



THE ONTARIO FEDERATION OF HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS, INC.

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Dear Members,

The Ontario Ministry of Education is currently conducting a consultation that will form the direction of education in Ontario. As a service to our members, the OFHSA Policy Workgroup Leader in collaboration with the OFHSA Board of Managers, developed this information resource using pertinent OFHSA policies to help support our members in completing the survey as grassroots advocates.

To complete the online survey, please register by entering your email address at the link below. Your responses will be received anonymously — and unconnected to your email address.

After you have registered, you will receive an email from survey@fortheparents.ca with a single use link to the survey. Be sure to add this email address to your safe senders list so the email doesn't go into your junk mail.

Survey Registration Link: <https://registration.fortheparents.ca/>

Closing Date: December 15th, 2018

At this time, it is critical that our members provide their voice to help form the direction of education in Ontario. This information resource is based on OFHSA policy and can be used by our members to help guide in completing this online survey, or for future consultations.

It is hoped that our members will also incorporate their local perspective as it related to their involvement in their local H&S Association and school community.

This is one of the most critical times to make your voice heard to help shape education in Ontario. Please use any or all of the responses along with your personal views in completing the survey.

Ministry of Education's Consultation: Education in Ontario

LINK: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/for-the-parents>

OFHSA'S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

Survey Question: If you are a member of a stakeholder group interested in Ontario's education system, please describe: (maximum 500 words)

The Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations is a province-wide network of dedicated members, committed to informed and proactive involvement in our homes, our schools and our communities, to obtain "The Best for Each Student".

OFHSA has been advocating for students in public education and supporting parent engagement in schools for over 100 years. Ours is a unique volunteer organization that provides a credible voice for members at the school, school board and provincial levels because of the long history of involvement, experience and commitment to the support of student achievement, equity and well-being in the education system.

OFHSA feedback represents the collective voice of members. Members of OFHSA are concerned with the health and welfare of our children and youth. Recognized parent organizations such as ours, provide the Ministry the opportunity to hear that parents, schools, families and communities working together can create a meaningful partnership that ultimately leads to significant gains in student achievement and well-being.

OFHSA seeks to confer and co-operate with organizations other than schools which concern themselves with the care and training of children and youth in the home, at school and in the community; and with the education of adults to meet these responsibilities.

OFHSA appreciates and realizes it takes the involvement of everyone in the education system to further parent engagement in Ontario. Parent engagement is ongoing and continuous, everyone has a role and a responsibility.

Together, education stakeholders from all aspects of the education system have important perspectives that need to be heard as we are partners in the process of promoting new initiatives and supporting student achievement, equity and well-being.

Survey Question: How should we improve student performance in the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)? (maximum 500 words)

STEM is a curriculum-based idea of educating students in four specific disciplines — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — OFHSA members ask that the acronym *STEM* be changed to *STEAM* to include the Arts as an additional key curricular area of focus in an interdisciplinary and applied approach where fundamental competencies can be strengthened, expanded and reinforced through a strong Arts curriculum, in addition to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Social, spiritual and academic (science, the arts, financial literacy) competencies all support the whole child with a wide knowledge base. The Ontario education system must cultivate well-rounded students, prepared at the end of their school career, to live as capable, productive and happy adults in a complex society.

Survey Question: How should our schools prepare students with needed job skills, such as skilled trades and coding? (maximum 500 words)

Given the changing nature of technologies, skills requirements, career choices, and complex societal expectations, Ontario students require courses to stimulate interest in, and prepare secondary school students for, the pursuit of a career in a skilled trade, including apprenticeship programs. These are necessary and valuable components of the secondary school curriculum which should be available to all secondary school students.

Educators, both secondary and senior elementary grades, provide knowledge-based guidance to ensure students are advised of the necessary information, educational resources, course requirements and opportunities – including trade schools, apprenticeships, co-op placements, and Specialist High Skills Major diploma requirements.

District School Boards must seek to increase community partnerships at the local level to expand the effective program options and supports of experiential learning.

Survey Question: What measures can be taken to improve provincial standardized testing? (maximum 500 words)

First and foremost, all stakeholders must understand the purpose of and value the information on/in a standardized assessment. ONLY THEN it can be determined how it is used to drive student achievement.

Measures:

- Available in various formats that best allows the student to showcase their knowledge of curriculum (digital, written, verbal)
- If parents are receiving/interpreting results from the assessment, how do they apply the information to confidently support their child? – i.e. ‘you are doing great’; ‘look at the improvement’; ‘what do you think would help you to feel better or more successful’
- Is this measure given more weight than other academic assessments at home and in the education community?
- If the end reporting has only an education focus, the assessment should only be about student learning/pedagogy, not about the value of the local neighbourhood
- Through the lens of a student’s reaction to assessment results, reporting may not be in the best interest of the student
- Require the literacy construct to incorporate how students use technology and how literacy is evolving in a technological age, including coding
- Standardization includes the environment from community to community - developmental differences in the brain, school classroom structure, social structure and ELL student aptitudes
- Recognize challenges to accessing technology
- Present the role and function in a clearer manner so as to engage the parents and break down any resistance

Assessments (measures) should be used exclusively by school boards and schools in their communication with parents and students and in their plans to improve student achievement.

OFHSA members believe:

- that for large-scale provincially mandated assessments of student learning, that students not reasonably exempted are expected to participate, but the final decision rests solely with the parent/guardian (2003)
- that early identification and intervention initiatives, be provided for all at risk children, including those with identified exceptionalities, to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to succeed. (2004)
- that if results of any large-scale provincially mandated assessments are to be used toward a student's course mark the details of that use (including what part of the assessment and the percentage of course mark determined by those results) be clearly communicated to the student, the parent and the public. (2011)
- that the results of any large-scale provincially mandated assessments are to be clear and easy to understand and should be made available to the student and parent/guardian as quickly as possible; at a minimum, the results should be made available in the same school year in which the test was written. (2003)
- that school-by-school results for large-scale provincially mandated assessments of student learning are not to be used in any ranking activity, i.e. any "naming and shaming" activity, that is easily misinterpreted and can undermine the integrity of the public education system (2003)

Survey Question: What more can be done to ensure students graduate high school with important life skills, including financial literacy? (maximum 500 words)

Given the changing nature of complex societal expectations of personal, financial, career and family structures; a different set of skills and attitudes is required to become a successful contributing adult. *Life and Livelihood Skills* education affords the opportunity for a reduction in the harmful negative effects of the problems facing society while supporting well-rounded, healthy lifestyles.

Every student must receive the basic life skills education necessary to promote interpersonal and psycho-social skills for healthy living and social well-being, and life skills education leading to complementary education in such topics as healthy nutrition, food choices and preparation; health and self-body image; simple household tools and maintenance; communication and technology skills; and financial/money management and entrepreneurial skills.

Members of OFHSA know that parents who are knowledgeable about school programs can be better advocates for their children:

- The courses offered need to be measurable in order to view the outcomes of each student.
- If financial literacy is introduced in developmental ways across the grades, there needs to be a reduction in curricular expectations (i.e. "crowded curriculum") to allow for sufficient instructional time.

- The resources need to be age-appropriate and include applications that can be used at school and shared with parents for use at home.
- Promoting positive student mental health and well-being to develop resilience, which is an essential life skill, needs to continue to be integral to a well-rounded education.

Social, academic and spiritual competencies including science, the arts and financial literacy support the whole child with a wide knowledge base. The Ontario education system must cultivate well-rounded students, prepared at the end of their school career, to live as capable, productive and happy adults in a complex society.

OFHSA members call on the Minister and Ministry to review the current elementary curriculum, along with education partners and parents, to develop curriculum to support *Life and Livelihood Skills* knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that prepare for transition into adulthood.

Survey Question: What steps could schools take to ban cellphone use in the classroom? (maximum 500 words)

Ontario Students need be discerning digital citizens with intentionally guided and supported opportunities that allow students to safely explore various uses and risks of technology in the school environment.

Given the changing nature of technologies and complex societal expectations, rather than banning personal devices, OFHSA members call on the Ministry of Education *to develop guidelines for healthy screen time and appropriate device use for students in the classroom (2018)*. A healthy screen time limit must take into account the average hours children spend with screens in the classroom and balance that with average in-home use.

The public school system is invested in the long term educational outcomes and the well-being of students and therefore should be and can be the forerunner of this movement.

Design, in consultation with health care providers, guidelines developed for healthy screen time and appropriate device use standards to be provided within student curriculum:

- to limit the negative impact on the developing brain
- to implement appropriate use standards that restrict social media
- to include age-appropriate applications that can be used at school and shared with parents for use at home
- to ensure all Wi-Fi access on devices is strictly educational on all devices used by students
- to enhance physical education regarding healthy screen time and appropriate device use
- to develop the skills to make healthy, informed decisions
- to identify warning signs and prevention strategies related to Child/Adolescent Digital Technology Use/Abuse.

There is a potential lifelong impact on children that makes this issue too important to delay developing strategies and implementing standards for integrating screen time into the lives of children and youth without sacrificing physical activity. Future research is needed to determine if reducing screen time supports healthier use by students and aids the prevention and treatment of disorders in youth.

Survey Question: How can we build a new age-appropriate Health and Physical Education curriculum that includes subjects like mental health, sexual health education and the legalization of cannabis? (maximum 500 words)

Since 1967, OFHSA members have advocated for curriculum for grades K-6 that includes discussion of family and social relationships including physiology of the sexes and the introduction at the preadolescent stage of compulsory courses on aspects of human growth and development. Members believe both physical education and health education includes the establishment of an Ontario physical fitness and nutrition program for all grade levels.

In fact, our members believe that to ensure the safety of our youth, Ontario students need and deserve curriculum that deals with the realities they are living using the most appropriate methods of imparting moral and ethical values to all students, whatever their religious heritage. (1964)

All of the components of a modernized Health and Physical Education (H & PE) curriculum need to be explicit such as mental health and well-being, student safety, consent, LGBTTIQQ2SA, gender identity and family realities grounded in human rights and equity, as presented in the 2015 revised H & PE curriculum.

For this reason, Faculties of Education must be required to train educators and provide ongoing professional development workshops in teaching drug education at all levels. District school Boards must have a policy discouraging the illegal use, possession and trafficking of controlled substances on school premises.

Consultation with health care experts, physicians and pharmacists that use the utmost care in prescribing controlled substances, ensures awareness of the dependence potential of legal mood-modifying drugs so that District School Boards, in co-operation with local Boards of Health, organize community programs relating to the use and abuse of drugs in society.

Current curriculum must include factual and constructive classroom discussions of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. The law currently outlines the consumption and distribution of controlled substances (alcohol, tobacco, cannabis). Restrictions under the Narcotics/Liquor Control Act include minimum legal age, geographic distance, controls on point of sale, as well as controls on lifestyle advertisements and broadcast advertising.

Survey Question: What elements should be included in a Ministry of Education Parents' Bill of Rights? (maximum 500 words)

The significance of parents as integral partners in the education system has been proven.

OFHSA's collective focus is on "The Best for Each Student" – their success, achievement and well-being. Education is a shared responsibility among parents, guardians, students, teachers, trustees, board staff, community agencies, interest groups, and the provincial government (its policies and funding) and its agencies.

Parent engagement plays a significant role in student success and well-being, supporting overall benefits to student achievement when parents are active in the education system. In fact, there

are provincial parent groups, recognized by the Minister in the Education Act, that provide a wealth of knowledge and experience to the education community at the local, board and provincial level. Our collective focus is on children and youth, and their achievement and well-being. Though feedback is requested by these important groups, it is unfortunate to see this valuable resource omitted from public funding sources that support parent education and representation.

The Ministry of Education should continue to:

- work with and promote the provincially recognized parent groups
- promote and set high expectations for the directives contained in the Ontario Parent Engagement Policy

Therefore, the Ministry of Education must commit to the value of parents as partners, by demonstrating that such representatives of parent organizations be of equal status and in equally representative number as other members of the committee, other than elected trustees or members of the Legislative Assembly.

To communicate the value of parents as partners on a wide basis, there needs to be an awareness of the diversity of community groups and support organizations available to engage the health, welfare AND education of students. OFHSA's structure provides for system level involvement and regularly requests the continued opportunity for representation on any Advisory/Consultation Committee to promote our goals and shared beliefs for the future of public education in this province.

Respect and trust in parents as integral partners in the well-being of students is key to the understanding and acceptance that supports safe spaces for children and families to grow in the education system. The high level impact of valuing family uniqueness has a *meaningful* perspective in the fabric of Ontario's education system.

The Ministry of Education cannot lose sight of the fact that parents need to be included as supports to their child and parents also require support and opportunity for participation in the education journey of their children. Parents **MUST** have opportunities for ongoing dialogue with the school by participating in parent nights and conferences, being a member of a Home and School Association, School Council (or both), or attending local and board-wide consultations, committee meetings and school board public meetings.

The Ministry of Education and **MUST** continue to financially support and promote the many opportunities for parent/guardian organizations to be actively engaged in the education system.

Survey Question: Do you have any other feedback or ideas? (maximum 500 words)

MEMBERS – please share a specific example of successful parent engagement program/project or initiative that was undertaken in your school community that demonstrates the local value of the PRO Grant funding.

Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant funding **MUST be reinstated.**

The primary objective of the PRO Grant funding is to include and engage parents in support of student achievement, human rights and equity, and well-being. Through the support of the Ministry of Education with PRO Grants, OFHSA has been building parent capacity by providing learning opportunities for parent-driven, and parent-organized programs and events.

Historically parents have flourished from workshops, spanning topics from well-being, parents as effective partners in their children's education, effective partners with school boards and parents to parent outreach (engagement).

The concept of PRO Grant funding is key to greatly increase the outcomes for student achievement through parent engagement. Through events supporting and promoting an inclusive parent learning environment, OFHSA members, PIC members and community partners, have a networking platform. This allows parents to share personal knowledge and experience, to learn skills at our workshops to turn parent knowledge into practice, and to provide support for others in the community to further family involvement with a well-being focus (spirit, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical).

Members of OFHSA understand that a student's health, both physical and mental, is an important factor in their success as a student and in their adult life. To that end OFHSA members adopted a policy calling for *every publicly funded school in Ontario to have a Public Health Nurse on site, full-time (2016)*. A full-time school nurse would be available to students for counseling and referrals, therefore being the ideal facilitator for the "Comprehensive School Health" approach used in schools aligned with the Ontario Healthy School Framework. Schools, as hubs in a community, are the key place to centralize access to community service programs and public health services that improve the health and well-being of students, families and the community as a whole.

Members recognize the History of Indian Residential Schools (IRS) as an integral compulsory part of the Elementary and Secondary curriculum and the need for the Minister and Ministry of Education to develop a curriculum on the History of Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in collaboration with leading Indigenous Peoples educators.

The responsibility of all stakeholders concerned with public education is to work together to ensure that the priority of our education system is to meet the needs of students. Appropriate financial and staffing resources must be available to obtain "**The Best for Each Student**" in public schools in Ontario.