

Ministry of Education

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Dear Colleagues,

I want to extend warm back-to-school wishes to you all as we begin our 2017-18 school year.

This school year in particular brings with it exciting changes which will enhance the learning and working conditions for Ontario students and staff, and support meaningful parent and public engagement in our system. This past week, our government announced transformational steps that we will be taking together over the coming months and years to enable Ontario students to achieve academic success, strengthen equity and inclusivity across the education system, and make sure that the well-being of students, educators and staff is supported. We will do this in a way that recognizes the deep connections among these priorities, and puts the student experience at the centre of all that we do.

As we move forward, we will rely on the experience, expertise and insights of our education partners to develop and refine specific plans and timing for this exciting work. I know I can count on your support to realize these goals.

Promoting Well-Being

We recognize the importance of well-being of our students at all stages of their learning so they can reach their potential both personally and academically. During our extensive province-wide consultations last fall, we heard that students are better placed to succeed if they feel connected with their education environment. We also heard that putting well-being at the forefront greatly improves the day-to-day experience at school for students and staff.

Students told us that being connected, having a sense of belonging, and feeling like a respected and valued member of the school community, are critical to their school experience. They told us that it's important to feel safe — both physically and emotionally — and to have opportunities to develop healthy bodies and minds. They also told us how important it is to have meaningful learning experiences, more opportunities to have a voice in their schools, as well as positive relationships within the school community.

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To better support the well-being of students and staff, our government is investing \$49 million over the next three years to enhance well-being initiatives. Funding for school boards' local well-being priorities will increase from \$6 to \$12 million starting in the 2018-19 school year. Funding for School Mental Health ASSIST will increase by \$6 million over the next three years. This funding will also include \$6 million in new and expanding programming to support staff well-being and classroom violence prevention, almost \$4 million to expand active transportation options for students to and from school and funding for other programs and supports to promote student well-being. More details and consultation on the specific programming enhancements will follow in coming weeks and months.

Curriculum Refresh

I am thrilled that we will be consulting with our education partners on how best to update Ontario's curriculum and report cards from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Refreshing the curriculum and report cards will enable an up-to-date focus on transferable skills that will allow students to better navigate our fast-paced technology-driven world. We know that employers are looking for graduates who are able to bring critical thinking skills to the table, and who possess skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, communication, creativity, innovation and citizenship.

As we refresh our curriculum, we know that we must continue teaching students the academic fundamentals that include reading, writing and math. But we must also make sure to leave room for deeper learning and considerations of equity and well-being to be more deeply integrated into the classroom. A thorough engagement of the public, parents, students and educators will inform the details of the refresh. However, the overall goal will be to equip students with the knowledge, attributes and skills needed to participate in a modern, highly skilled workforce, and also contribute to their communities as engaged and compassionate citizens.

Along with curriculum change, there is a need to make sure our assessment and reporting practices and tools are also supporting the many facets of our vision for education. As a first step, we will revise the provincial report card this coming year to include the transferable skills that will be at the heart of our curriculum refresh, in place of the existing Learning Skills and Work Habits.

We will also begin a review of provincial assessment and reporting practices, including EQAO, to make sure they are culturally relevant, measure a wider range of learning, and better reflect student well-being and equity. This review will be conducted by the Premier and the Minister of Education's [six education advisors](#), led by Dr. Carol Campbell and will include broad consultation with students, parents, educators and all of our partners.

Ensuring Equity

Equity is a central pillar of the ministry's vision for education. It is at the core of our commitment to the success of every student and child in Ontario. Our schools should be places where students not only learn about diversity and inclusion but also experience it. Students should see themselves and their classmates reflected in their studies, in their teachers, and in their environments. Similarly, as the anchors of our school community, all teachers, education workers and sector leaders need to experience the same levels of equity and inclusivity.

To further advance these goals, we have released [Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan](#). Building on the great work done across the sector to promote equity and inclusion, the action plan outlines the next steps in how our government will work with education partners, students, parents and communities to identify and address systemic barriers and biases. Eliminating these barriers will also enable more students to achieve their full potential. A new Education Equity Secretariat will support the implementation of the action plan.

We will also be working to identify and remove systemic barriers that limit any student's ability to succeed and pursue their chosen pathways after graduation. In collaboration with all education partners, we will introduce a renewed approach to Grade 9 in which all students are supported to achieve their maximum potential and choose appropriate pathways to work, college, apprenticeship, or university.

We know that our success in achieving excellence, promoting well-being, ensuring equity and enhancing public confidence will depend on the knowledge, passion and dedication of everyone working together — educators, staff, leaders, parents and communities. The principles of collaborative professionalism will guide us as we collaborate on the planning and implementation of these important changes.

I look forward to working with you.

All the best for the 2017-18 school year.

Sincerely,



Mitzie Hunter, MBA
Minister

c: Ontario Public School Boards' Association
Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques
Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario
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