

Ministry of Education

Ministère de l'Éducation

Strategic Planning and
Elementary/Secondary
Programs Division

Division de la planification
stratégique et des programmes
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MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Supervisory Officers and Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities
Director of Provincial Schools
Supervisory Officer of Centre Jules-Léger
Supervisory Officers
Principals
Student Success Leaders

FROM: George Zegarac
Assistant Deputy Minister
Strategic Planning and Elementary/Secondary Programs Division

C.C: Ontario Teachers Federation and Affiliate Federations

DATE: June 23, 2008

SUBJECT: **Divisional focus for 2008-09**

This has been another great year for education. The hard work by education partners across the province is truly making a difference. We still have more work to do together to keep moving toward our goals of raising the student achievement bar, closing the gap for all students and increasing public confidence in publicly funded education. However, it is important to recognize that we are making continued progress in improving student achievement.

I have had the opportunity to meet with many groups throughout the year. Quite a few have mentioned to me that last year's divisional focus memo was a valuable tool to support school and board planning for the school year. I am pleased to again communicate our priorities to you so that you can determine your plans, including staffing, within this context. This memo outlines our focal points for the division in the areas of special education, curriculum, student success and adult education, to see how these agendas fit together and to support planning and resource allocation at the Boards.

Our work is an integral part of the overall vision for Ontario education, as outlined in the Government's "Energizing Ontario Education" document released in February, 2008 (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/energize/index.html). Our efforts are focused on the three core priorities: high levels of student achievement, reduced gaps in student achievement and increased public confidence in publicly funded education. We continue to work closely with our colleagues in Literacy & Numeracy Secretariat, Instruction & Leadership Division, French-Language Education & Educational Operations, and Elementary/Secondary Business & Finance

Division to develop and implement this vision. In a separate communication to French-language boards, my colleague Dominic Giroux, Assistant Deputy Minister, French-Language Education & Educational Operations, will outline how the student success and curriculum agenda will be implemented in the coming year, in relation to *Aménagement linguistique* initiatives.

Where are we going in 2008-09?

For 2008-09, our overall strategy is to both continue to broaden and, more importantly, deepen implementation of the student achievement and the closing the gap agenda. Students who see the relevance of what they are learning, who are supported when they encounter difficulties, and who feel that they are part of the school community are more successful learners.

We aim to create effective long term change, both raising the bar and closing the student achievement gap by:

- an ongoing focus on improving instruction, assessment and evaluation, in particular in the areas of Mathematics, English and Science where students are continuing to struggle. As you remember, literacy and numeracy are two of the four Pillars for Student Success;
- continuing innovation in secondary schools, through expanding course choices and innovative programs that help students succeed and graduate, such as dual credits, Specialist High Skills Majors, co-operative education, credit rescue and credit recovery;
- improving strategies to close the gap and address the needs of students who are struggling and in need of additional support, through measures targeted toward specific boards, schools and groups of students (e.g. special education, English Language Learners, Aboriginal students, boys' literacy);
- continuing to focus on effective practices in special education that support enhanced student outcomes, including improving IEPs (Individual Education Plans), the use of assistive technologies, and ongoing teacher training in differentiated instruction and assessment, as well as broader team training. Students with special education needs make up 14% of the student population. Improved outcomes for these students are critical to their future, and to our progress on both closing the gap and raising the bar to reach the 85% graduation target;
- attracting back early school-leavers by building on new pilots in Adult Education to improve aspects such as recognition of adult learners' skills and knowledge, and effective local partnerships, to create a more accessible, supportive and accountable system;
- adding resource materials that are more engaging to all students to support their learning (e.g. Black history, Aboriginal perspectives, boys' literacy, gender studies);
- encouraging and supporting partnerships among co-terminous/neighbouring boards, regional collaboration among boards and between the secondary and postsecondary sectors (for example through Regional Planning Teams of schools and colleges as part of the School-College-Work Initiative);
- supporting enhanced communication and engagement strategies within the school system and with our education partners – students, parents, business and postsecondary education and training. Communication and engagement will enhance effective programming and build public confidence in publicly funded education. More details on a Student Engagement Strategy will be released shortly.
- in order to establish consistency of approach to board and school improvement planning K-12, DM Steve Marshall has proposed that one School Effectiveness Framework for

both the elementary and secondary panels be developed. This will allow boards to adapt essential and locally developed components from the School Effectiveness Framework that support both elementary and secondary instructional and assessment practices including integration of Special Education. This will also enable boards to adapt and consolidate approaches, plan and monitor goals.

What is the focus for Curriculum?

A greater focus on instruction, assessment and evaluation will build on the momentum from the successful Provincial Symposium on Assessment and Evaluation, held on January 8 & 9th. This is critical in meeting our 85% graduation rate target. Our supports will, more and more, focus on the classroom teacher.

Our major focus over the next eighteen months is to work with stakeholders and board teams in developing a consolidated Kindergarten to Grade 12 Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting policy document to be in schools for September 2009. This document will be designed to improve clarity and consistency in assessment, grading and reporting practices. The working document *Growing Success*, introduced at the Provincial Symposium, has been developed and distributed to initiate discussion in the policy development process by identifying some of the key issues that need to be addressed in the policy document. The review of both elementary and secondary report cards, which was conducted in the past year, will be incorporated into this process. In addition, a new video series on exemplary Assessment & Evaluation practices, and a professional development plan are being developed to support teachers in their implementation efforts.

We will continue to focus supports in areas that students are clearly struggling, such as Mathematics and English. GAINS (Growing Accessible Interactive Networked Supports) is using new technologies to provide deeper and more precise levels of support at all levels of the system for literacy and mathematics, grades 7-12. Educators involved in GAINS pilot projects are developing resources to share provincially in Adobe Connect professional learning sessions. The Boys' Literacy Inquiry Project, done in conjunction with an OISE Research team, is completing its reports on 103 projects developing effective ways to both raise boys' achievement levels and close the gap between boys and girls. A final report will be completed by August 2008, followed by case study videos made available to all teachers.

Through the 2008-09 GSN, there is more funding for English Language Learners through the ESL/ESD program, and you will see more reviews and accountability on programs for English language learners. Then-Deputy Minister Ben Levin's memo to boards, dated March 8, 2007, set this out. The memo indicated that during the 2007-08 school year, the ministry will have discussions with school boards to learn more about how ESL/ELD funding is currently being used to support good student outcomes for English language learners. In 2008-09 boards will be expected to demonstrate how they are using these funds at the board and school levels to benefit English language learners. In 2009-10 boards will be expected to report publicly on their improvement strategies, allocation of funds, and evidence that supports the approaches they have taken. In addition, we will be selecting a number of boards to conduct program reviews similar to the reviews conducted in Special Education. Additional information will be communicated in the near future.

As of September 2007, Ontario has a consolidated Kindergarten through Grade 12 policy that addresses the needs of English language learners, *English Language Learners: ESL and ELD Programs and Services*. Two additional resources have been developed for release this school year – *Supporting English Language Learners in Kindergarten* (already released) and *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling*. These are tools for boards to use in implementing effective programs and services for ELL students.

E-learning has been one of my passions since my very first day at the Ministry of Education. We now have a province-wide strategy, supported by regional coordinators, 57 English-language online courses now developed, and the Ontario Education Resource Bank, with over 10,000 resources linked to the provincial curriculum. This year, we have focussed on board level training. Now we are moving to classroom teachers. We have received very positive feedback from teachers who use resources such as the OERB, and would like all teachers to take advantage of the opportunity to access the resources available. We are using what we learn from the homework help pilots to expand the program and help struggling students in other communities. We expect this will be helpful for all students, but especially for students struggling with courses that have been identified as more challenging, such as Mathematics (Academic & Applied), Applied English, and Applied Science.

Dominic Giroux will highlight to French-language boards plans for the expansion of e-learning initiatives through the *Service d'apprentissage médiatisé franco-ontarien* (SAMFO), the new independent TFO and the successful homework support program *SOS Devoirs*.

We are maintaining a seven year curriculum review cycle. As per my memo of October 5, 2007, the curriculum review cycle now provides for an additional year between the release of the documents and mandatory implementation, allowing boards and teachers additional time to more thoroughly prepare for effective implementation of new curriculum. The review schedule can be found in updated [Appendix A](#). As the work of curriculum review continues, environmental education expectations and opportunities are being embedded in each discipline grades 1 to 12, so that all Ontario students develop the knowledge, skills, perspectives and practices that will contribute to environmentally literate and responsible citizens. In addition an Environmental Education Policy is under development as we move forward on the recommendations contained in the report *Shaping Our Schools, Shaping Our Future*.

We will be providing more resource materials to help engage various groups of students, (e.g. related to Aboriginal perspectives, and Black history). In addition we will be developing a suite of courses in Gender Studies, Equity Studies, and World Cultures as part of the curriculum review process for Social Sciences and Humanities, Grades 9-12. We will be building e-learning resources and more traditional supports.

The Curriculum Council has recently been given the task of examining the overcrowded elementary curriculum and will work closely with a Working Group of experts to gather information that will inform their deliberations. It is anticipated that the Council will provide advice to the Minister on this issue during the 2008/09 school year.

What is the focus for Student Success/Learning to 18?

Next year is not about a lot of new initiatives. It is about deeper implementation of existing policy directions and programs. Graduation rates have risen from 68% (2003-04) to 75% (2006-

07). Credit accumulation rates are also improving. To continue this progress, we need to expand successful, innovative programs that engage students, and also ensure that supports are provided when students need them. Key elements that we are expecting as part of board strategies include targeted efforts to support struggling students; focused support on applied courses specifically mathematics; engaging, quality programs with four strong pathways; and support for the development of solid literacy and numeracy skills.

Dual credits, Specialist High Skills Majors and co-operative education help to engage students, who are more successful when they see the relevance of what they are learning to their interests and future plans. Programs such as credit recovery, credit rescue and transition supports help students when they are struggling. We will continue to invest in these innovative programs so that they become more widely accessible to students. Our commitment to these programs includes an ongoing obligation to ensure their quality. We will be conducting more reviews to ensure students are receiving quality programs, and to share effective practices. At the provincial level, we will be closely monitoring data on student and system level results to assess our collective results and to determine areas that require further attention. We need to all work together to sustain the momentum for change and innovation while taking the time to reflect and build common understandings about effective and high yield practices and the active ingredients for success.

Communication to parents and students to build broader awareness of innovative programs continues to be a priority. *Student Success* brochures have been sent to all elementary and secondary schools for distribution to parents of students in Grades 8-12, as part of the course selection process for 2008-09. Your support in making sure that students and parents are aware of programs is key, so that students can make informed decisions about programs that best meet their needs.

In the next few months you will also see these brochures displayed at drive test centres, libraries, recreation centres and distributed through other community service organizations. Schools and parents can order more copies through our website or through our Service Ontario phone line.

On May 12, 2008 Minister Wynne hosted a second Student Forum to discuss how students can have a stronger voice in Ontario's education system. A diverse group of over 50 Grade 7-12 students from across the province participated in a full day of roundtable discussions. Students welcomed the invitation to provide the Minister with advice on the student engagement strategy currently being developed and which has local, regional and provincial components. Some of these elements include student voice, student led projects and the provision of advice to the Minister. Input from the forum will contribute to the Ministry's development of its student engagement strategy.

My staff, together with the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS), the French-Language Education Policy & Programs Branch and the Field Services Branch, will continue to work with boards to align school improvement plans (K-12). We are also looking to further integrate Special Education in these plans in future years. The Aménagement Linguistique Policy will continue to be the main framework for all Ministry initiatives and improvement planning in French-language boards.

Better use of data continues to be a priority, to help identify problems and effective strategies, and create effective programs that educators and the general public can be confident are helping

students. We are working with Information Management Branch on a “Schools Like Mine” tool for Grades 7-12,. For data tools, information and analysis to be useful for all of us, we rely on timely and accurate information from boards and schools. In the future, when evaluating EPO funding proposals for SHSMs, dual credits, e-learning enhancements, etc., we may consider factors such as whether applying boards have demonstrated that they are fulfilling their action plans and reporting requirements, including submitting ONSIS data in a timely manner. We will be reviewing the present indicators of success and replacing some with more localized information while maintaining the provincial measurements we find useful.

We will continue to concentrate on the transition of students from one grade to the next especially in the crucial movement from grade 8 to grade 9 and between schools at all grades. We will be continuing our work with the Student Success Teams so that the efforts in a school are by a team not just an individual. There will be a concerted effort to move the Differentiated Instruction model to the secondary school.

We will collaborate with schools and school boards in a school improvement process that will involve Ministry and board school improvement teams. Details regarding school improvement teams will be available soon. This will build upon the work of *Destination réussite* of the past two school years in French-language schools.

Additional funding to support the Student Success Strategy has been provided for 2008-09. The Student Success Portion of the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) is \$56.1M. Information about the non-GSN funding for ministry-led professional development, resources and special projects including Specialist High Skills Major, the School-College Work Initiative, Differentiated Instruction and, new this year, Student Success School Improvement Teams will be provided at a later date. In combination, these funds will enable boards to design and implement their own innovative strategies to customize their specific focus in Student Success Action Plans that support deeper implementation of the Student Success Strategy; close the performance gap in specific student populations; and enhance instruction, assessment and evaluation practices. Further information about the GSN allocation and its use is provided in Appendix B.

Can we reach our 85% graduation target for 2010-11? Yes, we can. Each 1% increase is about 1500 students. This is an additional five students in every high school graduation class each year.

What is the focus for Adult Education?

Adult and continuing education is an integral part of the Student Success/Learning to 18 strategy, to attract back early school-leavers without a high school diploma, and encourage them to come back and continue their education. EDU continues to collaborate with our partners, TCU, Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) and other key stakeholders including CESBA (Adult & Continuing Education School Board Administrators) and school boards to better coordinate program pathways and access to services for adults.

An inter-ministerial committee (EDU, TCU, MCI) on Adult Education, chaired by the Minister of Education, has been formed to provide direction for improved policy alignment and coordination of programs and services for adult learners across government.

There will be additional funding for adult education programs through the 2008-09 Grants for Student Needs (GSN), with an increase to \$2880 of the Average Daily Enrolment amount in the Continuing Education and Other Programs Grant.

We are building on the framework set out by the Adult Education Review in 2005. In 2007-08, we focused on making it easier for learners to make informed choices and to access appropriate programs and services that will get them to their goals in the quickest, most effective way possible. In 2007-08, 14 adult education pilots were funded in 11 communities to focus on recognizing the first language of adult newcomers for high school credits; finding better ways to recognize adult learners' skills and knowledge; and creating effective local partnerships. We also developed the capacity of school boards to deliver adult and continuing education by providing resources for new principals, training on prior learning assessment, and examples of collaborative practices and partnerships within school boards.

Informed by the results of the adult education pilot projects, we will continue to work with TCU and MCI in 2008-2009 to better align policy and program initiatives related to adult learning to:

- improve opportunities for recognition and accreditation of external and experiential learning through prior learning assessment
- maximize existing resources within adult education through local coordination, linkages and partnerships among delivery agencies and school boards
- improve access to information through public websites such as Employment Ontario

Within EDU we will also:

- identify and explore options for increasing access to e-learning to deliver OSSD credits to adult learners
- improve capacity to collect and report adult student success outcomes that include credit accumulation and OSSD completion

What is the focus for Special Education?

The ministry priorities of improving student achievement and closing gaps in achievement apply to all students, including students with special education needs. We are providing more funding for special education, and will be expecting more accountability, with a focus on a more integrated approach to planning and the measuring of student outcomes.

Special education is an integral part of the Student Success agenda. Special education funding is incremental to base funding and as such is to be used to place students with special education needs in a position to improve their outcomes. This includes initiatives by the Literacy/Numeracy Secretariat and Student Success/Learning to 18.

Reflecting the importance of special education, and of reaching the classroom teacher to truly implement change, it has been strongly recommended that school boards dedicate one of their six Professional Activity days in 2008-09 to special education. Preparation for this day will be provided through Ministry led regional sessions early in 2009. These sessions will include applicable resources for the implementation of the new K-12 *Education for All* resource document and strategies for improving the use of Individual Education Plans as both instructional and administrative tools. This will be an important opportunity to improve learning for all students but especially for students with special education needs.

Part of the focus in the improvement of IEPs is to link them more effectively to the Ontario curriculum, report cards and classroom instruction. The web-based template developed last year and accessed by the majority of boards around the province will be further modified in 2008-09 to improve connectivity for individual boards thus facilitating ease of use and access for all staff involved in the IEP completion and review process.

The Ministry continues to implement the recommendations of the Working Table on Special Education including the review of special education funding and practices. For 2008-09 \$67.3M has been allocated through the Grants for Student Needs to achieve the following:

- Continue the stabilization of high needs funding to ensure that no board receives less funding than 2007-08 and for those boards increasing in enrolment their allocation will be adjusted accordingly
- Increases in both the Special Incidence Portion and Special Equipment Amount in support of our highest needs students
- An increase in the Facilities Amount to support new programs and update resources

In addition, training and support funds have been allocated to:

- Continue training in boards to build skills in the delivery of ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis) for students with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorders) including summer training opportunities
- Build board level expertise in ABA
- Support the second year of the collaborative services models for ASD and increase the number of boards involved in this project
- Support models of collaboration focused upon the needs of students with other special education needs especially mental health
- Provide additional funds to boards who are serving deaf, blind and deaf-blind students to help defray the growing costs of interpreters and assistive technology
- Extend *Education for All* to become a K-12 resource for schools and begin to implement this resource through regional in-service sessions and
- Identify measures of learning and growth for students not accessing the provincial curriculum

We will continue to review and refine the various components of the Special Education Grant and to consult with stakeholders to ensure that the evolution of the special education funding approach supports students with special education needs, improves student outcomes and places less emphasis on the identification of students and more on emphasis on effective programming and instruction. It is the intent of the Ministry to ensure that all students accessing special education programs and services have IEPs after an appropriate period of assessment. We will work with boards during the 2008-09 school year to define timelines and expectations leading to the achievement of this goal.

Although the funding for the CODE and OPA projects concludes in 2008, the sharing of the learnings from these two critical initiatives is expected to continue within boards and across boards through the networks and relationships that been developed through these projects.

This past fall, the ministry published and distributed resource materials that were positively received by the field, and that we expect school boards are using to full advantage. *Shared Solutions - A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for*

Students with Special Education Needs was accompanied by Regional Training Sessions. Although the document was prepared to deal with special education-related conflicts, it is applicable to conflicts in the broader school community. The resource guide, *Effective Educational Practices for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, also released in fall, includes a collection of current practices in schools.

The ministry is working closely with the Ministry of Children & Youth Services on a two-year project to support regional teams made up of educators and community service providers in seven school board sites regarding collaborative service delivery for students with ASD. The Ministry intends to expand these models in the coming year and to build additional partnerships at the provincial and local level to meet other student needs (e.g. mental health). Partnerships are vital to meeting these needs.

Strong school leadership on special education is important, and needs to be supported through both elementary and secondary school principal development. Team training is also an important strategy.

What are the professional development priorities for 2008-09?

The focus for professional development funding is drilling down to the classroom on key priorities, including assessment and evaluation; literacy and numeracy; special education (IEP planning, measuring outcomes, ASD), transition supports, and effectively using e-learning. Students continue to struggle in subject areas such as Academic and Applied Mathematics, and Applied English and Science. These will be important areas of focus for professional development, as well as supports for new curriculum. As noted, school boards are requested to have at least one of their six professional development days devoted to Special Education. Team training is encouraged where applicable, e.g. special education and student success. We will be reducing Student Success Leader symposiums to twice a year. Leadership training in key areas (e.g. special education, effective use of data) aligned with the Leadership Framework is also important. We will keep the momentum and excitement going and build capacity among boards and schools to expand the array of quality innovative secondary programs available to support student success. To support implementation of the Specialist High Skills Major, the Ministry will continue at least one provincial symposium per year and may introduce regional forum(s) to complement the symposium, along with using e-Communities technology to support the development of online professional learning communities. Details are provided in Appendix C.

How we work together

We will continue to put our best efforts toward coordinating our activities within the ministry and with other ministries. There are many linkages that cut across our agendas (K-6, 7-12, etc.), and we are all working toward creating the best education for our students. I look forward to continuing collaboration with my colleagues, including Dominic Giroux, ADM, French-Language Education & Educational Operations and Ann Perron, Interim CEO of LNS.

Our division continues to work with Barry Pervin, ADM of Instruction and Leadership Development Division on professional development for teachers and leadership development, as well as building information management capacity. We are also working with Nancy Naylor, ADM of the Business & Finance Division on better supporting our funding and programming alignment, including capital planning.

We work closely with the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities on the Specialist High Skills Major, dual credits (which they have financially supported), and adult education. On adult education, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration is also a key partner.

We have been working closely with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on special education issues, including collaborative service delivery models for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. We look forward to collaborating with other ministries and Dr. Charles Pascal, Special Advisor, who will be advising the government on how to best implement full-day learning for four and five year olds.

Concluding Remarks

Reaching every student by improving student achievement and closing gaps in student achievement continues to be a challenging but worthwhile goal. Your leadership is of ongoing importance to support effective instruction, the creation of a positive culture that supports learning for all our students, and the capacity to identify, share and support effective practices. Thank you for your ongoing leadership in all of these areas, and in your key role as a champion of our publicly funded education system.



George Zegarac

Attachments

c.c. Senior Management Team
EDU Directors
Regional Managers