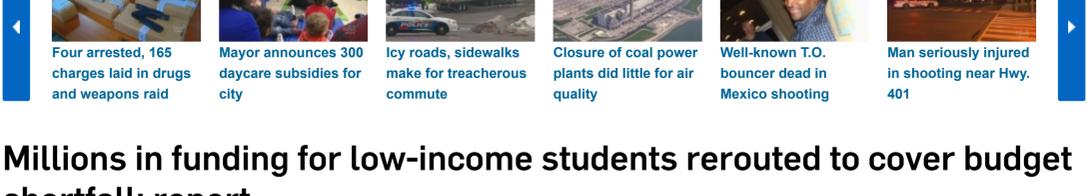




FEATURED



# Millions in funding for low-income students rerouted to cover budget shortfall: report

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A new report claims that millions of dollars in provincial funding meant to help low-income Toronto students is being rerouted to cover the school board's budget shortfall.

Social Planning Toronto says in a report released Thursday that half of the \$127 million set aside by the province in the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) has been reallocated to other budget line items between 2014 and 2015.

The grant was designed to provide extra funding and support for Toronto students whose "socio-economic circumstances place them at increased risk for academic struggle due to low income, immigration, low parental education and lone parent status."

Its primary allocation, according to the Ministry of Education, was intended for financially supporting breakfast programs, homework clubs, reading recovery and individualized support.

But the TDSB's budget woes has meant those funds have gone to other priorities.

"The TDSB has compensated for provincial underfunding using money (meant) to support Toronto's most underserved students," the report reads. "The effect of this reallocation is that funds meant for our poorest students are being used to finance the education costs of their richer classmates."

Sean Meagher, the executive director at Social Planning Toronto, recognizes that the Toronto District School Board is cash strapped but says diverting the funds meant for at-risk youth is not helping.

"It is literally taking food out of their mouths," Meagher told CTV News Toronto Thursday.

"It is literally cutting their parents off from the programs that can really help build a school. It's not providing kids who are arriving here from refugee camps, and all kinds of challenging situations, the head start they need to catch up to other kids across the city."

In the 2014-15 school year, 52 per cent (or \$66.4 million) was used for its intended purpose -- to "support those students who are living in poverty and at risk of not succeeding academically."

Meanwhile, the TDSB used 48 per cent (or \$61 million) of the grant for purposes other than funding programs and support for at-risk students.

Meagher blames a lack of explicit restrictions by the provincial government on how the grant is to be spent.

According to the report, the grant is 'unsweatered' which means the school boards that receive it have flexibility on how they spend the money and thus "are able, and do, divert it to other uses because of budget pressures."

Social Planning Toronto is recommending that the TDSB reallocate the entirety of the LOG grant to support students living in poverty.

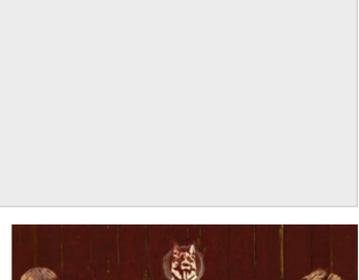
It goes on to suggest that the provincial government provide better funding for education in Toronto in hopes of reducing the "pressure on Toronto's school boards" that has resulted in money being diverted from students who need it most.

The non-profit advocacy group also advises that said 'unsweatered' money be 'sweatered' to ensure the funding is spent as expected.



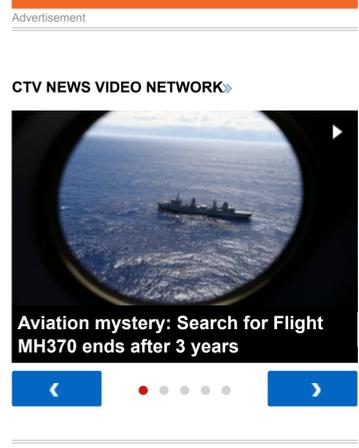
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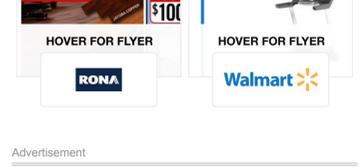
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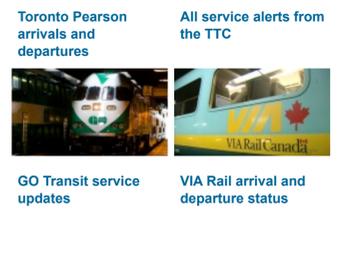
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