



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Employee Sick Days Up Significantly at School Boards: Auditor General

(TORONTO) “Employee sick days at Ontario school boards have increased over the past five years and are causing financial and resource allocation pressures for school boards,” Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2017 Annual Report*, tabled today in the Legislative Assembly.

Ontario has 72 publicly funded district school boards, responsible for two million elementary and secondary students. In the 2016/17 school year, the boards received \$23 billion from the Ministry of Education (Ministry), and used most of it at their individual discretion.

A study commissioned by over 50 Ontario school boards found that for the five-year period ending August 2016, average employee sick days increased by 29% (that is, from nine days to 11.6 days per employee). Overall sick leave paid as a percentage of payroll increased from an average of 4.2% for the 2011/12 school year to 5.3% for the 2015/16 school year—an increase of 25%.

All four school boards we visited did not have an effective attendance support program for employees. In three of the four school boards we visited, salary costs paid to school board employees while they were off sick increased by 32% from \$32.3 million in 2011/12 to \$42.7 million in the 2015/16 school year. Average sick days taken during this period ranged from 8.4 days to 13.4 days. Boards experienced added financial pressures because of the increase in sick days by their employees.

Among the findings of the audit:

- A review of four school boards across southern Ontario found that the boards generally used funding restricted by legislation for the purposes for which it was provided. However, this was not always the case for funding provided by the Ministry for specific purposes but not restricted by the Ministry or legislation. For example, the Ministry provides funding for students at risk of low academic achievement. The audit found that one board spent half of the \$46.5 million it received for at-risk students to cover shortfalls in teacher salaries and special education. As well, the Ministry provides funding to all English school boards for English as a second language/English literacy development. For the 2015/16 school year, one school board spent 42% of the \$23.9 million it received for this purpose in other areas.
- All four school boards we visited had long lists of students waiting to be assessed or served by specialists in the areas of psychology, and speech and language. For example, at three of the four boards we visited, 24% of the students on wait lists for psychological services had been waiting for more than a year. Timely specialist assessments allow boards to devise long-term plans for services to best meet students’ unique needs.
- None of the four boards we visited completed the two mandatory appraisals for all new teachers within 12 months of being hired, as required under the *Education Act, 1990*. The lack of timely appraisals impacts the new teachers’ ability to receive feedback and seek timely professional development required to be successful in the profession.

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Visit www.auditor.on.ca to read the Report.

