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The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is the largest school board in Canada and fourth largest in North America. The 2013-14 budget process began in March with approval of the staffing allocation (approximately $1.96 billion of the total budget). Currently the TDSB program and operating budget is being drafted, in which the remaining funds are allocated to non-staffing needs such as Model Schools for Inner Cities, administration and building maintenance. In June a balanced budget will be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval.

Students from economically and socially marginalized conditions experience greater opportunity, health and relationship gaps and are at higher risk of academic difficulties. In recognition of this, the Ministry provides the Learning Opportunity Grant (LOG) in addition to regular funds to provide students with an equitable opportunity to succeed. The Demographic Allocation of the grant, which is referenced as a poverty fighting tool in the Province’s *Poverty Reduction Strategy*, is intended to finance programs such as breakfast programs, homework clubs, reading recovery and withdrawal for individualized support, etc., all of which help to level the playing field and provide marginalized students with more equitable learning opportunities.

Similarly, the diversity of Ontario’s population means that some students require extra support to develop the English language skills needed to succeed academically. The Ministry of Education provides additional funding to support these students through English as a Second Language (ESL) grants. Given the LOG and ESL funds, it would seem our most marginalized students are protected; however, deep-rooted problems in the Province’s funding formula leave the TDSB struggling to stretch the total Ministry allocated funds to balance its budget. To address this issue the TDSB diverts a portion of the LOG and the ESL grant for general use – at the expense of students who have the least voice.

The TDSB routinely spends approximately 2/3 of the LOG and 1/4 of the ESL grant on other purposes, such as paying for higher energy costs and the full cost of Full Day Kindergarten. This trend is continuing in the 2013-2014 budget cycle. Despite the fact that enrollment in elementary schools is growing, with student need remaining constant, $1.7 million from the Model School’s teaching staff budget was cut – equaling 18 teaching staff positions dedicated to inner city student education.

The LOG and ESL grants are being redistributed throughout the system when they should be spent to support students from low-income, racialized and marginalized neighbourhoods.

**In 2012** the TDSB cut $97 million from its budget. About $50 million in staff cuts meant eliminating:

* 430 education assistants,
* 200 high school teacher positions, including 10 teacher-librarian positions,
* 134 school secretarial jobs, and
* 17 vice-principals

The $47 million in programming budget reductions meant decreases to:

* Professional development for teachers,
* International language programs, continuing education,
* ESL ($1.5 million),
* Additional staff, such as youth counsellors, instructional leaders, etc.

**In March 2013**, the Board approved approximately $27.7 million in staffing cuts. It should be noted that due to full day kindergarten and growth in ESL need there was a net gain of 62.5 staff in the elementary panel, however, there was a considerable loss of staff who play a critical role in supporting student need:

**Elementary Staffing Reductions**: 25 Librarians

20 Guidance teachers

16 teachers – Inner City Schools

2 Profile teachers

21.5 Special Education teachers

The secondary panel witnessed Trustees voting to cut half (30 of 60) of the learning opportunities teachers. While some staffing cuts may be rationalized by declining enrollment in secondary schools, the cuts to Learning Opportunities teachers outpace any decline in need, meaning Trustees chose to disproportionally place the burden of the cuts on students with the greatest need. In view of the declared purposes of these MOE grants technical paper alone – these are cuts that should not have been made.

**Secondary Staffing Losses:**

115.5 Regular Program teachers

25 ESL teachers

30 Learning Opportunities teachers

46.5 Librarians & Guidance teachers

22 Special Education teachers

2 Model Schools for Inner Cities teachers

2 Profile teachers

5 E-learning teachers

The Toronto District School Board claims that all students will be “provided with equitable opportunities to be successful in our system; that institutional barriers to such success are identified and removed; and that all learners are provided with supports and rewards to develop their abilities and achieve their aspirations” (TDSB, 2000). A school board that so publicly celebrates equity and inclusion should use the funds it has been given by the Province how they were meant to be used – to support its students with the greatest need. Yet once again the TDSB is balancing its budget at the expense of its most marginalized students.

A remaining $27.3 million must still be found by June to balance the 2013/2014 budget.