MISSING OPPORTUNITIES:

How budget policies continue to leave behind low-income students

SOCIAL PLANNING TORONTO

ABOUT SOCIAL PLANNING TORONTO

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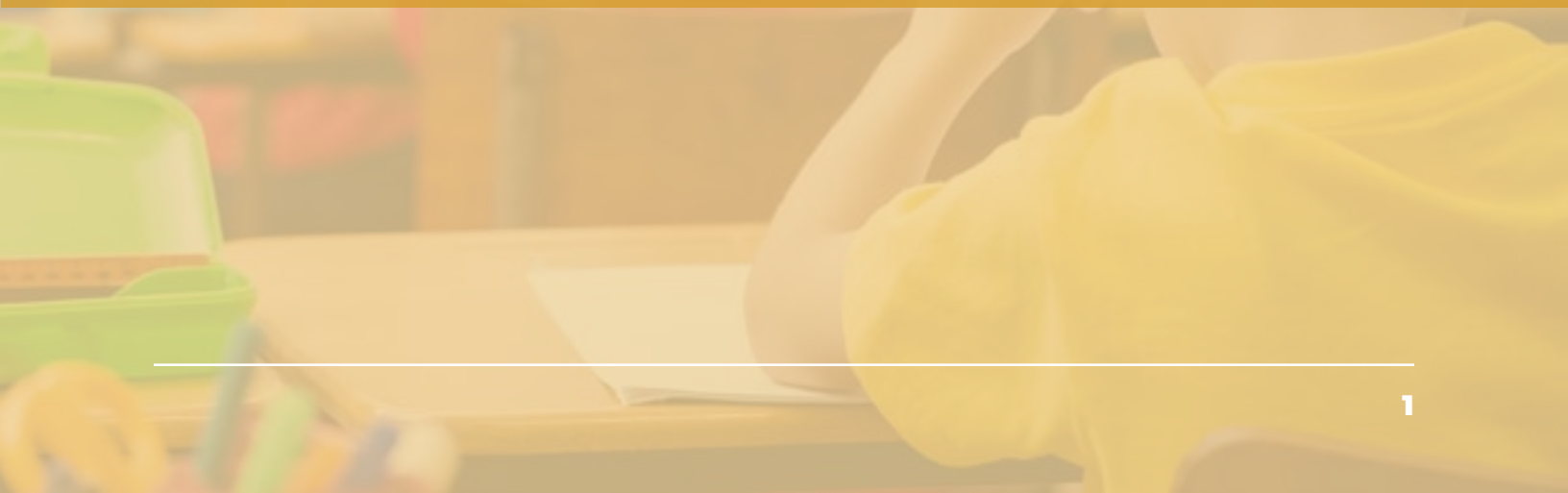
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Family income is one of the most powerful factors affecting student success. Students from economically and socially marginalized conditions face greater external challenges and consequently require the system to adapt to meet their needs. In recognition of this, the Ontario Ministry of Education provides all school boards with the Learning Opportunities Grant of which the largest portion is flowed through the Demographic Allocation (LOG-DA). Toronto remains the child poverty capital of Canada[1] and yet the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) only spends about half of the LOG-DA on programs and supports for students living in poverty, according to data they published earlier this year.[2]

The LOG-DA is intended to finance programs such as breakfast programs, homework clubs, reading recovery, and one-on-one support within the classroom, all of which help to level the playing field for marginalized students. However, because of chronic underfunding of the education system by the Province, the Toronto District School Board, like other school boards in Ontario, uses the LOG-DA to balance budget lines not related to the grant's purpose. This means that the students with the greatest need are failing to benefit from the resources that they are entitled to – about $61 million worth of resources each year.

1 Polanyi, Mustachi, kerr, & Meagher, 2016
2 Toronto District School Board, 2016b



"The disparities between Toronto's affluent and non-affluent schools are clearly visible and impact low-income students and parents' capacity for self-advocacy, extra-curricular activities, access to information and general opportunities".

Teacher, TDSB School

INTRODUCTION

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is the largest school board in Canada and serves approximately 245,000 students in 584 schools.[3] Approximately two-thirds of these students self-identify as being from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds and collectively speak over 120 languages.[4]

In 2000, the Toronto District School Board adopted the Equity Foundation policy which insists 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".[5]

The TDSB, like all public school boards, has the responsibility to improve the lives of children, to prepare them for adulthood, and to set them on the path to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives. When mechanisms are put in place to ensure all students have equitable opportunities to succeed, schools become vehicles of social mobility and can play a significant role in disrupting social inequalities, including intergenerational poverty.

3 Toronto District School Board, n.d.-a
4 See note 3 above
5 Toronto District School Board, 1999, p.1

LANDSCAPE OF CHILD POVERTY IN TORONTO

Over the past decade the gap between rich and poor Canadian families has widened substantially. In Toronto, income polarization has distinctly divided the city,[6] Given the rising cost of living and limited access to good jobs, many Toronto families struggle to make ends meet.

Numerous government initiatives have aspired to eradicate or reduce child and family poverty at the federal, provincial, and, most recently, municipal level. Notably, more than 25 years have passed since the federal House of Commons voted unanimously to eliminate poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000.[7]

However, these strategies have hardly materialized for Toronto's children and poverty remains a persistent reality for many families. In Toronto, 26.8% of children live in poverty, a far higher proportion than in the rest of the province or country. This rate is even greater in some Toronto neighbourhoods where the majority of children live in poverty.[8] Child poverty in Toronto is also unequally distributed across lines of race, geography, immigration or citizenship status, ability, and family structure. Toronto residents of African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Caribbean and Latin American backgrounds are much more likely to experience poverty.[9]

These statistics originate from the TDSB's own research: 28% of students in junior kindergarten to grade 6 are from families earning less than $30,000 a year and 21% are from families earning between $30,000 and $49,999.[10] More specifically, 48% of black children and 56% of children of Middle Eastern descent are from families in the lowest income bracket, compared to only 9% of white children.[11]

IMPACT OF POVERTY ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Experience of persistent childhood poverty tends to have negative impacts on life outcomes.[12] Not only does it affect children's quality of life, it can have lasting effects which follow them into adulthood. Poverty can increase children's exposure to an assortment of challenges including unstable or inferior housing, insufficient food or poor-quality diets, and poor-quality child care, and may result in delayed physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional growth.[13]

Income and access to resources remains one of the most powerful factors affecting success in school. How poverty affects student achievement is complex, and there are many contributing factors. For example, students living in areas of concentrated poverty sometimes do worse in school because of the effects of social isolation, crime, violence,

6 Hulchanski, 2007
7 Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007
8 Polanyi, Mustachi, kerr, & Meagher, 2016
9 Polanyi, Johnston, Khanna, Dirie, & kerr, 2014
10 Yau, Rosolen, & Archer, 2013
11 See note 10 above
12 Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007
13 Devaney, Ellwood, & Love, 1997

27% of children in Toronto live in poverty, making it the child poverty capital of Canada.

and drugs.[14] Students who are alienated from school are more vulnerable to acting out aggressively, being recruited into gangs, and engaging in drug and alcohol consumption.[15] These students also have less access to after-school and summer enrichment programs, causing them to fall behind their more affluent peers.[16]

Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Phipps and Lethbridge (2006)[17] found that higher incomes were consistently associated with better outcomes, including higher rates of success at school, for children from four all the way to 15 years of age. More recently similar patterns were noted among TDSB students: according to provincial standardized tests in grades 3 and 6, students within the highest family income category ($100,000+) have the highest achievement in all subjects.[18] For example, 93% of grade 6 students in the highest income bracket met the provincial standard for reading, while only 67% of students in the lowest income bracket achieved this level.

In secondary schools, low-income students are overrepresented in non-academic streams of studies. A recent study found that 33% of students in the lowest income neighbourhoods took the majority of their courses at the applied level, compared to only 6% of students in the highest income neighbourhoods.[19] This imbalance is due, at least in part, to streaming students along the lines of income. The postsecondary and career choices available to students in non-academic pathways are limited, thereby reinforcing disadvantage and perpetuating inequalities.[20]

Every student experiences school differently depending on individual, familial, neighbourhood, and community circumstances. Factors such as parental education, high family stress, race, immigration status, language spoken at home, and school and community environment, intersect to create unique experiences at school. Despite the expectation that schools are places of equal opportunities, some students face additional challenges which the education system fails to alleviate. While the trend is that lower-income and marginalized students are 'at risk' for academic difficulties, some of these students do certainly overcome barriers to achieve a high level of success in school.[21] This, however, does not belay the public responsibility to fund an education system that provides opportunity for all.

14 Miller, 2003
15 See note 14 above
16 See note 14 above
17 Phipps & Lethbridge, 2006
18 Sinay, 2014
19 Smaller, 2014 as cited in Hamlin & Cameron, 2015
20 Clandfield, Curtis, Galabuzi, San Vicente, Livingstone, Smaller, 2014
21 Sinay, 2009

THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON LEARNING

There are a wide range of interventions that can reduce the impact of poverty on education success for students who face disadvantages that come with low-income. Providing students with equitable opportunities to be successful is a central mission of any public education system. This means that every student is supported and inspired to thrive in school. In order to achieve this, the education system must take proactive measures to remove systemic barriers and create an equitable system in which all students strive, no matter their socio-economic status.

Below are a few examples of the ways that schools have been leveling the playing field for students who experience poverty.

STUDENT NUTRITION PROGRAMS

When students are hungry they can't learn. Hungry children struggle to concentrate in class, suffer from headaches and stomach aches, and may withdraw or act out because they are hungry.[22] This disproportionately affects students from the inner-city core and east and west suburbs who are notably less likely to be eating breakfast.[23] By providing nutritious meals students do better in school, miss fewer classes, and are more likely to graduate.[24]

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

When parents are engaged in their children's education, children experience improved learning outcomes. Parental involvement has been noted as a predictor of achievement in both elementary and secondary schools[25] with some researchers arguing it is the most accurate predictor.[26] Parent involvement has been noted to lead to higher achievements levels, more positive attitudes and behaviours, and better attendance.[27] While parent involvement is often built into school policies, effective strategies should be accompanied by the resources needed to strengthen parents' capacity and to reach parents who may experience barriers to engagement.

22 Share Our Strength, 2015
23 See note 8
24 Muthuswamy, 2012; Augustine-Thottungal, Kern, Key, & Sherman, 2013
25 Jeynes, 2007; Jeynes, 2005b as cited in Jeynes 2007
26 Henderson & Beria, 1994 as cited in Centre for Child Well-Being, 2012
27 See note 26 above

ACCESS TO AFTER-SCHOOL AND SUMMER PROGRAMS

After-school programs often provide valuable support to students who are struggling in school. In Canada nonprofit organizations like Pathways to Education and Frontier College offer homework and tutoring supports to low-income students that contribute to improved learning outcomes and academic performance.[28] According to Miller (2003) "many of the circumstances linked to poor achievement—low expectations by teachers, students' alienation from the school environment, lack of enrichment activities, weak social networks, and poor quality education— may be ameliorated, at least in part, through participation in afterschool programs".[29] Participation in recreation-based after-school programs offers children enriching life experiences that contribute to their positive social, physical, and intellectual development.

Similarly, the summer break is the longest stretch of non-school time for school-aged children and youth. During the summer, students' access to learning opportunities and resources can diverge sharply and result in summer learning losses/gains, with low-income students being more vulnerable to the former.[30] While the impacts of the summer programs can vary depending on the intervention, investment in this area has the potential to reduce achievement gaps.[31]

ARTS ENRICHMENT

Arts education - including dance, music, drama and visual arts – is an essential component to an enriching, rewarding, and complete education. The TDSB's Arts Foundation Policy states that "there is compelling evidence … that student achievement is heightened in schools that provide high-quality arts education".[32] American research found that among students of low socio-economic status, those who had arts-rich high school experiences have higher secondary school graduation rates; higher overall grade-point averages; higher math grade-point averages; and are more likely to pursue post-secondary education, as compared to their peers who experienced low-engagement in the arts.[33] When students participate in the arts they are supported in achieving their potential as learners and active citizens. In addition to fostering positive development and wellbeing of students, the arts promotes creative problem-solving, self-expression, and collaboration with others[34] among countless other skills.

28 Harper & Anglin, 2010; Pathways to Education, n.d.
29 Miller, 2003, p.12
30 Davies & Aurini, 2013
31 Davies & Aurini, 2013; Miller, 2007
32 Toronto District School Board, 2000, p. 1
33 Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012
34 Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES GRANT

In Ontario and across Canada, public education is considered the 'great equalizer' and is meant to ensure every child has a fair start, no matter their social identity or family background. In the face of unequal challenges, the public education system is meant to level the playing field, providing all students with better chances of successful outcomes. In recognition of this the Ministry of Education provides all school boards with the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG). The LOG "provides funding for a range of programs to help students who are at a greater risk of poor academic achievement".[35] Every year the Toronto District School Board receives approximately $144 million through the LOG.

The Demographic Allocation of the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG-DA) makes up the largest portion of the Learning Opportunities Grant. For the TDSB it constitutes 88.3% of the total LOG allocation, about $127 million.[36]

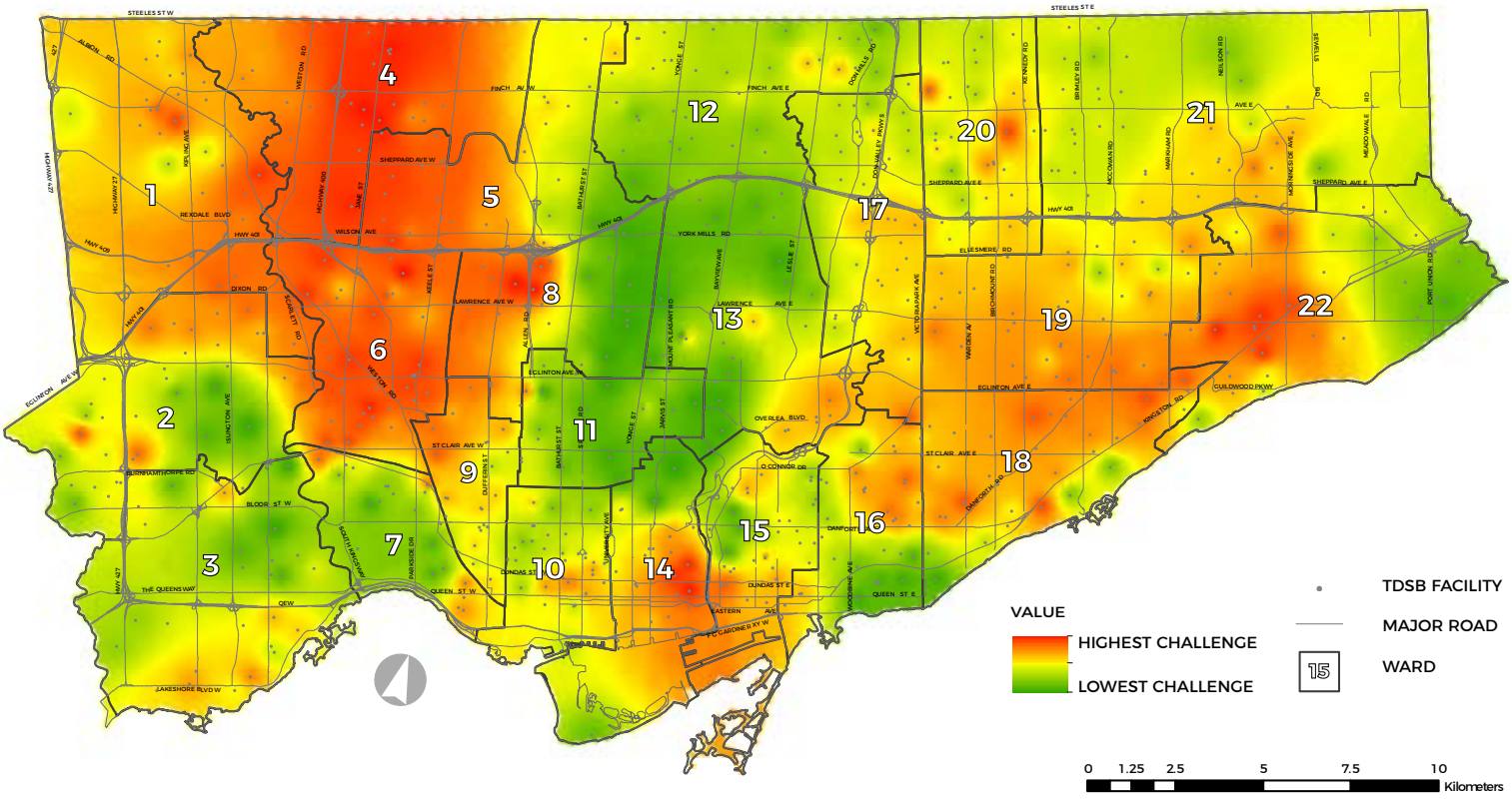
This money is explicitly designated to provide extra funding and support for students whose socio-economic circumstances place them at increased risk for academic struggle due to low income, immigration, low parental education and lone parent status. The Ministry states that:

> *The largest portion of LOG funding – $353.0 million – is flowed through the Demographic Allocation, which provides funding based on social and economic indicators that are associated with students having a higher risk of academic difficulty. This allocation supports boards in offering a wide range of locally determined programs for these high risk students. Examples of programs include breakfast programs, homework clubs, reading recovery, and withdrawal for individualized support. Boards have considerable latitude in determining the type of program and support that they provide with this funding.*[37]

Given the terms of the Learning Opportunities Grant, it would appear that the needs of the Toronto's most marginalized students are protected. The reality in Toronto schools, however, is much different because the LOG-DA is 'unsweatered'. This means that unlike other important grants where boards are required to spend the funds on their intended purposes, school boards have flexibility on how they spend LOG-DA money, and are able – and do – divert it to other uses because of budget pressures.

35 Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016a, p.61
36 Toronto District School Board, 2016b
37 Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016a, p.62

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES INDEX, ELEMENTARY 2014



Based on: Brown, R. S., Tam, G., & Marmureanu, C. (2015). Toronto District School Board maps representing demographics and achievement by geographic area. (Research Report No. 14/15-11). Toronto, ON: Toronto District School Board. Retrieved from http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/TDSB%20Maps%20Representing%20Demographics%20and%20Achievement%20by%20Geographic%20Area.pdf

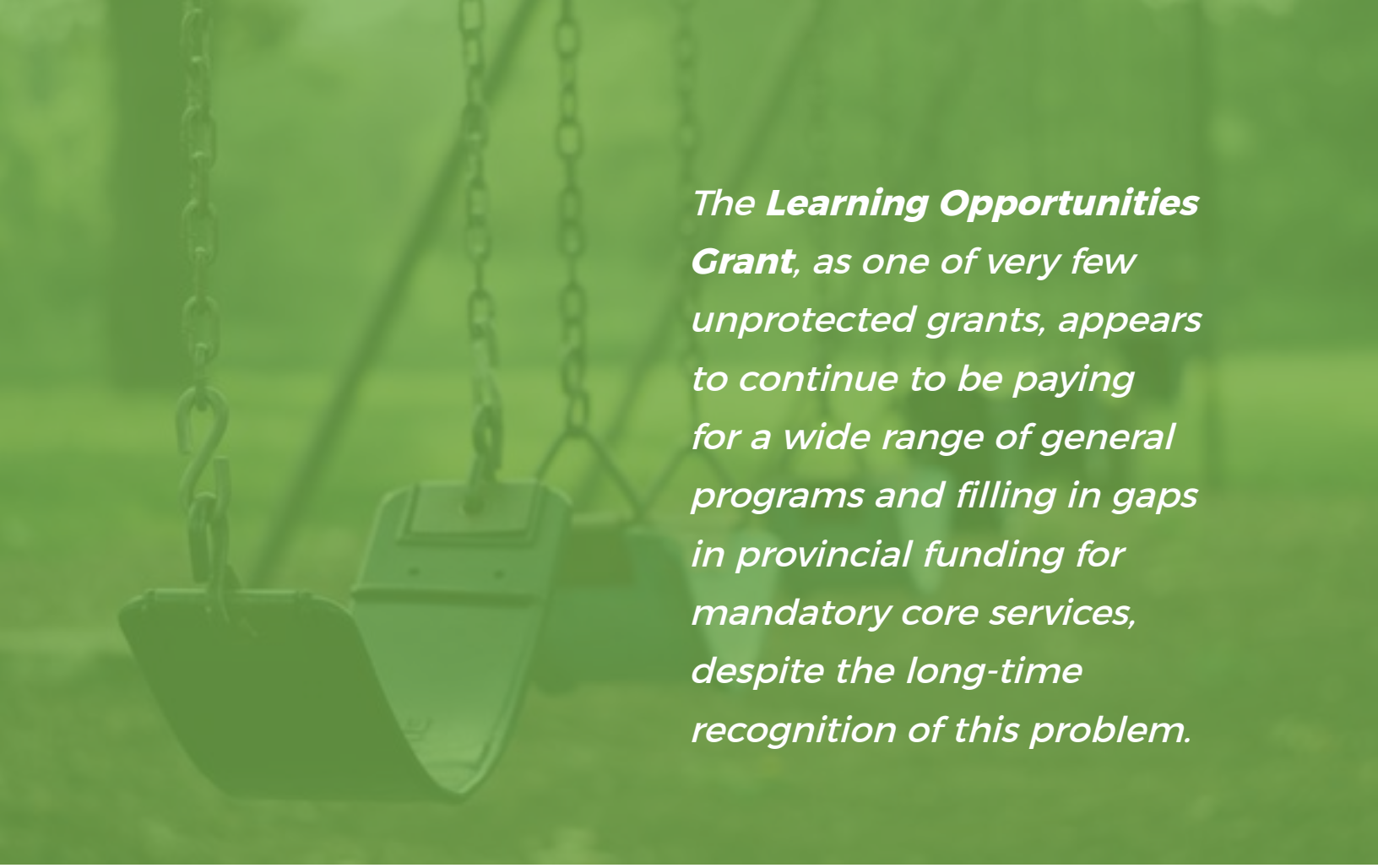
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES INDEX

The TDSB developed the Learning Opportunities Index (LOI) which "ranks each school based on external challenges affecting student success".[38] The LOI is calculated based on median income, proportion of low-income families, proportion of families receiving social assistance, percentage of adults with low education, percentage of adults with university degrees, and proportion of lone-parent families.

The LOI was designed "to ensure that children who have access to fewer resources at home and in their neighbourhoods have increased access to available resources in their schools".[39] The LOI is a tool for the equitable distribution of resources to the schools serving students with greater challenges.

38 Toronto District School Board, 2014, p.1

39 See note 38 above



*The **Learning Opportunities Grant**, as one of very few unprotected grants, appears to continue to be paying for a wide range of general programs and filling in gaps in provincial funding for mandatory core services, despite the long-time recognition of this problem.*

$61M OF LOG FUNDS DIVERTED FROM LOW-INCOME CHILDREN

Through participation on the Inner City Advisory Committee (ICAC), Social Planning Toronto and others urged the TDSB to release reliable, comprehensive, and transparent data on how the Demographic Allocation of the Learning Opportunities Grant is spent. The ICAC is a formal community advisory committee that advises the TDSB on "matters concerning learning opportunities for students in 'inner city' communities and on Board policies and programs addressing the socio-economic circumstances of students and families across the system, including the Model Schools for Inner Cities program".[40]

In 2016, as the result of a motion made by the ICAC (see Appendix A) and further feedback, the TDSB provided a breakdown of the Learning Opportunities Grant, including revenues and expenditures for the 2014-15 school year. This data was prepared in accordance with templates provided by ICAC in order to highlight expenditures which could be reasonably attributed to the intended purpose of the LOG-DA. These include programs directly targeting at-risk students (e.g. Model Schools for Inner Cities), as well as resources that were allocated using the LOI or similar formula (i.e. where resources were equitably distributed based on need).

40 Toronto District School Board, n.d.-b, "About ICAC", para. 1

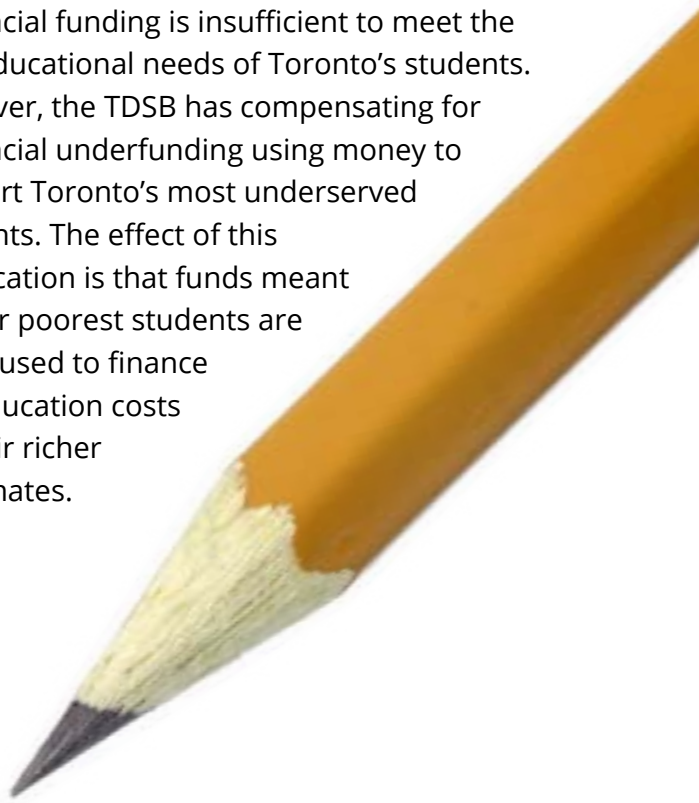
Data provided by the TDSB showed that only 52.10% ($66,389,519)[41] of the Demographic Allocation of the Learning Opportunities Grant[42] is used for its intended purpose: to support those students who are living in poverty and at risk of not succeeding academically.

Forty-eight percent (47.90%) of the funds are diverted away from the stated purpose to help even the playing ground for students who face challenges before they even enter the classroom. In other words, this means that in 2014-15 alone, approximately $61 million, that was supposed to support our most marginalized students, was diverted to other budget line items.

In 1997, during the development of a newly-created provincial funding formula for education, the Ontario government led by Premier Mike Harris established an expert panel to provide recommendations on the Learning Opportunities Grant. While the Panel recognized the need for "extensive local flexibility in decision making within the overall purpose and conditionality of the grant", it further emphasized that this should be "matched by appropriate accountability requirements to communicate details of decisions made, programs funded, and results achieved".[43] Unfortunately, the provincial government chose not to put in place any mechanism for accountability.

This practice is not new. For the past decade researchers and advocates have noted this diversion of funds, both locally and provincially.[44] Given the fiscal pressures on school boards, it is no surprise that they seek to reallocate any available funding. As Mackenzie (2015) observes, Toronto public school trustees "are dealing with a funding formula so flawed, they have little room to maneuver".[45] The LOG-DA, as one of very few unprotected grants, appears to continue to be paying for a wide range of general programs and filling in gaps in provincial funding for mandatory core services, despite the long-time recognition of this problem.

The TDSB is required by the Province to produce a balanced budget, even though provincial funding is insufficient to meet the real educational needs of Toronto's students. However, the TDSB has compensating for provincial underfunding using money to support Toronto's most underserved students. The effect of this reallocation is that funds meant for our poorest students are being used to finance the education costs of their richer classmates.



41 This is the figure presented by the TDSB. Further analysis suggests that this figure may be significantly lower.
42 Toronto District School Board, 2016b
43 Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1997, p.11
44 Mackenzie, 2007; Mackenzie, 2015; Johnston, Queiser, & Clandfield, 2013; People for Education, 2013
45 Mackenzie, 2015, p.5

MOVING FORWARD

THE DIRECTOR'S INNER CITY TASK FORCE

In June 2016, the TDSB Board of Trustees passed a motion to establish the Inner City Task Force.[46] This Task Force will be responsible for conducting an audit of TDSB initiatives and programs intended to improve outcomes for marginalized and under-served students living in urban poverty and/or experiencing bias or discrimination. The Task Force is expected to make recommendations in April 2017 regarding supports for students living with the effects poverty. While the motion does not specifically reference the Learning Opportunities Grant, it would seem that this envelope of funding is directly tied to its mandate and re-allocation of funds will be required to implement the recommendations.

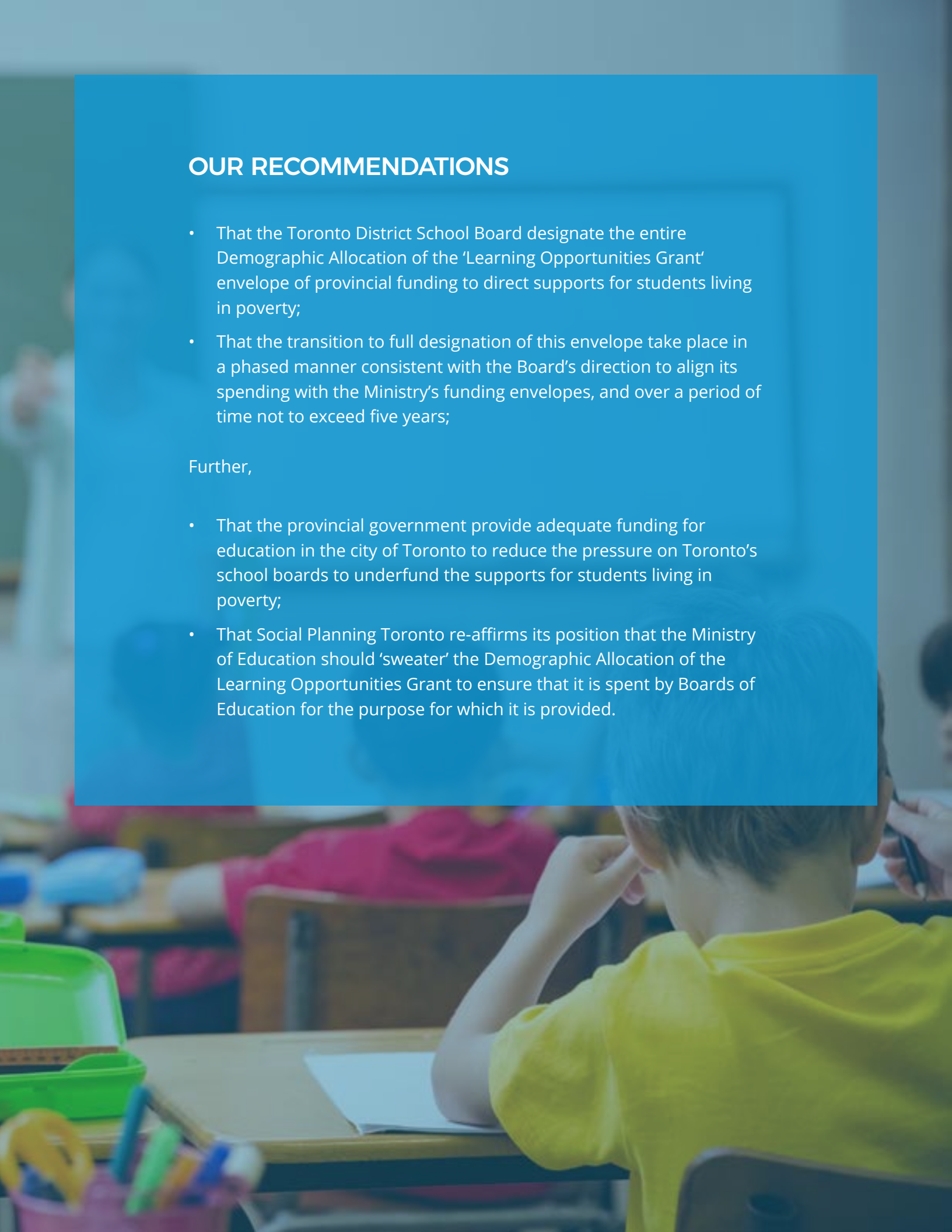
46 Toronto District School Board, 2016a

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the Toronto District School Board designate the entire Demographic Allocation of the 'Learning Opportunities Grant' envelope of provincial funding to direct supports for students living in poverty;
- That the transition to full designation of this envelope take place in a phased manner consistent with the Board's direction to align its spending with the Ministry's funding envelopes, and over a period of time not to exceed five years;

Further,

- That the provincial government provide adequate funding for education in the city of Toronto to reduce the pressure on Toronto's school boards to underfund the supports for students living in poverty;
- That Social Planning Toronto re-affirms its position that the Ministry of Education should 'sweater' the Demographic Allocation of the Learning Opportunities Grant to ensure that it is spent by Boards of Education for the purpose for which it is provided.



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APPENDIX A:

MOTION BY THE INNER CITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

a) That the Director present a report to the Inner City Advisory Committee on revenues and expenditures for programs and services for students at risk, according to the criteria used for the Learning Opportunities Index;

b) That the report be for the year 2014-15 and its format consist of a system-wide analysis, including student enrolment information and the following information for the year in question using the following format:

A. REVENUES (ACTUAL)

i) The revenues for each LOG allocation
ii) Revenues from all sources specifically intended for students at risk

B1. EXPENDITURES (LOG EXCLUDING DEMOGRAPHIC ALLOCATION – DA)

i) Literacy/Math Outside School Day
ii) Student Success (SS) Gr 7 – 12
iii) SS Gr 7-8/teacher allocations (lit/num)
iv) School Effectiveness Framework (elem)
v) OFIP (tutoring)
vi) Specialist High Skills Major
vii) Amalgamation Adjustment (school boards)
viii) Mental Health Leaders

B2. EXPENDITURES (ACTUAL)

It is agreed that the entirety of these amounts match the goals of LOG-DA

i) Model School programs
ii) LOG teachers (Elementary)
iii) LOG teachers (Secondary)
iv) Learning Opportunities Supplement in Elementary Schools
v) Learning Opportunities Supplement in Secondary Schools
vi) Student Financial Assistance in Secondary Schools

B3. EXPENDITURES (WHERE RESOURCES ARE ALLOCATED USING LOI OR A SIMILAR FILTER)

*Using template attached, worksheets A, B1, B2, B3:

Include only those items where LOI or a similar filter is used for the allocation

Exclude items where LOI or similar filter is not used for the allocation

For included items, describe the way in which LOI or similar filter is actually used

i) Principals – Elementary
ii) Principals – Secondary
iii) Vice-Principals - Elementary
iv) Vice-Principals - Secondary
v) School Office support staff - Elementary
vi) School Office support staff - Secondary
vii) Child and Youth Workers
viii) Child and Youth Councillors
ix) Education Assistants (not Special Education)
x) School-Based Safety Monitors
xi) Food Service Assistants
xii) Early Childhood Educators
xiii) Lunchtime Supervisors FDK
xiv) Lunchtime Supervisors Regular
xv) Aquatic Instructors
xvi) Caretakers
xvii) Other Professional staff (not Special Education)
xviii) Outdoor Education
xix) Classroom Computers
xx) Community Services and Translation
xxi) Safe Schools
xxii) Student Nutrition
xxiii) Other (specify and itemize)

B4. EXPENDITURES (SCHOOL-BY-SCHOOL)

Using the same format as in Appendices A through F of the report to the Budget Committee at the meeting of February 24, 2014.

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