



**SUBMISSION OF THE
ONTARIO TEACHERS' FEDERATION
TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION**

December 2018



**Ontario Teachers' Federation
Fédération des enseignantes et
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The Ontario Teachers' Federation is the advocate for the teaching profession in Ontario and for its 160,000 teachers. OTF members are full-time, part-time and occasional teachers in all the publicly funded schools in the province—elementary, secondary, public, Catholic and francophone.

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Preamble

The following submission outlines OTF's recommendations in response to the Ontario government's 2018 Public Consultation on Education. Notwithstanding this submission, OTF views this consultation process only as a starting point for more extensive discussion and collaboration between the government and OTF and its four Affiliates in order to reinforce Ontario's earned reputation as having a world-class, publicly-funded education system.

SUBMISSION OF THE ONTARIO TEACHERS' FEDERATION

TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION

Improving Student Performance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)

Students are sentient beings, not widgets. As such, they must continue to have opportunities to exercise and experience a sense of agency in their learning and education.

At the primary and junior levels, students need opportunities to reflect on their learning and academic goals to help them increase their understanding of their interests, strengths and needs which, for some students, may coalesce in the latter part of their secondary years. In addition, students often need support so that they experience smooth grade-to-grade transitions (Ontario, 2013a, 21).

At the intermediate and secondary levels, students can take increasing responsibility for their own learning and planning for their own future (Ontario, 2013a, 18). In addition, the curriculum and programs, that are already in place in schools and boards provide effective and efficient means for students to explore STEM disciplines in real-world settings and, for students who are drawn to these specific areas, to develop the attitudes and aptitudes necessary to be successful in them. Some of these curricula and programs include Guidance and Career Education (Ontario, 2006), Cooperative Education (2018) and Dual Credit (Ontario, 2013b) and Specialist High Skills Majors (Ontario, 2016b) programs, among others). Effective transition planning from elementary to secondary and from secondary to apprenticeship, work and post-secondary education can also help students experience greater success.

With respect to mathematics specifically, research reveals that over 15,000 teachers, and by extension their students, have benefitted from Ministry-funded and OTF-administered subsidies (available between 2014 and 2018) of the cost of math-focused Additional Qualifications and Additional Basic Qualifications courses (Yashkina, 2018; OTF, 2018c). Thousands of teachers have also benefitted in recent years from a wide array of teacher-developed and teacher-directed professional learning opportunities, offered across the province at low or no cost through Ministry funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage the government to:

1. Continue to provide elementary and secondary students – with the support of their teachers – with opportunities to gain an ever-evolving understanding of their emerging strengths and interests through learning across a variety of disciplines.
2. Continue to provide elementary and secondary students – with the support of their teachers – with numerous and varied opportunities to explore a variety of disciplines and connect their strengths and interests to career paths.
3. Continue to provide elementary and secondary students – with the support of their teachers – with access to studies and career preparation in STEM-related fields, with particular attention paid to fostering participation of female students in these areas.
4. Ensure that any potential focus on STEM does not occur at the expense or exclusion of other fields and disciplines (e.g. the arts, languages, etc.) that form part of a well-rounded education.
5. Continue to fund the subsidy of math-focused Additional Qualifications and Additional Basic Qualifications courses for teachers.
6. Continue to fund a wide array of teacher-developed and teacher-directed professional learning experiences in mathematics for teachers.
7. Devote more attention and funding to Initial Teacher Education programs that support teacher candidates pursuing certification as technological educators in order to meet the demand for technology teachers in Ontario schools.
8. Equip schools with flexible facilities (space and technologies) and resources to sustain technology-focused programs (e.g. automotive, construction, horticulture, etc.).

Preparing Students with Job Skills Such as Skilled Trades and Coding

Curriculum and pathways programs and supports already in place in schools and boards (e.g., Guidance and Career Education, Cooperative Education, and Dual Credit and Specialist High Skills Majors programs, among others) provide effective means for students to develop and deepen the attitudes and aptitudes necessary to lead a fulfilling life, contribute meaningfully to society, and enjoy successful careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage the government to:

9. Fund feasible and authentic opportunities for students, whose interests and skills align with employment in the skilled trades or in careers that rely on coding – more aptly termed “computational thinking” – to pursue this pathway and be prepared for potential careers in these areas.
10. Fund regular and sustained access for teachers to both professional learning opportunities and resources that enable them to stay up-to-date in an ever-evolving society and dynamic labour market.
11. Incentivize the recruitment of teacher candidates in the area of technological education in Initial Teacher Education programs (particularly those in French-language) to meet the significant demand for technology teachers in Ontario schools.
12. Provide additional funding to support Initial Teacher Education programs focused on the area of technological education.
13. Equip schools with flexible facilities (space and technologies) and resources to sustain technology-focused programs (e.g. automotive, construction, horticulture, etc.).
14. Ensure that, in all cases where experiential learning opportunities are provided, learning expectations are high and the integrity of credits is maintained.
15. Continue to seek a balance between instilling skills, such as collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving, and fostering the development of thoughtful, creative, caring and well-rounded citizens.

Improving Provincial Standardized Testing

The Report of the Royal Commission on Learning (1994) – out of which subsequently grew the Education Quality and Accountability Office – recognized that “[those] who emphasize standardized tests almost exclusively, which they believe are teacher-proof, are missing a crucial truth. In the end, no one knows the student’s capacities, or is in a position to assess them in all their nuances and complexity, better than the classroom teacher.” In effect, standardized assessments provide only one pixel in the bigger picture of student performance and progress. Furthermore, high-stakes, large-scale assessments and tests cannot be conflated with high-yield, classroom-based strategies and learning opportunities.

The Ministry of Education’s Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools (2010) articulates the following overarching principle: “the primary purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve student learning; standardized tests cannot be confused with learning” (p. 6). Furthermore, Policy/program memorandum no. 155: Diagnostic assessment in support of student learning underscores the fact that “A teacher’s professional judgement is the cornerstone of assessment and evaluation” (Ontario, 2013d). Evidence from educational researchers consistently underscores the positive impact of timely, descriptive feedback on student learning (Black & Wiliam, 2017); large-scale, standardized assessments simply do not afford such opportunities. Instead, as a teacher attests in Kempf’s (2016) work “Standardized testing returns us to the limiting and narrow style of teaching that assumes that a “standardized student” exists. It puts school practices in direct opposition to all relevant, current and respected pedagogy” (p. 84). Furthermore, grading and reporting of student achievement is a human endeavor and a caring, sensitive process that involves and requires that teachers exercise their professional judgment (Cooper, 2007, p. x). Teachers’ use of day-to-day, classroom-based, teacher-created and teacher-administered assessments, as well as provincial report card data, are authentic barometers of student achievement that better inform next steps for students’ learning.

For more information regarding OTF’s positions with respect to assessment and evaluation, see *More than dots on a chart: Setting a new course for assessment in Ontario* (2017a) and *Pas seulement des points sur un graphique: Adopter une nouvelle approche pour l’évaluation en Ontario* (2017b).

RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage the government to:

16. Recognize and reinforce the rights of teachers to exercise their professional judgement to provide students with numerous and differentiated opportunities, during day-to-day classroom instruction, both to learn new skills and knowledge and to be able to demonstrate what they know and can do in multiple ways.
17. Implement policies and pursue courses of action that eliminate the negative impact of high-stakes, standardized, large-scale assessments.
18. Adopt a random sample-based model of large-scale assessment instruments in lieu of census or population-based models if standardized assessments are to continue.
19. Commit to a policy that opposes any expanded use of high-stakes, standardized, large-scale assessments.

Ensuring Students Graduate High School with Important Life Skills Including Financial Literacy

Students should be equipped with a variety of learning and life skills and habits that support their ability to be flexible, adaptable and resilient citizens capable of navigating a rapidly changing world (Conway, Campbell, Hardt, Loat, & Sood, 2016). Students are already provided in classrooms and schools with numerous opportunities to develop important learning and life skills. The learning skills and work habits currently identified in the provincial report card (i.e., responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative and self-regulation) represent a strong foundation of fundamental habits and skills that students should develop as they transition through the stages of youth to adulthood.

With respect to financial literacy education, the Ministry of Education's Financial literacy: Scope and sequence of expectations resource guides (Ontario, 2016a) already identify the expectations across the junior, intermediate and senior divisions and across all subject areas that support authentic

and "natural fit" opportunities for students to develop strong financial literacy skills. Also worth noting is OTF's contribution to financial literacy education by way of its Inspire financial learning (2018a) and Inspirez le savoir financier (2018b) websites that provide teachers with ample resources and lesson plans to support the infusion of financial literacy across the curriculum in Grades 4 through 12.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage the government to:

20. Make stronger, explicit connections between curriculum expectations and work habits and learning skills in all curriculum documents, as the documents are reviewed and updated in consultation with teachers.
21. Continue the practice of developing financial literacy skills in the divisions and disciplines that are best suited to support students' acquisition of key knowledge and skills.
22. Launch a review, in consultation with teachers, of the Business Studies curriculum (Grades 9-12), one of the few disciplines and documents that has not seen any revisions since 2005 and one in which financial literacy education features prominently.

Banning Cellphone Use in the Classroom

An outright ban on cellphone use in the classroom is both unnecessary and unenforceable. Moreover, many parents, guardians and caregivers support student access to cellphones as one of many learning tools. It is also worth underscoring that teachers, schools and boards have put in place replicable, promising practices and protocols that support effective pedagogical use of cellphones.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage the government to:

23. Recognize and reinforce the rights of teachers to exercise their professional judgement about when, during instruction, students should be able to harness this form of information and communication technology or device to support their learning.
24. Defer to teachers' discretion about when it is *not* appropriate for students to use such devices in the classroom.

Building a New, Age-Appropriate Health and Physical Education Curriculum that Includes Subjects like Mental Health, Sexual Health Education, and the Legalization of Cannabis

All students must have access to the most current, expert-informed and research-based knowledge and skills to make healthy and responsible choices and decisions that affect not only their own safety, health and wellbeing, but that of others (Ophea & OASPHE, 2018). Topics should continue to be addressed at age- and developmentally-appropriate junctures. The 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum, developed through extensive and unparalleled consultation with experts and education stakeholders (including parents), already meets this important goal. Similarly, all students must have access to the most current, evidence-based and scientific knowledge about cannabis use – offered at age-appropriate junctures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage the government to:

25. Reinstate the 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum.
26. Update the 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum to include the most current, evidence-based and scientific knowledge about cannabis use.

Developing Elements for a Parents' Bill of Rights

We all know that healthy relationships are built on a foundation of mutual respect and trust (OTF, 2015b, p. 9). A Parents' Bill of Rights is redundant since Acts and Regulations already frame teachers' responsibilities to Ontario citizens (including parents, guardians and caregivers). Furthermore, a broad range of formal and informal opportunities already exist for parents, guardians and caregivers to connect with teachers about matters related to their children (e.g., parents' nights, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, etc.). Similarly, a range of effective avenues already exist for parents, guardians and caregivers to voice their ideas or raise concerns (e.g., School Councils, Parent Involvement Committees, the Ontario College of Teachers).

For additional information about OTF's ideas regarding parent engagement and its resources designed to support the ability of teachers to build and sustain healthy relationships with families (including parents, guardians and caregivers) and the communities, see OTF's resources Parent engagement (2015b) and Engagement des parents (2015a).

RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage the government to:

27. Leverage existing structures to encourage healthy relationships between school and home and between teachers and families (including parents, guardians and caregivers) that, in turn, foster the necessary conditions for students to live, learn and thrive.
28. Co-develop, with appropriate stakeholders, emerging avenues to deepen relationship-building and communication between school and home and between teachers and families (including parents, guardians and caregivers), both of which are mutually beneficial for families, students, teachers and educators.

Expanding Teaching and Learning About Indigenous Peoples

In the name of truth and reconciliation, Indigenous students must see themselves and their experiences reflected in the curriculum and the school community. Similarly, non-Indigenous students must also learn about the lived experiences – past and present – of Indigenous people. The final report of the TRC outlines 94 Calls to Action to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of reconciliation in Canada. Calls to Action 6 to 12 relate directly to education and Calls to Action 62 through 65 relate to education for reconciliation (TRC, 2015a). Additionally, Call to Action 57 calls explicitly and specifically for professional development and training for public servants, including “skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights and anti-racism” (TRC, 2015a). Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), reminds us that “it was the educational system that has contributed to this problem in this country; it is the educational system, we believe, that’s going to help us to get away from this” (TRC, 2015b).

32. Continue to support the work of the Minister’s Advisory Council on First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education, the Indigenous Education Office, and the Joint Implementation Work Group to deliver on the TRC’s Calls to Action and to achieve the goals set out in the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (Ontario, 2007).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In keeping with the spirit and principles of truth and reconciliation, we encourage the government to:

29. Ensure that today’s generation of Indigenous students, many of whom may be reclaiming their traditional language and customs, and non-Indigenous students have access to authentic opportunities to learn about Indigenous peoples, perspectives and experiences – past and present.
30. Earmark funding for professional learning for teachers and for the development of teacher resources to help them build and deepen their background knowledge about Indigenous peoples, perspectives and experiences – past and present.
31. Support opportunities to build collaborative relationships and reciprocal partnerships between teachers and Indigenous communities, organizations, Elders and knowledge keepers.

Recommendations at a Glance

We encourage the government to:

1. Continue to provide elementary and secondary students – with the support of their teachers – with opportunities to gain an ever-evolving understanding of their emerging strengths and interests through learning across a variety of disciplines.
2. Continue to provide elementary and secondary students – with the support of their teachers – with numerous and varied opportunities to explore a variety of disciplines and connect their strengths and interests to career paths.
3. Continue to provide elementary and secondary students – with the support of their teachers – with access to studies and career preparation in STEM-related fields, with particular attention paid to fostering participation of female students in these areas.
4. Ensure that any potential focus on STEM does not occur at the expense or exclusion of other fields and disciplines (e.g. the arts, languages, etc.) that form part of a well-rounded education.
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26. Update the 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum to include the most current, evidence-based and scientific knowledge about cannabis use.
27. Leverage existing structures to encourage healthy relationships between school and home and between teachers and families (including parents, guardians and caregivers) that, in turn, foster the necessary conditions for students to live, learn and thrive.
28. Co-develop, with appropriate stakeholders, emerging avenues to deepen relationship-building and communication between school and home and between teachers and families (including parents, guardians and caregivers), both of which are mutually beneficial for families, students, teachers and educators.
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30. Earmark funding for professional learning for teachers and for the development of teacher resources to help them build and deepen their background knowledge about Indigenous peoples, perspectives and experiences, both past and present.
31. Support opportunities to build collaborative relationships and reciprocal partnerships between teachers and Indigenous communities, organizations, Elders and knowledge keepers.
32. Continue to support the work of the Minister's Advisory Council on First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education, the Indigenous Education Office and the Joint Implementation Work Group to deliver on the TRC's Calls to Action and to achieve the goals set out in the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (Ontario, 2007).

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