

# NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## SCHOOL BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE – SYSTEMIC PROBLEM DUE TO HISTORIC ISSUES

Toronto, Ontario

The school bus driver shortage and high driver turnover in the GTA and elsewhere is related to a number of issues that have been simmering over many years including a government funding formula that has not been re-examined or revised in 10 years and does not reflect today's student transportation needs. Costs of school buses and parts have increased 35% as a result of product imports and the strong US dollar. The Request for Proposals (RFP) process mandated by the Provincial Government eight years ago, must be overhauled to ensure it is a fair, open, and transparent process reflecting reasonable operating contracts to support safe school bus operations and sustain all employee jobs including office staff, maintenance personnel and professional school bus drivers.

In a safety sensitive industry, delivery of secure and on-time student transportation is the responsibility of several key stakeholders working cohesively together – government, school boards/transportation consortia and school bus service providers.

OSBA is calling on the Provincial Government, specifically the Ministry of Education, to fulfill Premier Kathleen Wynne's written election promise of June 2, 2014: *"Further, as part of our consultations for next year's school board funding, we will review transportation benchmarks to ensure we have an appropriate understanding about how to deliver safe, high quality transportation services across the province."* **Promise made. Promise broken.**

On January 28, 2016, the Ministry of Education released a "Student Transportation Competitive Procurement Review (STCPR) Report" completed by former Justice Colin Campbell outlining 29 recommendations regarding improvements to the competitive procurement process for student transportation. While some steps have been taken to instigate a few of these recommendations, to date, most of them have not been implemented.

Government funding levels have not kept pace with rising costs of operating student transportation and are inadequate for a vital public service. Driver wages and the cost of school bus vehicles and parts take up the biggest portion of contract fees paid by school boards/transportation consortia to school bus service providers. While a competitive procurement process contributes to accountability, it has also led to processes and outcomes that mistakenly focus on achieving lowest possible costs which inadvertently result in pressure on school bus driver wages seeing as this is the single largest cost of school bus operations.

Funding supplied by the Ministry of Education to school boards is not flowing to student transportation service providers to adequately cover rising costs. Minister of Education Mitzi Hunter has stated that *"...we've increased that funding by 40 per cent (since 2003)"* (2.5% per year over 16 years). Unfortunately, a majority of service providers in Ontario have received 25-30% or less since 2003 - representing less than 2% or CPI, or even 0% each year.

### **Where is the difference going?**

OSBA is also requesting the Ministry of Education confirm that all funding provided to school boards/transportation consortia for delivery of pupil transportation services, is allocated directly to cover all costs of transporting students safely and on-time to school, and NOT re-directed to fund other initiatives.

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*The Ontario School Bus Association (OSBA) is a non-profit association providing advocacy and education services for the owners of school bus companies and school boards and transportation consortia across Ontario. The school bus industry maintains the highest safety record as substantiated by Transport Canada.*

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