum expectations. That environment presents an opportunity to promote and explore student-centred, differentiated learning that promotes global competencies, such as collaboration and critical thinking.

In order to support the learning experience for rural students, the ministry will:

- Work collaboratively with school boards to identify, support and promote products and tools that enable deep learning for students in multi-grade classrooms;
- Strengthen technology-enabled learning opportunities; and
- Support the sharing effective practices from pilots with the province.

Background

There are currently a number of existing GSN supports that particularly aim to support rural and northern education. These include:

- *The School Foundation Grant*, which provides funding for principals, vice-principals, office support staff and office supplies, recognizes that remote schools require a higher level of funding support than other schools;
- *The School Operations and Renewal Grant*, which supports the costs of operating, maintaining and repairing school facilities, recognizes that remote schools require additional funding to maintain underutilized space;
- *The Geographic Circumstances Grant*, which provides higher levels of teacher staffing support for remote schools and provides additional funding to recognize the additional costs in small, disperse and remote boards; and
- *The Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount of the Special Education Grant*, which recognizes the need for higher levels of funding for small, disperse and remote boards.

We will also continue supporting the following initiatives:

- Improving access to e-learning and a minimum broadband speed of 1 Megabit per second per student in rural and northern schools across Ontario, over the next 4 years, through new and updated network infrastructure and improved network capacity.
- Enhancing access to dedicated support for students with special education needs in rural and northern Ontario, including more mental health and behavioural support professionals.
- Expanding experiential learning opportunities for rural and northern students working with local industries such as agriculture, food processing, mining and forestry through the Career Kick-Start Strategy, including growing the percentage of grade 11 and 12 students participating in Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programs from 14 per cent% to 25 per cent% over the next three years.

If you require further information about these changes, please contact:

Subject	Contact	Telephone and E-Mail
Capital Policies and Programs	Colleen Hogan	(416) 325-1705 colleen.hogan@ontario.ca
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Pedagogical Supports - Curriculum	Shirley Kendrick	(416) 325-2576 shirley.kendrick@ontario.ca
Pedagogical Supports – Program Implementation	Sandra Bickford	(416) 325-2564 sandra.bickford@ontario.ca
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When rural students are provided with opportunities for an excellent education, communities thrive.

That is why we are taking immediate action to improve the process that school boards use when engaging with community partners around their capital plans and investing in significant new supports for rural and northern students that will be tailored to the unique needs of their communities. Our government is committed to working with school boards and communities to make changes that best support all of our students.

The collaboration and input from all our education partners were key elements in developing the plan to strengthen rural and northern education. Your contributions are deeply valued and we are confident that, working together, we will ensure equity for students in rural and northern communities by providing them with high-quality services and programs.

Original signed by

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Appendix A

2017-18 Board-by-board Allocations of Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF)

2017-18 Rural and Northern Education Fund			
Index	DSBNo	DSB Name	Allocation
1	1	District School Board Ontario North East	\$ 462,149
2	2	Algoma District School Board	\$ 237,909
3	3	Rainbow District School Board	\$ 335,564
4	4	Near North District School Board	\$ 485,660
5	5.1	Keewatin-Patricia District School Board	\$ 376,072
6	5.2	Rainy River District School Board	\$ 267,133
7	6.1	Lakehead District School Board	\$ 141,570
8	6.2	Superior-Greenstone District School Board	\$ 159,711
9	7	Bluewater District School Board	\$ 1,116,127
10	8	Avon Maitland District School Board	\$ 838,666
11	9	Greater Essex County District School Board	\$ 128,264
12	10	Lambton Kent District School Board	\$ 610,142
13	11	Thames Valley District School Board	\$ 647,850
14	12	Toronto District School Board	\$ -
15	13	Durham District School Board	\$ 49,086
16	14	Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board	\$ 667,149
17	15	Trillium Lakelands District School Board	\$ 1,190,514

18	16	York Region District School Board	\$	56,574
19	17	Simcoe County District School Board	\$	546,330
20	18	Upper Grand District School Board	\$	523,404
21	19	Peel District School Board	\$	54,884
22	20	Halton District School Board	\$	29,622
23	21	Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board	\$	40,087
24	22	District School Board of Niagara	\$	135,855
25	23	Grand Erie District School Board	\$	583,173
26	24	Waterloo Region District School Board	\$	42,508
27	25	Ottawa-Carleton District School Board	\$	189,525
28	26	Upper Canada District School Board	\$	1,389,862
29	27	Limestone District School Board	\$	538,885
30	28	Renfrew County District School Board	\$	440,056
31	29	Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board	\$	609,395
32	30.1	Northeastern Catholic District School Board	\$	137,633
33	30.2	Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board	\$	83,775
34	31	Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board	\$	80,733
35	32	Sudbury Catholic District School Board	\$	84,003
36	33.1	Northwest Catholic District School Board	\$	141,396
37	33.2	Kenora Catholic District School Board	\$	57,372
38	34.1	Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board	\$	47,245

39	34.2	Superior North Catholic District School Board	\$	78,256
40	35	Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board	\$	304,729
41	36	Huron Perth Catholic District School Board	\$	284,852
42	37	Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board	\$	139,990
43	38	London District Catholic School Board	\$	169,603
44	39	St. Clair Catholic District School Board	\$	246,613
45	40	Toronto Catholic District School Board	\$	-
46	41	Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board	\$	293,964
47	42	York Catholic District School Board	\$	95,290
48	43	Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board	\$	119,848
49	44	Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board	\$	353,928
50	45	Durham Catholic District School Board	\$	41,296
51	46	Halton Catholic District School Board	\$	52,902
52	47	Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board	\$	65,727
53	48	Wellington Catholic District School Board	\$	98,835
54	49	Waterloo Catholic District School Board	\$	42,324
55	50	Niagara Catholic District School Board	\$	118,715
56	51	Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board	\$	222,381
57	52	Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario	\$	677,094

58	53	Ottawa Catholic District School Board	\$	182,649
59	54	Renfrew County Catholic District School Board	\$	237,118
60	55	Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board	\$	339,237
61	56	Conseil scolaire de district du Nord-Est de l'Ontario	\$	123,552
62	57	Conseil scolaire de district du Grand Nord de l'Ontario	\$	40,735
63	58	Conseil scolaire Viamonde	\$	47,037
64	59	Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario	\$	182,296
65	60.1	Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Grandes Rivières	\$	431,947
66	60.2	Conseil scolaire de district catholique Franco-Nord	\$	184,019
67	61	Conseil scolaire de district catholique du Nouvel-Ontario	\$	150,623
68	62	Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Aurores boréales	\$	34,519
69	63	Conseil scolaire catholique Providence	\$	205,036
70	64	Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud	\$	95,134
71	65	Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien	\$	576,381
72	66	Conseil scolaire de district catholique du Centre-Est de l'Ontario	\$	234,603
		Provincial Total	\$	19,997,115

Appendix B

RNEF Methodology

Funding through the RNEF is allocated to school boards based on the number of rural students and two factors measuring the density of rural student enrolment in the board.

$$\text{Allocation} = \text{number of rural students} \times \$116.28 \times \left[\frac{\text{rural density factor} + \text{rural density ratio}}{2} \right]$$

Number of Rural Students:

For funding purposes, “rural” students are defined as living in rural areas or population centres with a 2016 Census population less than 10,000.

A population centre is defined by Statistics Canada as a community with a population of at least 1,000 and a population density of at least 400 people per square kilometre.

A rural area is defined by Statistics Canada as an area that lies outside of a population centre, that is, the area does not meet the thresholds noted.

Students are mapped to population centres and rural areas using student postal code information from ONSIS and the Postal Code Conversion File from Statistics Canada.

In the RNEF formula, density is measured in two ways and reflected in the density based weighting factor as follows:

Rural Density Factor:

The rural density is first calculated by dividing the rural enrolment of the board by the rural area of the board. The rural area of the board is determined by taking the area of the board that lies outside the geographic boundaries of the population centres with a 2016 Census population of 10,000 or more.

The rural density factor is then calculated such that:

- (a) If the rural density is less than 0.1 the rural density factor is 1.
- (b) If the rural density is more than 4 the rural density factor is 0.
- (c) A non-linear scaling function is used to map rural density between these values. The scaling function is set so that boards with a rural density near the provincial average receive a density factor of about 0.5.

The rural density factor is inversely related to the rural density – boards with a lower rural density (i.e. a smaller number of students dispersed over a larger area) receive a higher rural density factor -- except where the minimum and maximum limits are reached).

Rural Density Ratio:

This measures the rural density relative to the total density of the board. This ratio is between 0 and 1 for all boards.

$$\text{Formula: } \frac{\text{Rural enrolment} / \text{Rural area (sq. km)}}{\text{Total enrolment} / \text{total area (sq. km)}}$$