

Ministry of Education

Minister

Mowat Block
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2
Telephone (416) 325-2600
Facsimile (416) 325-2608

Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre

Édifce Mowat
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2
Téléphone (416) 325-2600
Télécopieur (416) 325-2608



March 26, 2009

Dear Education Partners,

Over the last five years, we have worked together to bring about higher student achievement, reduce the achievement gaps among groups of students who are known to struggle, and build public confidence in our 5,000 schools. The Ontario government's commitment to a strong publicly funded education system is unwavering. Thank you for your ongoing dedication and hard work.

There is much to be proud of — every student outcome has improved. Across the province, 13,500 more students graduated last year compared to 2003-04. The proportion of students at level 1 or lower on EQAO tests (those who do not have the most basic skills in literacy and numeracy) has dropped by more than half. The number of very low-achieving schools has also dropped by 75 per cent. Similarly, the achievement gap for English Language Learners and special education students is shrinking.

A spirit of partnership, along with relationships built on respect, clear priorities, more resources and a better use of existing resources, have been the keys to improvements in recent years. Today, despite a sharp economic downturn and declining enrolment across the province, funding for Ontario's publicly funded school boards is increasing for the seventh consecutive year.

The 2009-10 Grants for Student Needs (GSN) is increasing to \$19.8 billion — up almost \$600 million over last year, or more than 3 per cent. Funding has increased by more than \$5 billion under this government — up 34 per cent, and per-pupil funding has increased by more than \$3,000 — up 42 per cent.

The 2009-10 GSN includes the following highlights:

- Protects key achievement gains by continuing to invest in program enhancements for students and more staff in key areas.
- Includes the full cost of the new four-year labour agreements.
- Helps boards to keep up with costs by adjusting benchmarks in areas such as Community Use of Schools, school operations and transportation.

Clearly, education continues to be among the government's highest priorities, as these investments demonstrate. A strong publicly funded system provides an important foundation for students today, but also for Ontario's long-term economic health and prosperity.

However, it is important to note that this particular education investment is being made in the context of challenging economic circumstances. Many difficult decisions were needed in other government priority areas to protect the dollars needed to sustain important changes that are delivering results in our schools.

Tough economic times require that all of us be even more sharply focussed on key student achievement goals than ever before. The Ministry of Education is looking to consolidate the gains in student achievement of the last few years. That will require more time, attention and funding for a few proven strategies. It will also mean fewer new initiatives, enabling the system to build on the significant gains to date.

Savings and efficiencies in some areas of the GSN are required to protect our core strategies and achievement gains. Operational reviews, student transportation reforms, the Expert Panel on Capital and other measures will continue to improve business practices, allowing us to focus resources on supporting student achievement.

The B-memo that will be released tomorrow morning provides details of adjustments in other key areas, such as textbooks, computers, transportation, staff development and the Declining Enrolment Adjustment. The ministry will continue to work with boards to reduce operating costs through more efficient and effective business practices.

The importance of transparency to support public confidence cannot be overstated in these economic times: sound business practices, prudent use of education dollars and accountability for results require our ongoing vigilance.

As we work together to find efficiencies, we anticipate stronger relationships between neighbouring school boards and with community partners. Goals will include taking full advantage of existing school space and better co-ordinating social and educational supports. This will help build public confidence and demonstrate, in a tangible way, the true potential of our schools as hubs that can help create strong communities and a more cohesive society.

The government will continue to support other education initiatives that are funded outside of the GSN. About \$260 million outside the grants will flow to boards in the 2009-10 school year. We are committed to providing details as soon as possible to assist with budget planning, and we are also simplifying the administrative processes around non-GSN funding for 2009-10.

In closing, let me say again that we should take a great deal of pride in what has been achieved in the last few years in Ontario education. Our system has become a model for other jurisdictions. Student achievement is on the rise. Our key goals — 75 per cent of students achieving the provincial standard in reading, writing and math, and 85 per cent of students graduating — are on the horizon.

When it comes to transforming the system, we know what works: sustaining attention on teaching and learning, a coherent aligned strategy, engaging students, parents and communities, good relationships, focussing interventions in key areas and minimizing distractions.

I am confident that the foundation built over the last five years, combined with the relentless drive to do even better in the years ahead, means we are well-positioned to continue building an education system that is second to none.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Kathleen Wynne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education