



News Release

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Inconsistent Availability and Use of IT in Schools: Auditor General

(TORONTO) The Ministry of Education (Ministry) lacks a broad IT strategy for curriculum delivery, use of IT by students, and administration of IT, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2018 Annual Report*, released today.

“The availability of tablets, laptops, computers and applications varied among schools. At some, for example, eight students shared one computer; at others, each student was assigned their own computer,” Lysyk said after her Report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

“Some school boards applied no benchmark, policy or best practice to allocate IT resources to students.”

The Ministry funds 72 district school boards to provide elementary and secondary education to about 2 million Ontario students (as of the 2017/18 school year). School boards and individual schools determine how much funding they allocate to school and classroom technology according to their own needs.

School boards and schools use IT in the classroom for training in math skills, programming, coding, design and other subject areas, as well as to provide students with quick access to the Web for research. Teachers use IT to aid in designing and delivering lessons and administrative tasks such as tracking attendance and grades.

Boards reported total IT spending for the 2017/18 fiscal year of \$227.8 million—\$160.6 million for IT systems and computers (including software and licences), and \$67.2 million for the boards’ IT operations and administration. The Toronto District School Board, one of the four boards visited in the course of the audit, spent an average \$33.9 million annually on IT over the last five school years.

The following are some of the specific concerns identified in the audit:

- Some schools had new, modern devices in classrooms, while others had outdated equipment. The age of the equipment can affect students’ learning experience because outdated technology is slow and incompatible with the requirements of the latest software. Older technology can also be vulnerable to hacking and other cybersecurity threats if it is no longer supported by its vendor with regular security updates.
- The system that administers the Ontario Education Number, issued to every student in the province, contains students’ personal information and educational records. The audit found that 971 user accounts in this system, or 19% of the total, had never been used. This indicates that many authorized users have no current need to access the system. The audit also found that accounts of inactive users of the Ministry’s IT system are not always being cancelled after they leave their jobs. These accounts are accessible on the Internet, creating a risk that confidential student information may be exposed to the public.
- Educating employees through ongoing awareness training is one of the ways to protect sensitive data, including confidential student data. However, 51 of the 69 boards that responded to the audit’s survey (74% of respondents) indicated that they do not provide formal IT security or privacy training to staff with access to technology. School boards also have room for improvement in addressing cyber-bullying in schools.

- Two of the school boards visited as part of the audit do not have enough oversight over their classroom IT assets, such as laptops and tablets, to be able to keep track of them. In some cases, board staff were unable to verify whether equipment had gone missing from the schools.

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Read the [School Boards—IT Systems and Technology in the Classroom](#) audit report at www.auditor.on.ca

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