

**Ministry of Education**

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Dear colleague:

Congratulations on the start of another successful school year. I trust that you are settling into the routines of the second week of school following an enjoyable summer. I am writing today to discuss the next steps associated with labour relations now that the Putting Students First Act, 2012 has been passed by the Ontario legislature. The Putting Students First Act is a piece of legislation focused on ensuring stability in classrooms throughout the entire school year and making sure that dollars stay in the classroom.

As you know, compensation and benefits make up 85 per cent of education spending. We had a choice to either continue to increase pay and benefits for teachers or spend the money on other important investments, investments that families and students rely on like full-day kindergarten, small class sizes, and keeping teachers in classrooms.

We made the choice to put our students and our education system first.

The Putting Students First Act, 2012 provides school boards, teachers and support staff until December 31, 2012 to engage in local collective bargaining. This allows our education partners to reach agreements that respect local circumstances while also achieving the policy and fiscal goals set out in the legislation.

Where agreements do not meet the goals outlined in the legislation, as Minister of Education, I will ask the parties to continue to work locally and will, if necessary, impose agreements. But there is still time for local agreements to be reached and I encourage all boards to continue the work they have started to get agreements in place as soon as possible.

These have been challenging times in education and I know we are asking a lot from our partners in education. But what we are asking for is fair, reasonable, and it is a balanced approach that will ensure we can continue to invest in an education system that is one of the best in the world.

Now that this important piece of legislation has passed, we need to turn our mind to how we can continue to make progress in our schools. The Putting Students First Act ensures a peaceful and stable year for our students and staff. It also keeps dollars in the classroom, where they belong, so we can continue to make the right investments.

These choices will allow us to keep focusing on what matters most: raising the bar in student achievement, closing the achievement gap, and maintaining public confidence in our top quality publicly funded education system.

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Last week, EQAO released province-wide results which show how our students are doing better than ever. Now 70 per cent of students in Ontario schools meet or exceed the provincial standard, up 16 percentage points from when we were elected in 2003.

We are proud of our students' achievements – made possible by the commitment of teachers, parents, boards, staff and students themselves.

But we are not satisfied and I know you are not either. We still have more work to do. We want 75 per cent of our students to meet the provincial standard, because mastering literacy and numeracy skills will help them reach their full potential.

Here's another example. Graduation rates continue to rise, having gone up 14 percentage points since 2003. That means about 93,000 more students have graduated than would have when we were elected – that's incredible progress. But we have more to do. We want to reach even more students to meet our target of an 85 per cent graduation rate.

One of our biggest accomplishments together has been our progress to fully implement full-day kindergarten in schools across the province by 2014. We are still moving ahead with that commitment, with currently about 120,000 four-and-five year olds attending FDK classes in about 1,700 schools.

What we have achieved in our schools since 2003 was possible because of our partnership with teachers, support staff, trustees, boards, parents and students. To get where we want to go, to continue to achieve, we need to keep working together.

Today and over the coming week, boards will be provided with additional information related to implementation of the legislation, including information on the fair and transparent hiring regulation that I announced in August. This regulation will set out a consistent, standard and open process that all boards must abide by to hire long-term occasional and permanent teachers.

In addition, the Ministry will soon begin the consultation process for the development of a Policy/Program Memorandum on the effective use of diagnostic assessments.

French-language boards will also be receiving information clarifying Welcome and Supervision requirements in the coming days.

Finally, in addition to letters sent to boards today outlining these next steps, information about funding adjustments to reflect the Putting Students First Act will be highlighted in a B-memo that boards will receive within the week.

Thank you for your commitment to Ontario's students and I look forward to continuing to work with you as we protect the progress we have made in education and to ensure that we continue to move forward.

Yours truly,



Laurel Broten  
Minister