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Students Urge Government to Recognize the Magnitude of Funding Cuts

For Immediate Release

Toronto, ON – In a series of memoranda sent to school boards on the evening of December 14, 2018, the provincial government announced their plans to cut \$25 million from the Education Program - Other (EPO) funding brought in by the previous government. This funding aligned with the *Achieving Excellence; A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* strategy released in April of 2014. School boards were promised funding, which they were anticipating on receiving this fiscal year, for special programming not covered by the Grants for Student Needs (GSNs). Although school boards are still working to understand the full impact these cuts will have, OSTA-AECO has reviewed the programs facing cuts and has determined that these unexpected changes will have a negative effect on many opportunities for Ontario youth.

Within the memoranda sent to school boards this past Friday, it has been announced that several programs will no longer be funded by the Ministry of Education. Among the funding facing cuts, OSTA-AECO urges the government to realize the importance of the following programs:

- *Focus on Youth*: This is an integral tool in providing economic opportunities to youth in high priority or low-income neighbourhoods and making communities safer. Afterschool programming fosters an inclusive environment for students to take advantage of opportunities that they previously may not have had.
- *SpeakUp*: These grants provide approved applicants up to \$2500 to fund student-led initiatives. These grants have played a major role in capturing the potential of student leaders throughout the province and providing them with the funds to create the change they see necessary for their community.
- *Re-engagement 12 & 12+*: For students who leave secondary school despite coming close to graduation, this program provides support for them to return and receive their high school diploma. As we continue to see high discrepancies among the achievement rates of different student demographics, specifically Indigenous students, we must continue to re-engage with our most vulnerable students who have left our education system.
- *Ensuring Equitable Access to Post-Secondary Education*: This program focuses on alleviating the non-financial issues students face when considering post-secondary education. In helping students prepare for their future, it is of the utmost importance to recognize factors other than financial matters that may hinder a student's ability to

pursue a post-secondary education, such as not having family support, and not receiving sufficient academic preparation.

The government has also announced that some EPO programs will be seeing a reduction in funding. Specifically, the cutback of the *Well-Being: Safe, Accepting and Healthy Schools and Mental Health* program cuts down on the much-needed strategies that the students of Ontario benefit from. As mental health concerns continue to rise within our schools, this program provides valuable funding to assist boards in the implementation of their mental health and well-being strategies. Overall student well-being continues to be a critical aspect of student success and current supports provided to students in these areas must be advanced.

“While the provincial government is looking for efficiencies throughout our province, we urge them to fully recognize the magnitude of the decisions they make - especially when implementing drastic changes during the academic year,” says OSTA-AECO President Amal Qayum. “Students are the heart of our education system; while striving to ensure that all of Ontario’s youth achieve at the highest level possible, we must provide them with comprehensive curricula and supports, while understanding the diversity of learners throughout our province. This is possible through equitable funding, which is necessary to ensure widespread student success.”

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