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MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of School Boards
Secretaries and Supervisory Officers of School Authorities
Elementary and Secondary School Principals

FROM: Grant Clarke
Assistant Deputy Minister (Acting)
Learning and Curriculum Division

Raymond Théberge
Assistant Deputy Minister
French-language, Aboriginal Learning
and Research Division

DATE: October 8, 2009

SUBJECT: **Teacher Comments on Report Cards**

The purpose of this memo is to clarify the Ministry's expectation of school board policies concerning the process teachers use to develop report card comments to describe students' achievement and their strengths, weaknesses and next steps.

Over the years, and especially in the past year, the Ministry of Education has heard repeated concerns and questions from parents and the media about the nature of the comments on students' report cards. Parents frequently say that they do not understand the comments and that the comments are not personal to their children. The media has incorrectly reported that the Ministry of Education has mandated standard phrases for teachers to use in the development of report card comments.

How teachers communicate with parents about the achievement of their children is vital to building trust and to getting parents involved with the education of their children. Current Ministry policy for Grades 1-8 states that: "In writing your anecdotal comments, focus on what the student has learned each reporting period. Describe significant strengths and weaknesses, identify next steps for learning, and provide suggestions for how parents can support those next steps at home." For Grades 9-12, current Ministry policy states: "Describe as specifically as possible significant strengths and areas for improvement and identify the steps that should be taken to improve the student's learning."

In that regard, it is important that teachers have the opportunity to compose and use personalized comments on report cards as an alternative to selecting from a prepared set of standard comments. District school boards should not enact policies that prevent teachers from providing personalized comments on report cards.

In winter 2010, we will be releasing a new K-12 Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting policy document that will further clarify policy for the development of report card comments. However, it is important that we address this matter as soon as possible and, to this end, we want to provide you with the draft wording related to this in the policy document. It reads as follows:

In writing anecdotal comments, teachers should focus on what students have learned, describe significant strengths, and identify next steps for improvement. Teachers should strive to use language that parents will understand and should avoid language that simply repeats the language of the learning and curriculum expectations or the Achievement Chart. When appropriate, teachers may make reference to strands. The comments should describe in overall terms what students know and can do and should provide parents with personalized, clear, precise, and meaningful feedback. Teachers should strive to help parents understand how they can support their children at home.

We trust that you will support our teachers in their most important role of communicating with our parents and in building confidence in our system.

Grant Clarke

Raymond Théberge

cc: President, Ontario Teachers' Federation/Fédération des
enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario
President, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
President, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
President, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association
Président, Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens
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