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Millions in funding for vulnerable students being diverted to other expenses: report



An empty school classroom is pictured. (AP Photo/Dinesh Ramde)



Chris Fox, CP24.com
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More than \$60 million in provincial funds earmarked for vulnerable students ended up going towards balancing the Toronto District School Board's budget last year, a new report from Social Planning Toronto has found.

The report suggests that only \$66,389,519 of the \$127 million in Learning Opportunity Grant funding reserved for programs for students from lower income families was actually used for its intended purpose in 2014-2015.

The remaining \$61 million in funding went to general revenues, the report found.

"It is literally taking food out of their mouths, it is literally cutting their parents off from the programs that can really help build a school," Social Planning Toronto Executive Director Sean Meagher told CTV News Toronto on Thursday. "It's not providing kids who are arriving here from refugee camps and all kinds of challenging situations the head start they need catch up to other kids across the city."

FULL REPORT
Read the full report from Social Planning Toronto
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In 2014-2015, the TDSB received \$144 million in total provincial funding through the Learning Opportunity Grant. The demographic allocation of the grant, however, was \$127 million.

According to Social Planning Toronto, that money is "explicitly designated" to provide extra funding and support for students whose "socio-economic circumstances place them at increased risk for academic struggle."

"Given the terms of the Learning Opportunities Grant, it would appear that the needs of the Toronto's most marginalized students are protected. The reality in Toronto schools, however, is much different because the grant is 'unsweated'. This means that unlike other important grants where boards are required to spend the funds on their intended purposes, school boards have flexibility on how they spend the money and are able to divert it to other uses because of budget pressures," the report states.

According to the report, school boards typically use the demographic allocation of the Learning Opportunity Grant for programs ranging from breakfast programs, to homework clubs and other individualized supports.

The report says that 28% of TDSB students in junior kindergarten to Grade 6 are from families earning less than \$30,000.



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