



2024-2025 Staff-Recommended Budget Questions and Answers

Q1: How are we engaging the community about the 2024-2025 budget process?

A. The District has recently launched a new community engagement platform - engage.ocdsb.ca. The [budget section](#) has been created and will continue to be developed and expanded throughout the budget process. Currently, this section includes some frequently asked questions, a financial overview, and budget timelines.

Q2: I understand there was an atypical drop in enrolment last year, can you please remind me what the fluctuation from the estimate to the actual for the 2022 to 2023 school year was?

A. Enrolment estimates for the initial budget are based on a variety of factors from local population growth rates, the previous year enrollment numbers, the opening of new schools, etc and those Estimates are made for the first time during Academic Staffing process which are approximately 7 months before the start of the school year and are revised as more information becomes clearer. Actual enrollment varies throughout the school year and can significantly change and often grows from September to December. The actual enrollment for 2023-2024 was approximately 693 pupils lower at the time of revised estimates than originally forecasted. There was no way to validate these numbers until into the school year.

| | Projection 2023-2024 Budget Estimates | Actual 2023-2024 Revised Estimates | Increase (Decrease) |
|-------------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| Elementary | 52,249.50 | 51,276.00 | (973.50) |
| Secondary | 24,503.46 | 24,783.44 | 279.98 |
| | 76,752.96 | 76,059.44 | (693.52) |

Q3: In Report 24-041 on page 2 it flags that there will be two additional autism spectrum disorder classes opened, where are these two classes being opened?

A. Learning Support Services is anticipating the need for two additional specialized program classes at the secondary level. Continued analysis is required to determine the location of these be programs.

Q4: Why do none of the budget meetings upcoming include the needs analysis from the motion? Are the advocacy documents the needs analysis?

A. The Advocacy briefs were finalized by the Advocacy Committee last week. The advocacy briefs will form part of the analysis of needs that was requested by the Budget Committee. The briefs provide an overview of the issues, funding, and include some key recommendations. The briefs are included in the backup on this Budget Committee agenda. Staff is working on some additional elements of the analysis of needs for each of the identified areas. These will be added to a future Budget Committee agenda.

Q5: Is the only way to change the timelines for academic staffing approval through negotiations with the unions?

A. Correct. The only way to change the timelines for academic staffing is through the local collective bargaining process. The timelines are set based on our obligation to ensure schools are staffed and ready to open in September. For example, the timelines are critical in ensuring that we meet our obligations of notifying staff of surplus. If this does not happen within the established timeline, the District would be required to create positions to keep surplus staff employed which would not be fiscally possible.

Q6: Do other districts have the same timelines with their academic staffing and budgetary approval?

A. The Ministry of Education requires all school boards to submit their budget for the upcoming school year by June 30th. Similar to the OCDSB, all school boards would have a local budget process with timelines between February and June. The process for dealing with academic staffing may vary by Board, subject to collective agreements, policy and/or practice considerations.

Q7: Why isn't the main goal of the budget to meet the goals of our strategic plan?

A. The Budget report makes a direct connection between the strategic plan and the budget, noting that *“any new investments should advance the Board’s updated strategic priorities of learning, well-being, and social responsibility. Responsible and transparent fiscal practices will ensure the successful implementation of all three areas of focus of the plan for current and future students and employees at the OCDSB.”*

Q8: Why would we seek to accumulate/rebuild a surplus at the expense of achieving our Plan?

A. These are not either/or goals. The strategic plan sets the direction for the school district in how priorities are set and resources are allocated. That work must be done within the context of a balanced budget. A balanced budget should advance work on strategic priorities within available resources. Generally, in school board budgets, surpluses are not planned, but arise from savings found in operations so that the District has some capacity to deal with unexpected expenses or make one-time investments.

Q9: Please explain the impacts of the cuts to Indigenous funding. What will the change from last year staffing to this year on indigenous' students support be?

A. The Indigenous funding model changed for the 23-24 school year and moved the funding into a defined funding allocation only to be used for Indigenous student learning and support. At that time, the Ministry provided a one time transitional funding amount which is not expected to continue this year. However, that amount was not part of the Indigenous education allocation. Under the new funding model, there have been a number of additional resources and supports put in place to support Indigenous student learning and well-being. We anticipate that the funding will remain the same for the upcoming budget year. There are NO planned reductions in services or support to the Indigenous community for the 2024-2025 school year at this time.

Q10. Why isn't there a clear commitment to present the budget at the advisory committees and support trustees in their outreach? "If schedules allow"

A. Staff continue to be committed to working with the Advisory Committees as done in previous years. Scheduling is an ongoing challenge and we make every effort to make it work.

Q11. How are we prioritizing the needs of at risk/highest needs students? I would like clear examples.

A. The District prioritizes the needs of students in many ways; some examples include staffing allocations, school budgets, Student Achievement Through Equity (SATE) project, the Family and Community Engagement Initiative (FACE), Black Graduation Coaches, Indigenous Education Coaches, and community support workers.

Q12. Has funding changed from last year's allocation? It seems like we've moved away from identifying equity groups in the language presented in the memo. There is a risk in generalizing.

A. Information about the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) is not expected until mid to late March. When we receive the GSNs, we will better understand any changes in funding. Based on the information currently available, we do not anticipate significant changes in funding. This will allow us to continue with many of the important investments we have put in place in previous years, but may limit new investments.

Q13. In academic staffing, can we see which schools are receiving additional resources?

A. The Academic Staffing process in March deals with the overall allocation in order to meet the collective agreement timelines. Individual school allocations will be based on enrolment, number of classes (elementary) and sections (secondary) specific to each school. This happens between April and early May annually prior to the first round of postings and surplus notices that are issued.

Q14. What is the Financial position of the board?

A. Currently the District is under Ministry supervision due to our financial health. This is the result of the amount of the unencumbered balance in our current accumulated surplus relative to the size of our financial operations. When your organization is under supervision for its financial health, it puts tremendous strain on the system to operate as there is little flexibility to find additional savings during the school year. Ministry supervision increases the workload on an already over-stressed financial team and is usually the first step before the Ministry launches a takeover of the board if the financial health of the board does not improve. Just like financial advisors advise households to have a savings account with 3 months worth of living expenses in the event of emergencies, School boards should operate with sufficient flexibility to avoid financial supervision and maintain an unencumbered surplus of approximately 2% of their operating budgets.

Q15. What is the costing for four (4) half-time (0.5) Vice-Principals if we wanted to add to the complement of single Elementary school administrators for schools in high need (e.g. schools high on the RAISE index).

A. The approximate cost for four (4) additional half time (0.5) Elementary Vice-Principals is \$263,701.33.

Q16. What does employee replacement costs cover (field trips, sick days, Professional Development, other major events)?

Employee Replacement costs include all absences where a replacement is required. This includes: Sick, Illness in Family, Compensatory, School Based Leaves (e.g. field trips), Jury duty, personal days, etc.

Q17. What methods do we currently use to transport students to school and what are we spending on each method?

A. Students are currently transported through the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) coordinated services. The three main methods of transportation for OCDSB students are large yellow buses, small vehicle transportation, and OC Transpo bus service. There are some other services like coach buses etc.. but they are often used in limited cases for short durations. OSTA costs are made up of the contracted services for the methods of

transportation plus their staff and administration costs to manage their services so the numbers below are only a reflection of some of the expenses OSTA bills to the individual school boards. For FY 23/24 the approved OSTA budget for OCDSB student transportation was \$18.2M for yellow buses, \$17.3M for small vehicle transportation, \$8.6M for OC Transpo Public Transit, and \$3.0M for fuel escalation across the van and yellow bus contracts.

Q18. What would it cost with our current model to ensure every student in OCDSB has transportation to school?

A. Many students are not eligible based on their proximity to their assigned schools. The Ottawa student transportation is limited by current 3rd party capacity which can not currently provide transportation to every student in the district if you included all currently non-eligible students. It would involve bringing additional transportation capacity into the Ottawa market which would increase the costs across the board and it would also come with funding challenges within the current funding model. OSTA would need to investigate these costs.

Q19. What would it cost to transport students entirely on yellow buses and eliminate small vehicle transportation.

A. Yellow buses are an important and economical method of transportation but yellow buses have both 3rd party capacity limitations and functional limitations for some students with specialized needs or geographical limitations in some remote rural areas. It would not be feasible to grow the 3rd party capacity to transport all students nor would it be functionally practical for students with solo transportation needs.

Q20. What would it cost to provide every middle and secondary student an OC Transpo pass?

A. It would cost approximately \$37M to provide every OCDSB middle and secondary student OC Transpo passes. The reality is that OC Transpo also has capacity limitations on the routes they can service to support school transportation so not all students in middle or secondary school can receive OC Transpo services. Many secondary students are currently on yellow buses which is a more effective method of transportation and many other students are not eligible for transportation or have additional transportation needs that OC Transpo could not support.

Q21. What would it cost to make all students inside 3KM walk regardless of age?

A. A policy like this would produce cost savings but it would be impossible to determine those cost savings without OSTA running their data through software. As well we have certain obligations that would not allow us to exclude certain students who would be unable to walk or would be put at risk by hazards if walking like crossing highways etc...

Q22. What does the funding model fund around changing distance?

A. Funding benchmark rates to reflect costs of operating school buses through a number of components: 1.) Vehicle component to reflect annualized capital, operating, and licensing costs; 2.) Fuel component based on travel distance and market price of fuel; and 3.) Driver component based on travel time, with provision for 30 minutes per day for non-driving duties, and an hourly wage benchmark of \$23 Technical Paper 2023–24, April 2023 127 plus 13% for statutory benefits, along with an annual amount for recruitment/retention bonus and for driver training. The Ministry takes student routing information and utilizes its own programs to determine funding provided which changes based on the Ministry adaptations. Information provided to the public on the Ministry's funding on Transportation can be found in the Ministry of Education's Technical papers posted on their website.

Q23. We have buildings, repairs, ethical and legal obligations to our real property. How are we meeting these needs?

A. School Boards are provided various sources of capital funding for facilities work. In particular OCDSB uses Facilities Renewal and School Condition Improvement funding as part of the Facilities Renewal Program to plan and deliver safe and effective learning spaces for our staff and students. For FY 2023-2024 we have a budget of approximately \$117.8M dedicated to the improvement. The recommended 2023-2024 plan includes a variety of renewal projects including:

- Site – paving and sidewalks, septic and water systems, parking areas, play areas, playgrounds, fencing;
- Building envelope – roofs, doors and windows, foundation repairs, masonry repairs, structural repairs;
- Building interior – flooring, ceilings, interior doors and hardware, millwork;
- Mechanical – heating, ventilation, air-conditioning, chillers, plumbing, controls;
- Electrical – hydro service upgrades, power distribution, generator replacements, lighting, communication cabling, network and telephone upgrades, public address and fire alarm systems;
- Portables – relocations, upgrades and repairs;
- Various functional alterations, program upgrades, renovations, and regulatory requirements;
- Environmental – asbestos abatement, oil storage tank removal and soils contamination remediation;
- Energy conservation and efficiency upgrades, multi-year energy plan projects; and
- Accessibility – 20 year accessibility plan and various barrier-free projects, elevator replacements, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) compliance for major renovations; a continued rollout of universal washrooms and change rooms are being undertaken based on identified needs.

Q24. What is the breakdown of the 896M\$ backlog in repairs?

A. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) has a large portfolio of buildings and properties encompassing over 12 million square feet. More than 80% of the spaces are over 20 years old. The Ministry uses a standard guide to determine repair work based on equipment life expectancy. For example a furnace might have a replacement cost of \$2.0M and a life expectancy of 10 years. After the 10 year period the furnace would be placed on the backlog list but the reality would be that the furnace is in excellent condition and could have another 10 years of life expectancy. It would be unrealistic and unnecessary for OCDSB to complete all the work identified on the backlog list.

Q25. What would it cost to get the operationally critical repairs done in 2 years?

A. OCDSB does not have any operationally critical work that must be done and if we did we would conduct it immediately as we maintain a contingency in our annual plan for unforecasted requirements. We prioritize all repair work as part of the Annual Facilities Renewal Plan to ensure that we maintain and continue to enhance learning spaces for our students and staff.

Q26. What do we lose if funding drops off?

A. Capital funding for school repairs has been consistent and steady for the last few years. We have no indications that stable funding will not continue to be provided by the Ministry of Education. The reality is that all our school sites are in operation for 10 months of the year and many sites also conduct summer programs during the other 2 months of the year. Availability of school sites, local market construction capacity, and the intrusiveness of some repair work are greater limitations on the completion of renewal work than funding from the Ministry.

Q27. How long and what would it cost to ensure all facilities are AODA compliant this year? Do we have an estimate, retrofit implementation?

A. OCDSB is compliant with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), which was passed into law in June 2005. Ontario does not have an AODA Built Environment Accessibility Standard that requires retroactive modifications. Changes to the building code have been made over the years to address physical barriers but only apply to new builds and major retrofits. The District completed a general Accessibility Audit of our facilities in 2006 and another in 2022. These comprehensive plans have been used as a guide for planning projects annually to continue to reduce physical barriers, where possible, within our facilities and adapt to any proposed changes implemented by the provincial government.

Q28. We need to ensure cyber security of digital assets and data. What technology do we need to collect and manage student and staff data?

A. OCDSB uses various software programs to protect student, staff, and parent data such as but not limited to AI driven Extended and Detection Response (XDR) applications. Providing details to the public on the specific cyber security tools would assist threat actors on specific potential attack vectors. OCDSB works with our insurer, other school boards, the Ministry, and consultants on a safe and secure cyber security plan to protect all data. All applications are vetted for security risks before allowing use within our system.

Q29. What is the total list of software as a service that we pay for, and are any of these replaceable with open source software?

A. As the IT industry has shifted to cloud based software, many of the applications in use at OCDSB are presently Software as a Service (SaaS). It is anticipated that all software at the District will be cloud based within the next 3 years. In order to protect student and staff data, softwares used by the OCDSB are kept confidential. Since schools boards are governed by Broader Public Sector Purchasing Guidelines, OCDSB ensures these regulations are adhered to during the procurement processes for software purchases. Suppliers at times include in their submissions leveraging open source software. Open source software is not precluded as long as the submission is clear on how student and staff data is protected from any security related issues.

Q30. Are the current suite of tools for mental health sufficient for the task, and if not, what external tools do we have that can supplement ours?

A. Mental health services within school boards work within a tiered model of intervention. We are fortunate to have access to programs across these tiers and in collaboration with community partners to best support the mental health of students as outlined in Right Time Right Care.

At the tier one level (mental health promotion and stigma reduction), School Mental Health Ontario provides a wealth of information that supports educators and mental health professionals in meeting the needs of students. Some examples include changes to the grade 7 and 8 Health and Physical Education curriculum requiring the use of six modules to deepen knowledge and understanding of what good mental health is, reducing stigma, and where to turn to for help. Modules are also expected for the grade 10 Career Studies course in the 2024-2025 school year that will further support student mental health and well-being. The Mental Health Lead along with mental health staff have been working with educators to support the implementation of these important lessons for students.

Ottawa Public Health has also worked collaboratively with Ottawa school boards to develop Healthy Transitions for grades 4 & 6. This program offers mental health awareness for students in junior grades and can be delivered by classroom teachers. Further, they have revised their Youth Connections Ottawa materials, a mental health program for secondary students, which will be piloted in the Fall.

At the tier two level, staff are implementing group support through emotion regulation groups, support for newcomer populations, and healthy relationships groups. We have also expanded our work in restorative conferencing training with IIRP. With the support of both SMH-ON and the expertise of our mental health teams, these evidence-informed groups are providing important support to students across the District.

At the tier three level, we have been engaged in training around suicide assessments and assessment of risk to others through partnership with the Centre for Trauma Informed Practices and Living Works.

While this provides only a snapshot of the support and services available, the mental health team members are often working at the tier three level on crisis management. The Mental Health Lead has inquired with School Mental Health Ontario about the possibility of training mental health staff in single session therapy. This training would provide staff with the needed skills to provide intentional, solution focused and evidence informed approaches to their meetings with students. The hope is that School Mental Health Ontario will consider this a valuable training for all staff across the province.

Q31. Assuming there is a waitlist for services, what would it cost to ensure no student waited longer than three months for a referral to one of our services or for an external service?

A. While formal assessments are sometimes a necessary part of understanding a student's learning profile, a considerable amount of time is spent conducting assessments and writing reports. Frequently, a consultation approach including educators and psychology staff and/or speech and language therapists is also an effective way to lead to instructional approaches that support learning.

Learning Support Services has been working to shift the emphasis away from "assessment for placement" to an understanding of student's learning needs and developing strategies to support the learner. By freeing up time from doing assessments and report writing, multi-disciplinary team members can spend more time building capacity with educators to meet the needs of students.

Q32. What would it cost to create a program, service or opportunity, to offer mental health support in house?

A. Currently, school mental health professionals provide mental health support in many different ways. School mental health professionals are well positioned to focus on promotion, prevention and intervention. However, school mental health professionals exist within a community of practice that provides support along a continuum of care. We work collaboratively with hospitals and community agencies and have developed important partnerships to support student mental health and well-being.

The District is not in the position to offer long-term mental health treatment nor to act as primary care providers. We feel the bridge to community agencies is an important part of the continuum of care for students and families and we continue to focus on building bridges where students can move seamlessly between mental health services and supports.

Q33. What would it cost to provide 1:1 technology to student ratio? What would it cost to use a different ratio or different technology to support student learning?

A. It is estimated that moving to a 1:1 technology to student ratio would cost approximately \$8-22M and have an on-going additional cost of \$6-7M per year. Different ratios and grades would have various levels of implementation and on-going costs depending on the model selected.

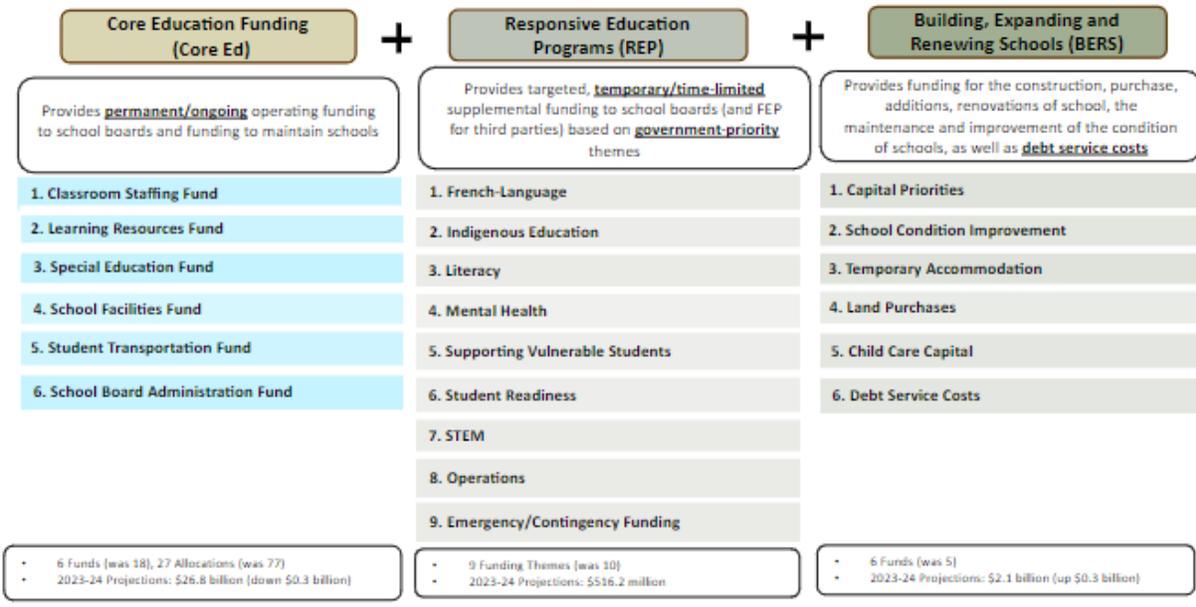
Q34. Why did the Ministry change the Grants for Student Needs Funding Formula?

A. This is the first time in 25 years that the education funding has been significantly restructured. The Ministry changed the Grants for Student Needs Funding Formula as part of their commitment to the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023. The Ministry undertook a review to enhance transparency for parents and strengthen accountability in the publicly funded education system.

Q35. What were the changes to the Grants for Student Needs Funding Formula?

The changes were daily complex and you can find more detailed information at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/education-funding-2024-25> but in the simplest terms the Ministry redesigned the budget mapping framework in the following ways:

1. Renaming Grants for Student Needs (operating) to Core Education Funding;
2. Streamlining from 18 grants to 6 funding pillars in Core Education and from 77 allocations to 28 allocations
3. Renaming Grants for Student Needs (capital) to Building, Expanding and Renewing Schools;
4. Renaming Priorities and Partnerships Funding to Responsive Education Programs and/or Funding for External Partners;
5. Streamlining from 10 themes to 9 themes in the Responsive Education Programs..



Q36. How do the Ministry's changes to the funding formula impact the Budget for 2024-2025?

A. The changes to the funding formula are a remapping of how funds are provided to the school boards but do not impact budget amounts. Budget amounts are based on the Technical papers so the changes to the funding formula do not impact budget.

Q37. What are the 6 new pillars in the Core Education Funding?

A. Core Ed continues to be student-centric with a more intuitive funding structure, clearly showing how funding supports Ontario's students for better communication with parents. Core Ed is made up of the following six funds:

1. Classroom Staffing Fund (CSF): The Classroom Staffing Fund supports the majority of staff that work in classrooms, including teachers, early childhood educators (ECEs) in kindergarten classrooms and some educational assistants (EAs). Note that the primary source of funding for EAs is the Special Education Fund.
2. Learning Resources Fund (LRF): The Learning Resources Fund supports the costs of staffing typically required outside of the classroom to support student needs, such as teacher-librarians / library technicians, guidance counsellors, mental health workers, school management staff as well as non-staffing classroom costs, such as learning materials and classroom equipment.
3. Special Education Fund (SEF): The Special Education Fund supports positive outcomes for students with special education needs. This funding is for the additional costs of the programs, services and/or equipment these students may require.

4. School Facilities Fund (SFF): The School Facilities Fund supports operating (including cleaning and utilities), maintaining, renovating and renewing school buildings. It also provides additional support for students in rural and northern communities.
5. Student Transportation Fund (STF): The Student Transportation Fund supports the transportation of students between home and school.
6. School Board Administration Fund (SBAF): The School Board Administration Fund supports governance and administration costs for the operation of the school board, including its board offices and facilities, as well as for parent engagement activities.

Q38. How is Elementary Program Review impacting the OCDSB Budget for 2024-25?

A. Elementary Program Review is an initiative to review the programs being offered by the district. The review is underway but there will be no implementation of the review for OCDSB in 2024-25. The options have not been determined nor have they been approved by the Board of Trustees. There may be some funding approved for a team to continue to develop and determine the options for future consideration.

Q39. Is the OCDSB canceling specialized classes as part of an inclusionary model for the delivery of supports for students with special needs?

A. The OCDSB is not canceling the offering of specialized education classes for students with special needs for the 2024-2025 school year. As part of an Elementary Program Review, there will be an evaluation of how we deliver services to students with special needs and that work is underway but no changes to the current delivery model are being recommended or approved at this time as the work is underway to develop options for future considerations.

Q40. OCDSB is undertaking an Elementary Program Review to save money?

A. Elementary Program Review is not a money saving exercise. Funding provided to OCDSB is based on the Ministry of Education Technical Papers and driven by student enrolment. Changing the programs within the school board to ensure effectiveness and efficiency may allow for the re-allocation of resources, internally, to offer better support to students but it is not a cost savings initiative. It is a long over-due process to ensure that the programs we offer serve the needs of our students from an achievement, well being, and equity perspective. Students should have equal access to programs across the district within their communities.

Q41. Has the board looked into purchasing a fleet of school buses and hiring drivers?

A. The board has been investigating the potential to purchase and manage drivers through either the board or Ottawa Student Transportation Services. This continues to be an option for exploration but at this time the option is complicated and would potentially cost more than 3rd party contracting of the services. It would require a substantial investment of capital funds from the Ministry and the purchase of land as well as determining the maintenance of the assets. Other boards and consortiums who have investigated or implemented this type of options even

on a small scale of a bus or two have not realized the savings they were expecting and it came with other operational complications. At this time we have been investing resources in providing stable operations by working with our vendors and we currently have no long term cancellations.

Q42. Can we better fund libraries to enhance the quality and quantity of reading resources available to the students?

A. Schools are provided budgets which are intended to support their individual needs including the purchase of library books and reading resources for students. While individual school decisions on how to spend and allocate those resources can be difficult, we have been and will continue to work with school principals on best practices and uses of school budgets without taking away from their ability to make local decisions on the most pressing requirements to best support students.

Q43. Where can I find more specific information on how school boards are funded? In particular the Technical papers?

A. The Ministry of Education website has a variety of resources on school board funding. In the link below you will find the technical papers which go into specific details.

https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/B2024/B05_Attach1_EN.pdf