

Ministry of Education

Deputy Minister

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Memorandum To: Directors of Education

CC: Council of Ontario Directors of Education, Children's Services Leads, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards

From: George Zegarac
Deputy Minister

Date: March 2, 2016

Subject: Syrian Newcomer Settlement in Ontario

As a follow up to my memo sent in December 2015, I would like to provide you with information about the Syrian newcomer settlement in Ontario. I want to take this opportunity to thank you, your staff and communities for coming together to find innovative and collaborative ways to help those in need. At this time, we have welcomed more than 25,000 Syrian newcomers to Canada; 10,000 of these newcomers are destined for Ontario. It is exciting to hear that many students and families have already been welcomed into our schools, and many more will be welcomed in the months to come.

Several ministries and community agencies are connecting to provide the supports necessary to be responsive to our newcomers and communities. Various working groups and committees are meeting to ensure a coordinated approach to identifying key contributors to the successful resettlement and integration of newcomers. The following four working groups have been established to identify goals, deliverables and measurable outcomes of our resettlement efforts:

- i. Settlement, Housing and Municipal Supports (Co-chaired by Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade (MCIIT) and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH));
- ii. Health including Mental Health (Co-chaired by Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) and Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS));
- iii. Education, Literacy, Training and Employment (Co-chaired by Ontario Ministry of Education (EDU) and Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU));
- iv. Faith-based Supports (Chaired by MCIIT).

These groups are positioned to meet monthly and report back to a Special Advisory Table on Refugees, which is co-chaired by Minister Hoskins and Minister Chan. The working groups, along with a research and evaluation working group, will review best practices, key performance indicators to measure success, as well as challenges experienced by stakeholders.

In addition, we have continued to work with boards, CODE, ministries and community partners to:

- coordinate inter-ministry opportunities to streamline supports;
- develop settlement plans to integrate Syrian newcomers into regular activities;
- promote, in collaboration with community agencies, partnerships with school boards and community agencies; and
- work together to problem-solve situations as they arise.

Several resources have been developed to promote information sharing across the province and country. A recent resource provides a repository for government materials in a Google Drive. This is meant to be a “one-stop shop” to access and download materials that have been shared by different ministries of the Ontario government to external partners. The drive can be accessed at this link: <http://bit.ly/1K9GciB>.

Please find below updates to the four key topics identified in the previous memo: 1) funding and extraordinary expenses; 2) language supports; 3) mental health supports and 4) community supports.

1) Funding and Extraordinary Expenses:

As noted in the previous memo, Syrian newcomers are being admitted to Canada with the status of “permanent resident”, as defined by Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Ontario’s Education Act (subsection 49. (7)) includes a provision that such pupils are exempt from paying any fee. Funding through the 2015-16 GSN will therefore adjust to any increase in the number of students resulting from the resettlement of Syrian refugees, depending on when the students enter the boards.

Boards are encouraged to track one-time extraordinary expenses. The ministry has issued a memorandum on February 3, 2016, providing more details on the 2015-16 funding through the GSN, and the reporting of Syrian newcomers enrolment and extraordinary expenses incurred as a result of the demand for services. The ministry, in partnership with the federal government, will ensure that school boards have the resources and support required to successfully integrate Syrian newcomers into our education system.

2) Language Supports:

To support the work of English-language school boards this past January, the ministry provided training on the Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) initial assessment tool. Initial assessment helps ensure the appropriate placement and provides starting points for developing a program that meets the students' needs. As we consider success criteria for our work ahead, we know that the appropriate placement of students and programs for newcomer children and youth should be guided by various assessment tools. For example, these tools include the STEP and TACLEF (Trousse d'acquisition des compétences linguistiques en français). The information gathered support educators in providing appropriate grade and class placement and conditions to assist the student in acquiring English or French while engaging with content that is age-appropriate and takes into account their prior learning.

In most cases, students will benefit greatly from supported integration into age-appropriate classes in subjects that build on their interests and prior learning, and provide opportunities to build interactions with their peers. For secondary school course placements, effective practice has shown that it is important that students are not streamed directly into particular courses based solely on the fact that the newcomers are English-language or French-language learners, but rather on their individually assessed abilities.

We have created a Responsive Assessment Centre Team, to support English-language school boards. This team is available to boards to support their work in conducting initial assessments of Syrian newcomers. Information regarding accessing this service has been provided to superintendents or board identified individuals with the responsibility for supporting English language learners.

The Support for English Language Learners Policy and Program Implementation Projects information was sent to English-language school boards on February 17, 2016. This is an opportunity for boards to determine and design the specific professional learning their educators require to support this population of our newest Canadians, and apply for funding up to a maximum of \$10,000.

To support the work of French-language school boards, the ministry will be providing support on the use of the TACLEF tool to assess students' language competencies in French and to help establish a French-language competency profile. We have provided French-language boards with an opportunity for support in welcoming Syrian newcomers and boards have indicated that they will communicate with us as the need arises.

3) Mental Health Supports:

I'd like to thank the mental health leaders and superintendents with responsibility for mental health for working with School Mental Health ASSIST to establish the School Mental Health (SMH) Newcomer Resource Group, whose focus is to support district school boards in their efforts to promote the mental health and well-being of Syrian newcomer students and their families. The SMH Newcomer Resource Group has voluntary membership from boards across the province, and the information developed and collated is shared with all school boards using a number of established processes. A Newcomer Advisory Network associated with the Resource Group has also recently been established, which brings together experts in immigrant and refugee mental health to provide strategic advice and direct consultation as issues arise.

One of the resources developed by the SMH Newcomer Resource Group is an info-sheet welcoming the Syrian newcomer students and their families to school, including information on mental health and well-being. The resource is organized to support a planned, whole school approach that recognizes all school staff and students have a role to play in helping newcomers feel welcome and supported. It can be accessed through the EduGAINS and ÉduSource websites. If you have questions about the mental health and well-being of Syrian newcomer students, or other related issues, please contact the mental health leader in your school board who can direct you to information or services in your community.

In order to help build capacity amongst our school mental health professionals and administrators, one of the many offerings available is a Refugee Mental Health online course run through the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Refugee Mental Health Project. Registration information can be found here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/schoolmh>. In addition, a mental health sharing platform has also been created using Google Drive. To access the SMH Refugee Resource Group folder, follow this link:

<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0Bx9WOcdOIVzNbndDaHcwT0hnOW8&usp=sharing>.

Also of note is [*Building Healthy Relationships - Parent Tool Kit and Guide*](#), developed in partnership with the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE), which is a parent resource and guide to help support the role of parents in a whole school approach to safe, inclusive and accepting schools. There are six sections in the tool kit, including how to support the mental health and well-being of young people.

I strongly encourage the sharing of resources across school boards, through venues such as the SMH Newcomer Resource Group. Additionally, if you see any gaps in services or resources, please convey this to your school board's Mental Health Leader.

4) Community Supports:

Through our continued work with our partners, I know that in many communities school boards are leading or participating in collaborative efforts with municipalities, community agencies and one another to ensure that newcomers are connected with the services they need upon arrival in Ontario. For example, we know that a number of boards are working together with ministry-funded family support programs (Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Better Beginnings, Better Futures and Child Care Resource Centres) to provide immediate supports to children and families, and connect them to other local resources. I encourage you to continue to maintain the vital connections to your local partners, including municipal service system managers (oversee child care, housing and income assistance), settlement agencies, public health and others, to ensure we are providing a responsive, warm welcome to arriving families.

As one of the learning ministries, we are always listening and looking for new and innovative ways to serve those who need it most. Again, thank you all for your commitment to providing quality programming and respectful service. As further information is actively gathered, we will communicate with boards as to next steps.

If you have any comments or questions, please continue to contact your CODE representative:

- Kathi Wallace, kwallace@scdsb.on.ca, PCODE
- Angela Gauthier, angela.gauthier@tcdsb.org, ECCODE
- Réjean Sirois, siroir@ecolecatholique.ca, CODELF

Or, contact the regional manager of the Field Services Branch in your area.

Thank you for your ongoing support,



George Zegarac
Deputy Minister

c: CODE

Children's Services Leads

CMSMs and DSSABs