

## Briefing Note

Re: Ministry of Education Announcement on Autism Programs, March 11, 2019

To: Laura Walton, Darcie McEathron, Michel Revelin, Mary Unan, Ann Lennarson,  
Joe Matasic, Archana Rampure

From: Dan Crow

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On Monday March 11 the Minister of Education made an announcement about supports for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Clearly this is an attempt to address the government's ongoing problems on supports for students with ASD. The announcement promised to:

- Fully fund teacher training for ASD-specific Additional Qualification courses (up to \$1 million)
- Double funding to the Geneva Centre for Autism (from \$1 million to \$2 million) for online training for educators
- Continue special education funding for behaviour expertise and student supports
- Expand after-school skills development programs for students on the Autism spectrum, by extending funding to all 72 school boards
- Support student transition into schools with autism service providers
- Fund school boards for each new student with ASD entering the system for the rest of the 2018-19 school year with an average of \$12,300

Too little of the new professional development funding is being allocated to Educational Assistants who provide supports to students with ASD on a daily basis. An additional \$1 million for online training will not meet the needs of CUPE members, and as a result will not meet the needs of students. Ministry documents show that existing funding for Geneva Centre training provides opportunities for 2,200 educators. Doubling that will only provide opportunities for a total of 4,400, or roughly 18% of all EAs in the province (based on an FTE count). If this money is also extended to teachers, as the Ministry's documents state, the number of EAs who can access the training will be reduced.

The Ministry documents state that the Behaviour Expertise Amount Allocation (BEA) will be \$15.2 million in 2018-19. This money is used to hire board-level Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) expertise professionals. This is not new money. It was announced as part of the 2018-19 GSN. The Ministry states that this money will continue in 2019-20. However, if the amount

remains the same, as is implied in the release, there is no room for inflation or wage increases. As such, the real value of the BEA will diminish next school year.

The After School Skills Development Program was launched under the previous government, and came as part of the Education Program – Other (EPO) funding. In 2018-19 it had been set at \$3.3 million to provide supports at 39 school boards. The PC government’s release indicates that it will invest \$6.1 million in this program to allow it to be extended to all 72 boards.

As part of the transition to schools that will take place after April 1 (i.e. after they lose other supports for children with ASD) the Ministry has committed to providing funding of an average of \$12,300 for each student that enrolls before the end of this year. The explanatory documents state that the Ministry is “extending the pupil count date” – i.e. they are treating them as if they had enrolled in September for the purposes of calculating school boards GSN allocation. \$12,300 is roughly the average per-student spending in Ontario. Although this looks like a significant sum for a 3-month period from April to June, it will be the same (approximately) \$12,300 for the entire 2019-20 school year. That is to say, they are only committing to fund new students with ASD on the same basis that they fund all other students in Ontario.

During the press conference the Minister also indicated that special education funding would be over \$3 billion for the 2019-20 school year. The Special Education Grant for 2018-19 is already over \$3 billion. It is not evident at all that there will be any substantive increase in funding next year. If there is no additional funding, this will effectively be a real cut in funding as inflation and any wage increases for education workers will mean that \$3 billion will not purchase as much next year as it did this year. Moreover, an evaluation of this amount can only be done in the context of total GSN funding.

Overall, this announcement contains only \$4.8 million in new funding. \$2 million of this will be in training, most of which will be allocated to teachers. This amount can only fund a small minority of educators in Ontario school boards. The other \$2.8 million comes in the form of the After School Skills Development Program. This \$4.8 million amounts to 0.16% of the Special Education Grant, and less than 0.02% of total GSN spending.