



c/o Applegrove Community Complex,
60 Woodfield Road
Toronto, Ontario M4L 2W6

December 18, 2009.

Hon. Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education
MINISTER'S OFFICE
Mowat Block, 22nd Floor
900 Bay St
Toronto ON M7A1L2

Dear Minister Wynne,

Re: Provincial Budget Commitments to enhance Community Use of Schools

I am writing on behalf of the SPACE Coalition (Saving Public Access to Community Space Everywhere) to make recommendations for the 2010 Budget.

Members of SPACE and other stakeholders appreciate the leadership of the Ontario government and the Ministry of Education to increase fair and equitable access to schools and to bring access/permit fees down. The community continues to benefit from the investments that began in 2004 and were enhanced in 2008. Opening up more affordable use of schools helps the province make steps towards a number of policy objectives including: promoting student success, engaging the community and parents in the schools, increasing opportunities for young people in high need areas, supporting racialized communities, newcomers and other historically disadvantaged groups, providing opportunities for seniors, building community connections and life-long learning.

Ministry of Education enhancements to the Community Use of Schools (CUS) policy and program to date have included:

- 2004 \$20 million in annualized funding for CUS via 72 School Boards.
- 2008 annualized funding to further reduce permit fees and to provide for expanded use of schools. Annualized funding to hire community outreach coordinators in 72 school boards. Base funding increased by \$12.9 Million.
- 2009 funding to the Priority School Initiative (PSI) beginning with 150 priority schools across Ontario which will provide free permits for eligible programs after-school. (\$5.1 million).
- Commitment made in February 2008 to increase the number of PSI schools up to 500 by 2012.

- Total Funding commitment for the CUS program by 2012.

We are also aware that the Ministry of Education has made separate announcements on programs that relate to community use of schools: Focus on Youth (expanded to Windsor in 2009, to supplement the other locations in Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa); and commitments to Early Learning and Development, Community hubs (Poverty Reduction Strategy), and health-oriented after-school programs (Ministry of Health Promotion).

SPACE Recommendations on the 2010 Provincial Budget

- 1. Continue to show provincial leadership in fulfilling commitments announced by the government in February 2008 to enhance CUS funding.**
- 2. Take measures to ensure all CUS funding from 2010 forward is “sweatered” to ensure dedicated investments, improved accountability and transparency.**
- 3. Include annualized funding of \$5 Million: to bring fees down in schools and on weekends, summer evenings schools* and to offset for community groups impact of the HST on permit fees, and/or to expand Focus On youth to one or two additional high need areas and areas hard hit by the recession, such as the north, Durham. (*e.g. opening up schools closed in the evenings due to no caretaker, lower fees Saturdays, Sundays, evenings in the summer and opening up spaces for programming in the summer in schools that are not included in Focus on Youth program with free permits for eligible programs).**
- 4. Include \$5 million in annualized funding to provide another 150 Priority School Initiative schools that are available to permit for free for children, youth and community programs @ \$34,000 per school. (This would leave 200 additional PSI schools in total to be phased in by 2012 to bring the total number up to 500 PSI schools).**
- 5. Include \$1.5 million to Boards for inflation or wear and tear capital upgrades related to Community Use of Schools.**

We acknowledge all the efforts of the Ontario government on this issue since 2004 to develop policy leadership, funding and innovation. We urge the Province to build on this successful program and maintain your 2008 commitments to phase in additional improvements to the Community Use program in the 2010 Provincial Budget as planned. We would not be alone in pushing for this commitment to proceed; the Roots of Youth Violence Secretariat highlighted the need for youth spaces and places and strategic investments in creating community hubs. We have many allies across the Province that recognize the vital importance of this policy lever to build up our community strength and to fairly and equitably support children, youth, families and community members of all ages.

SPACE and Social Planning Toronto released research in July 2009 which indicated that the funding of CUS was continuing to make a difference to bring fees down and open up access to schools. (Go to www.spacecoalition.ca for link to our Report). This research indicated that further progress is still needed to open up access for small and emerging groups, to reduce red-tape and barriers to access schools. We know there are still schools that are not available to community use in the evenings, on weekends, or after 3:30 pm in the summer because of lack of caretaking. Some School Boards are contemplating fee increases of 7% or more, even with

CUS funding. In addition, groups paying permit fees will face HST charges in July 2010. Community groups will experience HST as a “fee increase” even though it is a new tax and not a permit fee increase. Ongoing investments are needed to CUS to continue to enhance the CUS and to further open up the doors to our schools. We are concerned that any step-down from the commitments will erode the progress made to date.

Ontario has been hard hit by the global economic recession, and we are aware that the province is facing a large deficit. Communities are feeling first hand the stresses from this recession: at a household, family, neighbourhood, community and regional level. Tens of thousands of households have been adversely affected due to plant closures, business bankruptcies, and job layoffs. Families, individuals and seniors have less money for food, shelter, transportation, recreation and basic needs. This stress is being experienced by more and more children, youth, families, seniors, single parents, persons with disabilities and racialized communities. Immigrants including newcomers and refugees are also hard-hit by this recession compounding their poverty issues.

Affordable and equitable accessible community use of schools is needed more than ever in these tough times. The CUS ensures opportunities for more safe, healthy and supportive spaces for affordable programs for the community members to support people through these difficult times. The non-profit community sector is doing what it can do to support families, neighbourhoods and communities but this sector is stretched. This sector is also feeling the impact of declining donations and reductions in grants. The ability of many of these social organizations to sustain and run programs in schools depends more than ever on leveraging in-kind donations and reducing costs. Saving on permit fees can help an organization to put its limited resources into direct programming, staffing and/or volunteer support.

We urge the provincial government to continue supporting the Community Use of Schools and implement your commitments as envisioned in 2008. We would appreciate hearing what the government’s policy and program recommendations are related to CUS going forward.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to discuss the CUS and the provincial budget, the findings in our research and our recommendations. To contact me for more information, or to set up a meeting please call me at 416-461-8143.

Sincerely,

Susan Fletcher,
Chair of SPACE, and Executive Director of Applegrove Community Complex.

cc: Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario
Honourable Laurel Broten, Minister of Children and Youth Services
Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, Ministry of Community and Social Services
Honourable Margaret Best, Minister of Health Promotion
Honourable Rick Bartolucci, Minister of Community Safety and Corrections
Honourable Michael Chan, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
Honourable Dwight Duncan, Minister of Finance and Chair of Management Board of Cabinet

Attachments: SPACE – Social Planning Toronto Research report July 2009.