Achieving Excellence

A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario

April 2014

Ontario

“We want schools … where students will feel free to dream about their futures, where they are able to connect their passions with possible career options, and where the opportunities and resources needed to support these decisions are provided.”

– Minister’s Student Advisory Council Representatives

Mission Statement

Ontario is committed to the success and well-being of every student and child. Learners in the province's education system will develop the knowledge, skills and characteristics that will lead them to become personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens.

Ontario will cultivate and continuously develop a high-quality teaching profession and strong leadership at all levels of the system. Our education system will be characterized by high expectations and success for all. It will be responsive, high quality, accessible and integrated from early learning and child care to adult education.

Together, we will build on past achievements and move forward with ambitious goals.

A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario

Vibrant communities and a prosperous society are built on the foundation of a strong education system. Today, Ontario's publicly funded education system – acknowledged as one of the best in the world[1] – partners with parents, guardians and communities to develop graduates who are personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens. We now have more high school graduates than ever before, and more students are meeting the high provincial academic standards than were a decade ago. Our graduates are also entering a world that is more competitive, globally connected and technologically engaged than in any other period in history. With a track record of success that we can build on, and with the opportunities available in a more interconnected world, the time has come for us to aim even higher.

That is why in fall 2013, individuals and organizations across the province came together to consider and discuss the skills and knowledge Ontario learners will need in the future. The government received input from representatives within the education system, including parents and students, teachers, support staff and school and system leaders, as well as input from individuals and groups outside the education sector, including businesses and non-profit organizations. *Achieving Excellence* is the result of their feedback.

By focusing on the four key goals outlined in *Achieving Excellence*, we will maintain and enhance Ontario's reputation as a world leader in education.

Together, we will inspire our children and youth to become capable adults and fully engaged citizens, ready and able to contribute to their families and communities. Our children, youth and adults will develop the skills and the knowledge that will lead them to become personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens. They will become the motivated innovators, community builders, creative talent, skilled workers, entrepreneurs and leaders of tomorrow.

Achieving Excellence is based on the advice of thousands of Ontarians, and is the important next step in building the vibrant, prosperous province of tomorrow.

1. McKinsey & Company, *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, by M. Mourshed, C. Chijioke, and M. Barber (November, 2010), pp. 11–12. Available at www.mckinsey.com.

Our Success in Education – Now and in the Future

As Ontario embarks on a renewed vision of success for all learners, the province will build on a solid foundation. A decade ago, only 54 per cent of children in grades 3 and 6 met provincial standards in literacy and numeracy. That number has grown significantly, and today 71 per cent of grade 3 and 6 students are achieving our high provincial standards.[2] In addition, only 68 per cent of students were graduating from high school a decade ago. Now, 83 per cent of students are graduating. That means there are an additional 138,000 high school graduates in Ontario because of the education reforms of the past 10 years.

Performance gaps between groups of students have also narrowed, and in some cases, closed. For example, elementary students participating in English as a Second Language programs now perform almost as well as the general student population. Meanwhile, the achievement gap between boys and girls is narrowing, as is the gap between elementary students with special education needs and elementary students generally. Moreover, students in French language schools continue to perform at a high level, including scoring among the highest on Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests.

Ontario has also made significant investments to support our youngest learners. Our education system goals now include the modernization and integration of child care, making ours a truly connected system from birth to adulthood. And full-day kindergarten – the single most significant investment in education in a generation – will soon be a reality across the entire province, giving every four - and five-year-old the best possible start in life.

A unique characteristic of Ontario's successful education system continues to be its four vibrant systems, with English and French, Catholic and public school boards contributing to student achievement and well-being. Together, the four systems have contributed to Ontario's reputation for excellence and equity. As proof, respected international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), McKinsey & Company and the National Center on Education and the Economy in the United States have all applauded Ontario, our programs and our results. Time and again, international studies rank Ontario students among the best in the world. In particular, they have recognized our success in reducing the influence of socio-economic background on student outcomes.

However, there is more work to do to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Too many of our Aboriginal students, youth in care (e.g., children in the custody of Children's Aid Societies) and students with special education needs continue to struggle. Like many other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world, Ontario has also seen a decline in student performance in mathematics. And as the world becomes more interconnected and our students become more technologically sophisticated, there continues to be too much inconsistency in the way technology is used in the classroom.

With the progress made in education over the past decade, Ontario is well positioned to address these challenges. *Achieving Excellence* builds on the success of the past and sets ambitious new goals for the future that will inspire and focus our efforts. These goals include high levels of achievement in literacy and mathematics, higher graduation rates and more.

2. Ontario's provincial standard is equivalent to a "B" grade.

> “Ontario, which … has a relatively large school system of nearly 5,000 schools, 120,000 teachers, and 2.2 million students, is among the world’s highest-performing school systems. It consistently achieves top-quartile mathematics scores and top-decile reading scores in PISA.”
>
> – McKinsey & Company, *How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better* (2010), p. 47

Achievement also means raising expectations for valuable, higher-order skills like critical thinking, communication, innovation, creativity, collaboration and entrepreneurship. These are the attributes that employers have already told us they seek out among graduates.

Our renewed vision for education includes the valuable insights and contributions of many individuals and organizations, including representatives from the education, business, research and innovation, not-for-profit, municipal, multicultural, French language and Aboriginal communities. Time and again, our partners highlighted the innovation and creativity in teaching and learning that is already taking place in Ontario’s classrooms. Spreading this approach across the entire education system will only be possible with the leadership and commitment of educators and the involvement of our many community partners, especially our learners and their families.

We know that change is never easy, and realizing the goals set out in *Achieving Excellence* will require the continued commitment of all of our partners. However, the evidence of the past decade demonstrates that our education system is capable of making real, positive change. We know that in order to build a better system we need to value the work of all education professionals – early childhood educators, teachers, support staff, school and system leaders and administrators. We also know that policy decisions and the allocation of resources have to be guided by evidence and research. It is through these principles that we have seen success in the past, and these principles will continue to guide us in the future as we develop more rigorous, relevant and innovative approaches to learning.

Our province has accomplished much over the past 10 years. As before, we will see inspiration become action and investments yield results.

Defining Our Renewed Goals

Achieving Excellence builds on the education system’s three current priorities: increasing student achievement, closing gaps in student achievement and increasing public confidence in publicly funded education. It encompasses these goals and reaches deeper and broader, raising expectations both for the system and for the potential of our children and students.

Our renewed goals for education are:

- **Achieving Excellence:** Children and students of all ages will achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills and demonstrate good citizenship. Educators will be supported in learning continuously and will be recognized as among the best in the world.
- **Ensuring Equity:** All children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood.
- **Promoting Well-Being:** All children and students will develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices.
- **Enhancing Public Confidence:** Ontarians will continue to have confidence in a publicly funded education system that helps develop new generations of confident, capable and caring citizens.

These four goals are interconnected – success in one contributes to success in the others. Our progress over the last 10 years tells us that when educators, students, parents and guardians, and our many other partners focus on a small number of clearly defined goals, those goals can be achieved.

"Student engagement and curiosity could be addressed through stronger development of 21st century learning skills and well-being. We could call this the 'new entrepreneurial spirit' – a spirit characterized by innovation, risk-taking, commitment, and skilled problem solving in the service of a better future."

– Council of Ontario Directors of Education

Goal: Achieving Excellence

We must give our learners the tools they need to reach their full potential, regardless of their individual circumstances. By raising expectations, the transformation in Ontario education will ensure that students achieve at high levels, acquire valuable skills and become engaged members of their communities.

Students will be fully engaged in their learning, building the skills and developing the attributes they will need to compete for and create the jobs of tomorrow. They will benefit from a wide array of opportunities both inside and outside of school that are compelling and contribute to their success, including the opportunity to benefit from the effective and appropriate use of technology in the classroom. In a world that is constantly changing, Ontario students will be better prepared to adapt, achieve and excel, regardless of the challenges they face.

The quality of student learning is closely related to the quality of the teaching force and its leaders. All high-performing education systems in the world, like Ontario's, have vibrant, engaged educators, support staff and administrative and other professionals who are committed to continuous learning. Educators are creating more relevant, applied and innovative learning experiences that spark learners' curiosity and inspire them to follow their passions. They are laying the foundation for children and students to gain the experiences, skills and knowledge needed for success, now and in the future.

Raising the bar for our teaching force, support staff and education leaders will increase student engagement – and student engagement is crucial. By being more engaged, our young people can be more successful in literacy, mathematics, science and the arts. They can gain important higher-order skills – like critical thinking, communication, collaboration and entrepreneurship. All of this will help them graduate from high school and advance to postsecondary careers, education and/or training.

Why We Need to Do This

Foundational skills for academic achievement include reading, writing and mathematics. In order for students to achieve excellence in an area like mathematics, there must be a balance between understanding basic math concepts, practising skills like multiplication tables, and developing the thinking skills needed for advanced problem solving. These foundational skills remain a focus – and combined with creativity and critical thinking, innovative problem solving, effective communication and collaboration, they lead to excellence.

Our children, youth and adult learners will need this balance of skills to meet the opportunities and demands of tomorrow. To help promote this balance, schools must take advantage of the technologies that are connecting us to information and people around the world and around the corner. Our task is to modernize classrooms and support educators' efforts to bring innovation to learning.

Beyond reading, writing and mathematics, we know that to achieve excellence in the future, our learners will also need to develop characteristics such as perseverance, resilience and imaginative thinking to overcome challenges. Combined with a deep sense of compassion and empathy for others, our learners will develop the skills and knowledge they need to become actively engaged citizens.

The current challenge facing educators is that they are competing on a daily basis for the attention and interest of their students, which can be easily drawn outside the classroom. As the world continues to change and technology becomes more prevalent, that challenge will only increase. That is why it is so important to ensure that school is a compelling, innovative and engaging place to learn for all students.

The roots of achieving this goal are already in the ground. There are promising examples of what the future holds throughout Ontario's education system today.

The full-day kindergarten program reflects the connection of research, international best practice and policy to meet the combined needs of families, children, schools and our communities. Thousands of educators and students are participating in innovative projects that are making an impact on student engagement, learning and achievement. The inclusion of financial literacy across the curriculum provides the kind of practical learning that students will need in life. Programs such as dual high school and college credits and the Specialist High Skills Majors program have helped increase the graduation rate and raise expectations for excellence. And while all secondary school graduates complete their 40 hours of community involvement, thousands of students invest many more on their own.

While we take the next steps to achieve excellence in our education system, we are emboldened by the fact that Ontario has a great foundation for future success.

"Making real world connections is essential … [we need to] observe what students are interested in and use this to foster creativity."

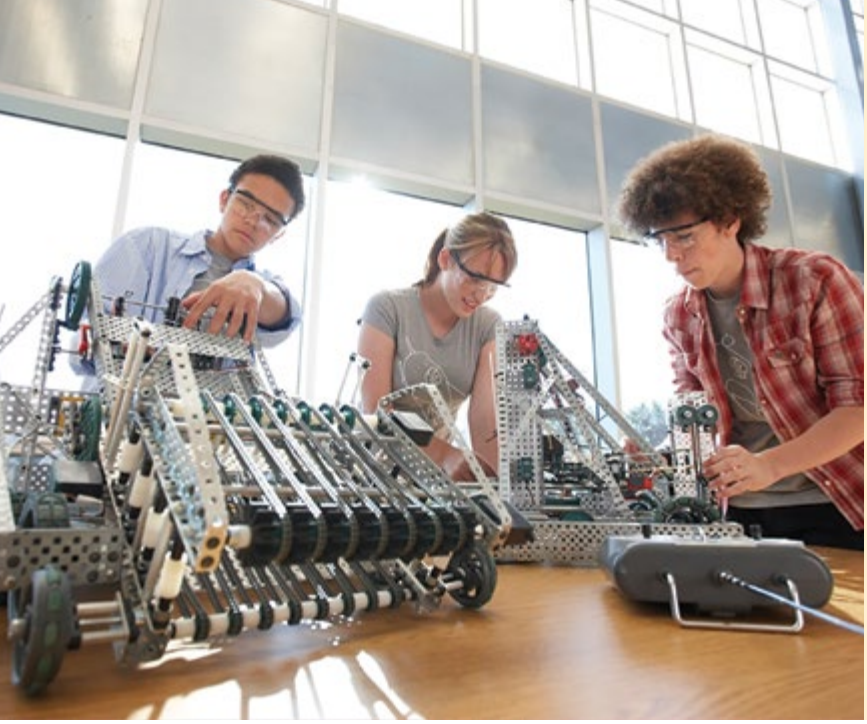
– An educator and consultation participant

Goal: Achieving Excellence *(continued)*

Plan of Action

To achieve success, Ontario will:

- Invest in the technology, design and infrastructure required for the classrooms of the future to serve the needs of all communities.
- Invest in innovative teaching practices and instructional methods enabled by technology to more precisely engage and address the learning needs of all students.
- Work with partners including TVO and TFO to build on existing online resources for students, educators and parents.
- Extend the principles of play-based learning established in full-day kindergarten and child care.
- Give students more flexibility and ownership in their learning, allowing them, for example, to determine whether they want to spend more time on e-learning or on learning outside of the classroom.
- Integrate family support programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Child Care/Family Resource Centres, and Better Beginnings, Better Futures, and create a common look and feel.
- Expand relevant new learning opportunities, including the Specialist High Skills Major program and the Dual Credit program.
- Foster more young entrepreneurs in Ontario schools by increasing training in innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship for Specialist High Skills Majors students.
- Increase student engagement in mathematics, science and technology by expanding opportunities for K–12 students to explore the relevance of these areas to their future pathways.
- Promote the value of the arts, including the visual and performing arts, in developing critical and creative thinking skills that support success in school and in life.



"Every student should have the opportunity to excel and gain experience for a career field they are interested in … entrepreneurship and innovation training really helps students learn to be creative and to see how being creative can help you be successful."

– Secondary school student

- Provide greater support to ensure parents and guardians are welcomed, respected and valued by the school community as partners in their children's education.
- Expand learning opportunities outside school to include community-based, civic, humanitarian, scientific and artistic activities, as well as cross-cultural and international experiences.
- Explore different models of learning, such as project-based learning or learning across multiple subject areas.
- Document, develop and implement innovative leadership practices and resulting clear improvements in student learning.

To assess progress towards this goal, Ontario will:

- Continue measuring progress towards an 85 per cent five-year high school graduation rate and a 75 per cent success rate on elementary EQAO assessments, with a particular focus on mathematics.
- Continue the trend of increasing the four-year graduation rate, which has increased by 19 percentage points since 2003–04 and now stands at 75 per cent.
- Define and develop measures for higher-order skills, such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration and entrepreneurship.
- Work with teachers, principals, and supervisory officials and their professional associations to identify and share effective and innovative teaching practices that include the use of technology.
- Increase participation in programs like Specialist High Skills Majors and Dual Credits, increase training in innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship, and ensure that programming meets student demand.

Promising Practices for the Future

Conseil scolaire catholique Providence has developed a series of innovative cross-curricular projects that integrate the use of communication technology to facilitate interaction with francophone artists and business leaders across the province and Canada. For instance, as part of a Grade 5 project, a network of schools developed a learning community with a focus on Franco-Ontarian musical influences. Students were able to use Skype to communicate with various musicians in order to work on a collaborative board-wide project. Such projects support the innovation and entrepreneurial skills valued by 21st century teaching and learning.

"In our culture, we believe that every child is born with gifts … What will our schools do to uncover and develop the gifts of our children?"

– An Aboriginal consultation participant

Goal: Ensuring Equity

Ontario's diversity is one of the province's greatest assets. Embracing this diversity and moving beyond tolerance and celebration to inclusivity and respect will help us reach our goal of making Ontario's education system the most equitable in the world. Everyone in our publicly funded education system – regardless of background or personal circumstances – must feel engaged and included.

Ontario schools need to be places where everyone can succeed in a culture of high expectations. They need to be places where educators and students value diversity, respect each other, and see themselves reflected in their learning. It is particularly important to provide the best possible learning opportunities and supports for students who may be at risk of not succeeding. This often includes, but is not limited to, some of our Aboriginal students, children and youth in care, children and students with special education needs, recent immigrants and children from families experiencing poverty.

Our work over the past decade has been focused on ensuring that no child or youth will have anything in the way to stop them from reaching their potential. We are seeing the results, which includes a culture shift in schools that recognizes diversity as a contributor to success, and not a barrier. The fundamental principle driving this work is that every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or other factors.

With the hard work and dedication of our education professionals, performance gaps between students have narrowed, and in some cases, closed. For example, elementary students participating in English as a Second Language programs now perform almost as well as the general student population. The achievement gap between boys and girls is also narrowing, as is the gap between elementary students with special education needs and elementary students generally. Work in these areas needs to continue, but we also need to push beyond what we have already done to make sure all students get the support they need.

Equity and excellence go hand in hand. So while Ontario has come far in closing gaps for many learners, more needs to be done for those students who struggle the most.

Why We Need to Do This

It is clear that students who feel welcome and accepted in their schools are more likely to succeed academically. By ensuring equity in our education system, we can help all students achieve excellence.

One of the great strengths of Ontario's publicly funded education system is the commitment to help all learners – from young children to adults – to achieve their full potential in life. Education creates opportunity, and it can do so for everyone. It promotes social justice, and it can be a great equalizer. As Ontarians, we celebrate and embrace our diversity, and it makes us a better and stronger society.

An important component of ensuring equity is supporting students through transition periods that we know pose challenges. There are several key transition points when children and students need extra attention – when they first enter kindergarten; when they make the transition to Grade 1; when they move from elementary to secondary school; when they move from secondary school to postsecondary education or the world of work, and when they move between schools or communities.

Beyond the transitions that every student experiences, we know there are some that are unique to each student's circumstances. For example, a youth in care may be transitioning between parents or guardians, and may be changing schools at the same time. Some Aboriginal students may be transitioning from on-reserve schools to the provincial school system. Such transitions can be especially challenging. While their circumstances are beyond the control of students, the education system should be equipped to support them through these transitions to ensure they have every opportunity to succeed. Providing the support needed during transitions will help improve the achievement of all students.

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In the summer of 2013, the Minister's Student Advisory Council met to brainstorm about the future of education in Ontario. The following image was created to capture the ideas from their discussions.

"In terms of diversity, 27% of Ontario students are born outside of Canada and 20% are visible minorities. Toronto, the main city in Ontario, is one of the most diverse cities in the world."

– OECD, *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States* (2011), p. 71

Goal: Ensuring Equity *(continued)*

While we know that some Aboriginal students, youth in care, students with special education needs and some students who are navigating a transition continue to struggle, we also know that there are other students at risk of not succeeding. For example, we know that some students who enrol in applied courses struggle to succeed throughout their high school careers. That is why, with the precise information on student achievement that is available to school boards, we need to ensure that the support provided is focused and targeted at the students who need it most, regardless of their circumstances.

The goal is an education system in which all children, regardless of circumstances, can be successful and supported – through excellent child care, stimulating early learning programs, full-day kindergarten, and engaging programs and caring environments – all along the way to any one of the four postsecondary destinations: apprenticeship, college, university or the workplace.

Plan of Action

To achieve success, Ontario will:

- Intervene in a timely and effective way to help children and students who are struggling.
- Increase knowledge and understanding of First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures and histories to enhance the learning experience of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
- Provide greater support for First Nation students when they transition from on-reserve schools to provincially funded schools.
- Provide new online learning and professional development opportunities for both teachers and students, particularly those in rural and remote communities, including opportunities for virtual cooperative education placements.
- Increase the integration of education services with services delivered by other ministries and community partners for children and youth with special needs.
- Support the accurate and up-to-date identification of children and youth with special education needs.
- Increase academic support and provide engaging programs for youth in care.
- Ensure that the adult education system better supports adult learners in their efforts to finish high school and successfully transition to postsecondary education, training or the workplace.
- Support and respect the cultural and linguistic needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities, and francophone communities.

To assess progress towards this goal, Ontario will:

- Monitor graduation rates and achievement gaps for groups of students such as First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, children and youth in care and students with special education needs.
- Set measures of student engagement and belonging for all students, especially those who may be at risk of lower achievement.
- Determine how many adults across Ontario complete their Ontario Secondary School Diploma annually, and evaluate their success as they transition to postsecondary education, training or the workplace.

Promising Practices for the Future

Biwaase'aa is a broad-based program that supports Aboriginal and other students in seven elementary schools in Thunder Bay. Youth outreach workers deliver in-school and after-school programs including mentoring, literacy/numeracy supports, food security programs and cultural competency awareness programs. This work is undertaken for the whole school community through culturally relevant teachings and by fostering relationships between families, schools and Elders.

"Improving student achievement and student engagement is directly linked to ensuring that we work collaboratively and in a purposefully integrated way for the social, emotional, mental and physical well-being of all children and youth."

– Ontario Public School Boards' Association

Goal: Promoting Well-Being

Children and students who have strong relationships and a positive sense of self – and who can understand and manage their own health and emotions – are in a better position to reach their full potential in the future. Their sense of well-being supports their learning because it makes them more resilient and better able to overcome challenges. Ontario's education system needs to help students build the knowledge and skills associated with positive well-being and become healthy, active and engaged citizens.

Developing child and student well-being means supporting the whole child – not only the child's academic achievement but also his or her cognitive, emotional, social and physical well-being. It also means ensuring that our schools, child care centres and early years programs are safe and welcoming physical environments. Achieving success in this goal will depend on the knowledge, wisdom and willingness of students, parents and guardians, community organizations, service providers, government ministries and others to create an environment that is healthy, safe and caring.

As child care, early learning and the education system become increasingly integrated, more children will benefit from a stronger start in life. Family support programs offer a wide range of opportunities that promote healthy child development, foster children's early learning through play, and support parents and families in their role as primary caregivers. The work that has already been done to create healthy, safer schools and to support the mental and physical health of children and youth provides an excellent blueprint for how we must work together in the future. This renewed vision must ensure that we build on the momentum we've achieved and equip our children and students with the skills they need to seize opportunities and overcome obstacles.

Why We Need to Do This

Over the past 10 years we have seen growing evidence demonstrating why student well-being is an important element of overall student success. Students cannot achieve academically if they feel unsafe at school or are bullied online. They cannot be expected to reach their full potential if they have mental health issues and if we do not provide the support they need. And they cannot be their best if they are not given the tools and motivation to adopt a healthy, active lifestyle, both in and outside of school.

That is why the well-being of children and students needs to move to the centre of the education system's priorities. This will require all of our partners to learn together and build capacity across the system to support our learners. By elevating child and student well-being as one of our four core priorities, we recognize its fundamental importance to our learners and their futures.

Student well-being is a goal that requires attention and commitment beyond the hours of the school day. Whether this goal is addressed by offering engaging before- and after-school programs or by ensuring that our schools act as community hubs beyond the school day, promoting student well-being requires the focused efforts of the entire community.

Ontario has already taken important steps to support the whole child, including the implementation of recommendations from the Safe Schools Action Team, the passage of the Accepting Schools Act and the launch of a comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy that focuses on children and youth in its first three years. However, if we are to fully support the whole child and the well-being of children and youth from our youngest learners to our soon-to-be graduates, we need to take further action.

Promising Practices for the Future

For several years, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has been working hard to ensure the physical, mental and emotional well-being of its students. With help from school staff, students, parents and guardians, and public health nurses, Health Action Teams identify issues of concern to each school and put strategies in place to address them. The Health Promoting Schools program is now in 18 secondary and 29 elementary schools in the district, including almost all high- and medium-risk schools.

Goal: Promoting Well-Being *(continued)*

Plan of Action

To achieve success, Ontario will:

- Work with partners inside and outside the education sector to increase interest among children and youth in being physically active, and to increase their motivation to live healthy, active lives.
- Work with our partners to make early years programs and services easier to navigate and offer greater convenience for parents and families.
- Ensure that parents, guardians and caregivers are aware of the range of child care and early years options available.
- Recognize and encourage a wide range of opportunities for parent, guardian and caregiver engagement and involvement in their children's learning.
- Support all students and staff in finding ways to be leaders and contributors to the school and broader community.
- Continue to support education sector initiatives for Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions Strategy in collaboration with other ministries, including the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.
- Work with provincial, regional and local education and health partners to support optimal delivery of, and access to, services and ongoing health supports for children, youth and families.

To assess progress towards this goal, Ontario will:

- Work with our partners to identify the factors that support student well-being and then adopt ways to measure them.
- Monitor children's success beyond full-day kindergarten through existing mechanisms (e.g., school report card information, ongoing implementation of the Early Development Instrument and EQAO annual assessments) to ensure that children continue to benefit throughout the later grades.
- Work with school boards to ensure that efforts to build safe and accepting schools are supported by high-quality data, including data from school climate surveys conducted every two years.

"There is nothing more exciting than a teacher who is passionate about teaching and learning. It is this enthusiasm that inspires and engages students."

– Student consultation participant

Goal: Enhancing Public Confidence

Over the past decade, confidence in publicly funded education has grown as teachers, support staff, parents and school boards see the results of hard work and targeted investments. In Ontario, the high school graduation rate has increased 15 percentage points over the past 10 years, while overall student performance on EQAO assessments has improved by 17 percentage points. These results, combined with the ongoing dedication of individuals and groups across the education sector, have resulted in greater confidence in publicly funded education. The goal is to ensure that this confidence is not only maintained, but enhanced.

An education system that is sustainable, responsible, accountable and transparent inspires public confidence and contributes to positive student outcomes. Public trust is built when the education system makes decisions based on evidence and research, and when it is seen as a good steward of public resources. With recent changes to national data collection, we will need to work even more closely with partners, especially school boards, to ensure that accurate, up-to-date information, such as socio-economic and demographic data, is available to make the best decisions for Ontario children and students. *Achieving Excellence* adheres to these principles while creating the conditions for excellence, equity and child and student well-being. Resources will continue to be focused on what makes a difference for children and students in each of the priority areas.

Parents and guardians are a critical component of ensuring public confidence in the education system. Parents who are engaged and actively involved in their child's learning make Ontario's great schools even stronger. Most importantly, students are more likely to succeed when their parents are engaged in their learning, and with more students succeeding, public confidence in the education system can be enhanced.

By raising our expectations for what student success means in Ontario, while dedicating resources where there is the greatest need, we will meet and work to exceed Ontarians' high expectations of the education system.

Goal: Enhancing Public Confidence *(continued)*

Why We Need to Do This

Ontarians want to have confidence in the ability of our publicly funded education system – from the ministry to the school board to the classroom – to meet the needs of our children. The consultation on a renewed vision for Ontario's education system revealed a tremendous confidence in our ability to set and achieve ambitious goals. Ninety-five per cent of Ontario children attend a publicly funded school – a testament to the confidence of parents and families across the province.

Our education system is consistently recognized as one of the best in the world, and for good reason. This international recognition also builds confidence among Ontario's parents and families, who have come to expect extraordinary results. This success has been achieved in partnership with educators, support staff and leaders who are committed to innovation and improvement in teaching and learning. Ontario benefits greatly from the high-quality teaching and education professionals who work in our schools.

Parents and guardians have also been a critical part of our success in education. We know that good schools become great schools when parents are engaged in their child's learning, and over the past number of years there have been more opportunities for parents to become engaged, both at the local and the provincial level. Parents Reaching Out Grants have helped parents come together in their communities to discuss local priorities, while Parent Involvement Committees are ensuring that the parent perspective is incorporated into provincial policies. While these have been extremely successful, we need to consider how to give even more parents opportunities to engage in their child's learning in the future.

To move forward, we need to ensure that the allocation of resources in the education system continues to be efficient and effective. We must also continue to support our educators in their professional learning, ensuring they remain proud members of a profession that is crucial to the future prosperity of our province. At the same time, we must continue to explore new and creative avenues for parents to engage in their child's learning.

Plan of Action

To achieve success, Ontario will:

- Give our students a solid education in the basics and beyond, to help develop well-rounded young adults who are ready for their future.
- Improve our initial teacher education programs to ensure that high-quality professionals are prepared to be successful in the complex classrooms of today.
- Partner with community organizations and businesses to provide students with more experiential learning opportunities.
- Ensure that school buildings and classrooms provide positive learning environments for all students.
- Promote greater collaboration between early years and education partners.
- Foster increased parent engagement through ongoing communication about what their children are doing in school and how parents, guardians and caregivers can further contribute to their learning.
- Work with the Open Government initiative to provide the public with relevant information about Ontario's publicly funded education system.
- Increase public awareness and understanding of the innovation and learning taking place in schools.
- Collaborate with education partners across the province to ensure that this renewed vision becomes a reality.
- Broaden the measures of success and the use of perceptual and demographic data (e.g., perceptual surveys) so that program and service enhancements address the specific needs of students who continue to struggle.

To assess progress towards this goal, Ontario will:

- Continue to monitor the percentage of children who attend a publicly funded school.
- Determine how many students across Ontario take advantage of increased experiential learning opportunities through cooperative education with community organizations and businesses.
- Work with boards to measure public perception through regular surveys and focus groups.

Promising Practices for the Future

At Halton's *Our Kids Network*, members believe that the entire community – including the public and private sectors – shares in the responsibility for achieving the conditions for well-being among children and families. The work of *Our Kids Network* is focused on child development from birth to 18 years, and is founded on evidence-based strategic directions. Sector leaders from education, government, health, mental health and special needs, along with police services and the multicultural community, provide direction and planning.

By integrating and aligning services, *Our Kids Network* provides leadership and support to help children and the community thrive.

Conclusion

The world is changing rapidly. That is why *Achieving Excellence* challenges the education sector in Ontario to transform to meet the expectations of today and build the vibrant, prosperous province of tomorrow. Through this renewed vision, Ontario is setting its sights on a comprehensive and continuous education system that supports children all the way from birth to adulthood. It will be a system that recognizes well-being as an instrumental factor in students' academic success, and promotes greater equity to ensure that all students can be their best.

This is an exciting and inspiring time for education in Ontario. Our past accomplishments have built a strong foundation for future success. We have so much to be proud of, and now is the time to aspire to even greater accomplishments for all of our learners.

By raising expectations for what our education system can accomplish, *Achieving Excellence* can help uncover and develop the potential of all learners. It will reveal their hidden gifts and spark new passions for future careers. We can develop compassionate and actively engaged citizens who graduate high school equipped for the technology-driven, globalized world. They will be well-rounded individuals who have not only strong basic skills but also the critical thinking skills, imagination and resilience to excel in – and create – the new jobs of tomorrow.

This renewed vision for the future of education in Ontario sets ambitious goals. We know these goals are achievable because we have proved over the past decade that by working together with a common purpose we can help our students reach new heights of success. At the core of *Achieving Excellence* is a commitment to collaborative, continuous learning among educators, leaders and government. Combined with broad partnerships with families, communities and businesses, all working together, we can create a system that is even more accessible, integrated and responsive – one that will give our children the knowledge and skills they need to succeed and the confidence to embrace the challenges of the future.

By working together, we can make *Achieving Excellence* a reality. We can give all of our children the opportunity to reach their potential. We can support their success inside and outside of the classroom. And we can build a better province for all Ontarians.

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