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MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Secretary-Treasurers and Supervisory Officers of
School Authorities

FROM: Karen Gill
Director
Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch

DATE: December 22, 2015

SUBJECT: *Syrian Refugee Settlement in Ontario*

School districts across Ontario have been welcoming newcomer students and their families for many years. Let me begin by thanking you and acknowledging the work that many of you are already involved in as we continue to prepare for the arrival of our newest Canadians.

We are aware that there are a range of language supports already in place in our school communities across the province. In response to needs that have been identified in English-language school boards, I would like to provide you with information about additional supports.

The Ministry of Education is developing an additional team of assessors who can offer initial assessment support to schools and boards, as needed. These individuals will be able to augment board personnel in the initial English language assessment of children and youth using the *Steps to English Proficiency (STEP)* resource, as well as an assessment of mathematical skills and knowledge. An initial assessment report will be generated that receiving schools can use to support the placement and programming needs of newcomer students.

To support the initial assessment process, the ministry is offering a two-day session for designated staff on January 13-14, 2016 in Toronto. Boards are invited to register up to two staff to attend these sessions – please see registration details attached. Please note that this learning session is designed for individuals who will have responsibility for administering the Initial STEP Language Assessment and the Initial Mathematics Assessment to newly arrived English-language learners. The focus of the learning is on administrating these tools and will be of benefit to new users.

Additional professional learning opportunities will be offered to support boards as you continue to build capacity in welcoming and providing program supports for these newcomers. Details of these opportunities will be provided early in the new year.

An Adobe Connect learning session is scheduled for January 20-21, 2016 to support school leaders with a focus on *Supporting English Language Learners: Transition and Inclusion*.

Information about participating in this session will be provided in early January. Further learning opportunities will be developed in response to regional needs.

Board and school staff may also find the following resources useful as they build effective practices to support students with limited prior schooling. There is a six-part video series complete with facilitator guides on *Supporting English Language Learners in an English Literacy Development Program*. This video series can be found at http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/ell/prolearnfac/ELD_video_series.html. The monograph entitled, *English Literacy Development: Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling* also addresses the needs of these learners. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/CBS_LiteracyDevelopment.pdf

As we move forward in welcoming our newcomer students and their families, we encourage you to share your successes, challenges and suggestions around providing language supports during this time of transition. If you have questions please do not hesitate to contact my office as noted below.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,

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