



Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization
Organisme Communautaire des Services aux Immigrants d'Ottawa



Presentation to the OCDSB Board of Trustees Committee of the Whole on the Budget May 3, 2005

OCISO, the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization, is proud of our partnership with the OCDSB. Since 1991 we have worked together to ensure the best education possible for immigrant children. OCISO is convinced that the OCDSB's commitment to integrating immigrant children has made this Board a leading example of excellence in education.

We are here this evening to encourage you to strengthen and deepen your commitment to immigrant children and to the children of immigrants. Demonstrating your commitment to this important group of vulnerable students through budgetary decisions is an important way of improving your services; creating healthy, functional schools and ensuring the success of immigrant kids.

OCISO would recommend that you make three budget commitments:

- Expand the Multicultural Liaison Program
- Shore up anti-racist education
- Strengthen English as a Second Language instruction

We will expand on each of these requests.

The Multicultural Liaison Program – the MLOs

The Multicultural Liaison Program is an awarding-winning partnership that places OCISO staff, the Multicultural Liaison Officers, in your schools. We currently have 11 FTE directly based in 32 OCDSB schools but they serve the whole system. Last year we had service requests from 39 schools that do not have an MLO based in their school and we have 3 schools on our waiting list of schools who have requested an MLO based in their school.

When the program started in 1991, the salary for the MLO's was co-financed 50%-50% between the OCDSB contribution and the monies which OCISO obtained through Citizenship and Immigration Canada. That ratio has now slipped to 33% OCDSB support to 67% from other funding.

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This new ratio has had a negative impact on the program for two reasons. First, we have not been able to keep pace with the demand in the schools and second we are under a great deal of pressure by the federal funder to concentrate our services on those they deem to be “eligible clients.” That is, permanent residents who have been in Canada less than three years. Many clients of the MLO program, whom the schools need us to help, include families who fall outside of this definition. It might be that they are on temporary work permits; are refugee claimants or because although they have been in Canada for more than three years family issues are only now emerging. Your staff have spoken eloquently in program meetings of the importance of basing services on need and not on immigration status.

Re-balancing the entire program to the original 50-50 split would involve increasing the OCDSB’s contribution to the program by approximately \$44,000. This contribution would allow OCISO to increase the number of MLOs serving your schools by one full staff person, allowing us to cover 2 or 3 more schools.

Anti-Racist Education

OCISO has participated in the Anti-Racist and Ethnocultural Equity committee since its inception. We firmly believe that this initiative is central to the ability of the OCDSB to make those important institutional changes needed to accommodate diversity. The AREE is key to in-service training and to ensuring anti-racist curriculum changes. We encourage you to continue to support this important function. The OCDSB has been a leader in this field – we believe that adding resources to AREE will be an excellent investment for the future.

English as a Second Language

As you are well aware, in the school year 1999/2000 the OCDSB cut the English as a Second Language teaching staff by 33% from 140 teachers to 93. Although OCISO protested this move at the time, we understood the extreme pressures that the Board was experiencing from the provincial government. Now that there seems to be a possibility of some flexibility, we strongly encourage you to invest in English as a Second language.

English is the key to academic success and success in life. Children who come from homes where English is not spoken, whether they are born here or whether they immigrate, face a significant disadvantage in relation to their English-speaking peers. In order to learn math, social studies or art, a child must first master the English language. As you already know, in order to achieve an adequate academic level of English, students need up to seven years of ESL support. We are well aware that the provincial envelope of funding for ESL only covers students who have been in Canada less than four years. We urge the OCDSB to take a needs-based approach to the education of immigrant children and to supplement the provincial ESL funding.

In closing, we would like to thank the OCDSB again for your commitment to supporting immigrant children. We know that you want all children to succeed in your schools and we encourage you to level the playing field by making the appropriate investments to assure better outcomes for immigrant children.