

Building The Next Phase in Ontario's Education Strategy

This document is intended to facilitate a discussion about building the next phase in Ontario's education strategy. By providing your consideration and feedback on the questions in this document, you will contribute to the next stage of improving Ontario's education system and providing the best possible outcomes for all of our learners.

A number of jurisdictions around the world are exploring how to improve their education systems. In fact, there are many voices out there that are offering advice on what direction to take and how to improve. We are looking for a made-in-Ontario approach that benefits from considering a wide-range of opinions regarding the best way forward.

We began our work with members of the Ministry of Education's Partnership Table, where we discussed the types of questions that needed to be asked in order to build on our past success and keep our system moving forward. Importantly, we asked what the vision, aspirations and goals should be not just for the education system in this province, but more importantly, for the success and well-being of our students.

This document is informed by those and other early discussions, and forms the starting point for a broader consultation.

Formal consultations on these questions will take place in September and October, and will include members of the education, early learning and municipal sectors, as well as others. This will include members of the business, research and innovation, not-for-profit and Aboriginal communities, just to name a few.

We anticipate that an updated vision for our education system coming from these consultations will be launched in early 2014, and that will form the basis for moving Ontario's education system from *great* to *excellent*.

Ontario Education Today

We've come a long way in the last ten years. Today, Ontario's publicly funded education system is one of the best in the world. Its success is based on the talent, dedication, and hard work of those in the education community — including students and parents — who turn inspiration into action, initiatives into implementation, and investments into results.

With the strength of the education community, Ontario has been able to introduce multi-faceted reforms to the publicly funded education system, making it the system of choice for 95% of Ontario's students and their families.

Our innovations and accomplishments are many and diverse, and they have been guided by three core priorities to which our system has committed:

- Increasing student achievement
- Closing gaps in achievement
- Increasing confidence in publicly funded education.

Ten years ago, only 68% of our students were graduating, and only 54% of children in grades 3 and 6 were achieving at the provincial standard in literacy and numeracy. Today, those numbers stand at 83% and 70% respectively, and they continue to climb.

Working together, we have also made progress in a number of other areas, including: child care and full-day kindergarten; higher quality teaching and learning from kindergarten to Grade 12; a robust leadership strategy; healthy, safe, accepting and inclusive schools; hands-on and engaging secondary programming; a revised and expanded curriculum; First Nation, Métis and Inuit education; improved governance; the *Politique d'aménagement linguistique*; parent engagement; and a prominent role for the student voice. Taken together, these initiatives have made a clear and positive impact on our education system and our students.

As successful as we've been, we know there is more work to do. Too many Aboriginal learners, children and youth in care, learners with mental health issues, and those in need of special education supports, still struggle within our system. The ministry's future success in growing student achievement will be most clearly defined by how these and all of our students fare over the coming years.

Overall though, the past decade has seen us all pursue a plan that has improved education in Ontario. That is something we can all be proud of. Now, it is time to set the bar even higher, to identify the next phase in our work together and follow through on it.

Together, we can elevate education in Ontario from *great* to *excellent*.

The Path Forward

We've learned a lot from the journey so far. Now it's time to build on our experience to define the next phase of Ontario's education strategy.

In pursuing the path forward, we will not abandon the good work we have been doing nor ignore the lessons that we have learned. Both can serve as building blocks upon which further progress can be achieved. At the same time, we must continue to be aware of cultural sensitivities, and we can never lose sight of maintaining the vitality of the system.

One of the most significant challenges and opportunities before us is how to best prepare our students for a rapidly changing, technology-driven, globalized world. To do so, we need to broaden our view of student achievement to include even greater emphasis on higher-order skills – such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and entrepreneurship – all of which are necessary for developing global citizens who bring the competencies and qualities that the employers of today and tomorrow are looking for, and that our children will need to thrive.

We also need to bring more focus to the state of student well-being in our education system. In addition to measuring how well our students meet academic goals, it's important to know whether our system is developing healthy, well-rounded and resilient young adults.

To take the next step toward realizing an updated vision for education, we have some key questions to ask. We need feedback from a broad range of individuals and organizations to help formulate that revised vision.

Based on our conversations with our education partners at the recent Partnership Table meeting, the following questions have been developed to solicit that feedback:

- Question 1
What are the skills, knowledge and characteristics students need to succeed after they have completed school, and how do we better support all learners in their development?
- Question 2
What does student well-being mean to you, and what is the role of the school in supporting it?
- Question 3
From your perspective, what further opportunities exist to close gaps and increase equity to support all children and students in reaching their full potential?
- Question 4
How does the education system need to evolve as a result of changes to child care and the implementation of full-day kindergarten?
- Question 5
What more can we all do to keep students engaged, foster their curiosity and creativity, and help them develop a love of life-long learning?
- Question 6
How can we use technology more effectively in teaching and learning?
- Question 7
In summary, what are the various opportunities for partnership that can enhance the student experience, and how can they benefit parents, educators and our partners too?

Your thoughtful consideration and answers to these questions will help shape an updated vision for the future of education in Ontario.

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