

Ministry of Education

Minister

Mowat Block
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre

Edifice Mowat
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Ontario

Tuesday, September 6, 2016

Dear colleagues,

I hope this finds you well-rested after a wonderful summer break, and energized to begin a new school year in 2016-17. This is an exciting time for education in Ontario, and for me as the new Minister of Education.

I am thrilled to have this opportunity to work with you, and to help make a difference in the lives of Ontario's children and students. I would like to share with you some of my priorities for our work together in this coming school year, guided by *Achieving Excellence*, our renewed shared vision for public education in Ontario.

Today, more than two million students will begin filling playgrounds, school hallways and classrooms across the province, ready to embark on a new school year. More than just bricks and mortar, these school facilities are an essential part of supporting student success. That is why I was proud to announce a historic \$1.1 billion investment to repair and renew schools across the province so they remain safe and modern places for student learning.

Our students cannot achieve academically if they do not feel safe, healthy or welcomed at school. Well-being has long been recognized as an important factor in overall student success -and supporting student and staff well-being remains a top priority.

That is why our ministry plans to consult with its stakeholders this fall on how we can work together to build on the strong foundation and further support well-being across all Ontario schools. We know that our success in promoting well-being will depend on the knowledge, passion and dedication of everyone working together- educators, staff, administrators and parents.

I am sure you all know that our government is committed to helping all students achieve excellence. And I am very pleased that Ontario's high school graduation rate increased to 85.5 per cent in 2015 -the highest level in the province's history. Surpassing our goal of 85 per cent is the result of the hard work of our students, the support of their parents, and the dedication and professionalism of our educators and leaders across the province. But we know there is still more to do when it comes to student achievement.

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To build on this success, we will provide increased supports to ensure that our graduates are equipped with the skills needed to succeed in their future career pathway. Our government recently released the [Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel's final report](#). In response to its recommendations, we are committed to working with school boards to expand the Specialist High Skills Major program, support further opportunities from kindergarten to Grade 12 for experiential learning and career exploration, and work together to update curriculum and assessment practices for the teaching of the global competencies that are necessary for the current and future economy. Some crucial competencies include critical thinking and problem solving; innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship; and collaboration to name a few, and build on solid foundations in literacy and numeracy.

It is clear that numeracy knowledge and skills are critical components of success in today's economy. And while Ontario's math results are strong compared to other jurisdictions, we know that there is more work to do, and that we have to reverse the recent downward trend in math achievement. Beginning in September, I am pleased to know that the Renewed Math Strategy will provide \$60 million in dedicated funding for additional support to schools so they can focus on engaging students in numeracy while providing increased support to schools that needed it the most. We are applying what we learned through our experience in improving literacy achievement to engage the entire school community in numeracy and to improve the math achievement for our students. The strategy will provide protected learning time for effective math instruction, improved access to online math resources, dedicated math leads in every elementary school, professional learning for educators and school leaders, and better supports for students outside of the school day such as tutoring and summer "reach-ahead" opportunities.

We want every learner to succeed. As we remain focused on student achievement, special education and the needs of vulnerable students are among my top priorities. I look forward to working with you to make sure that all students have an equitable opportunity to succeed -whether they are Indigenous students, students with special education needs, youth in care or other underrepresented groups.

I should also mention that I am very pleased that our province has recently designated the first full week of November as Treaties Recognition Week- this year it will be November 7 to 11. We will be providing updated resources to support schools in using this week to promote public education and awareness about treaties and treaty relationships. We also look forward to working with you and providing support for schools across the province to celebrate Canada and Ontario's 150th anniversary in 2017.

Thank you so much for your hard work and dedication in helping Ontario's students reach their full potential. I wish you all the best and I look forward to working in partnership with you over the coming school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MH' with a large flourish at the end.

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
Council of Ontario Directors of Education