

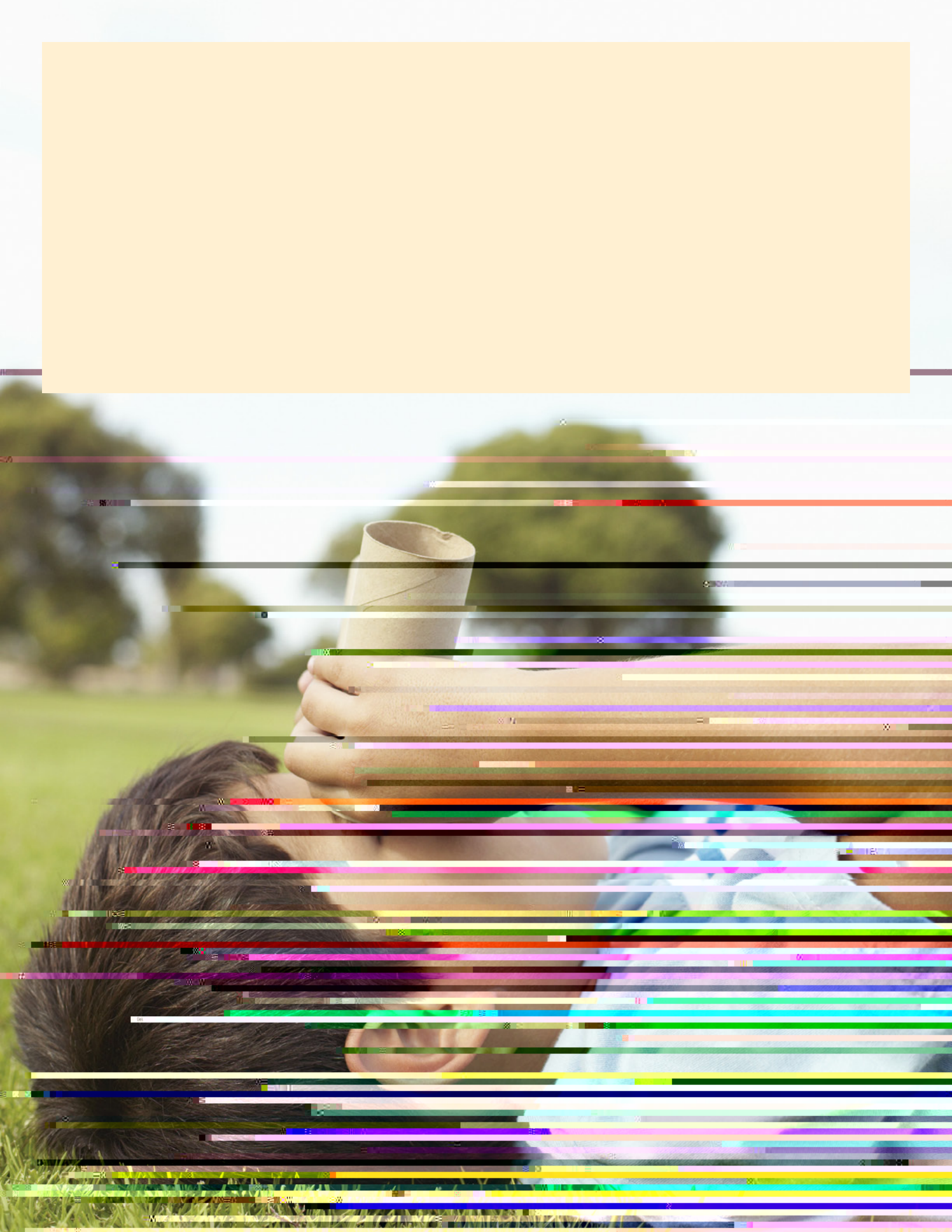
# Achieving Excellence

A Renewed Vision for Education  
in Ontario



April 2014







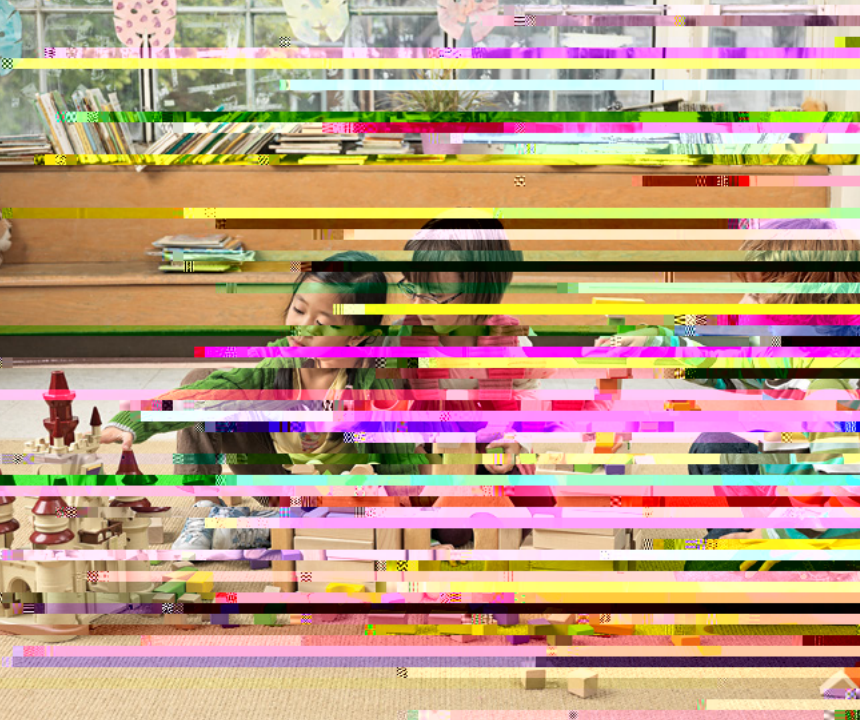
# Our Success in Education – Now and in the Future

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As Ontario embarks on a renewed vision of success for all learners, the province will build on a solid foundation. A decade ago

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Achievement also means raising expectations for valuable, higher-order skills like critical



Student engagement and curiosity could be addressed through stronger development of 21st Century learning skills and well-being. We could call this the 'new entrepreneurial spirit' – a spirit characterized by innovation, risk-taking, commitment, and skilled problem solving in the service of a better future.

– Council of Ontario Directors of Education

## Goal: Achieving Excellence

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We must give our learners the tools they need to reach their full potential, regardless of their individual circumstances. By raising expectations, the transformation in Ontario education will ensure that students achieve at high levels, acquire valuable skills and become engaged members of their communities.

Students will be fully engaged in their learning, building the skills and developing the attributes they will need to compete for and create the jobs of tomorrow. They will benefit from a wide array of opportunities both inside and outside of school that are compelling and contribute to their success, including the opportunity to benefit from the effective and appropriate use of technology in the classroom. In a world that is constantly changing, Ontario students will be better prepared to adapt, achieve and excel, regardless of the challenges they face.

The quality of student learning is closely related to the quality of the teaching force and its leaders. All high-performing education systems in the world, like Ontario's, have vibrant, engaged educators, support staff and administrative and other professionals who are committed to continuous learning. Educators are creating more relevant, applied and innovative learning experiences that spark learners' curiosity and inspire them to follow their passions. They are laying the foundation for children and students to gain the experiences, skills and knowledge needed for success, now and in the future.

Raising the bar for our teaching force, support staff and education leaders will increase student engagement – and student engagement is crucial. By being more engaged, our young people can be more successful in literacy, mathematics, science and the arts. They can gain important higher-order skills – like critical thinking, communication, collaboration and entrepreneurship. All of this will help them graduate from high school and advance to postsecondary careers, education and/or training.

## Why We Need to Do This

Foundational skills for academic achievement include reading, writing and mathematics. In order for students to achieve excellence in an area like mathematics, there must be a balance between understanding basic math concepts, practising skills like multiplication tables, and developing the thinking skills needed for advanced problem solving. These foundational skills remain a focus – and combined with creativity and critical thinking, innovative problem solving, effective communication and collaboration, they lead to excellence.

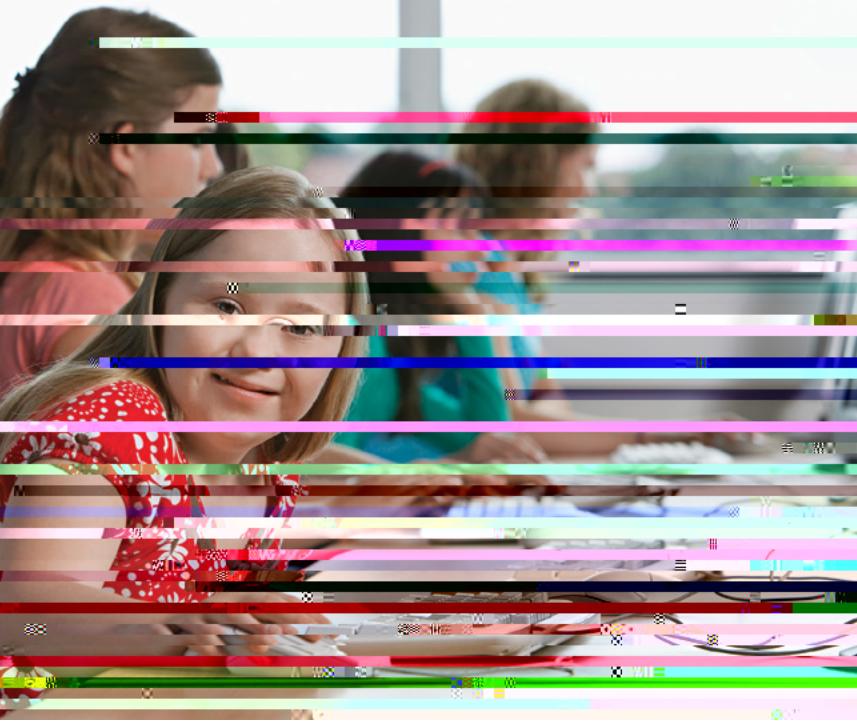
Our children, youth and adult learners will need this balance of skills to meet the opportunities and demands of tomorrow. To help promote this balance, schools must take advantage of the technologies that are connecting us to information and people around the world and around the corner. Our task is to modernize classrooms and support educators' efforts to bring innovation to learning.

Beyond reading, writing and mathematics, we know that to achieve excellence in the future, our learners will also need to develop characteristics such as perseverance, resilience and imaginative thinking to overcome challenges. Combined with a deep sense of compassion and empathy for others, our learners will develop the skills and knowledge they need to become actively engaged citizens.

The current challenge facing educators is that they are competing on a daily basis for the attention and interest of their students, which can be easily drawn outside the classroom. As the world continues to change and technology becomes more prevalent, that challenge will only increase. That is why it is so important to ensure that school is a compelling, innovative and engaging place to learn for all students.

The roots of achieving this goal are already in the ground. There are promising examples of what the future holds throughout Ontario's education system today.

The full-day kindergarten program reflects the connection of research, international best practice and policy to meet the combined needs of families, children, schools and our communities. Thousands of educators and students are participating in innovative projects that are making an impact on student engagement, learning and achievement. The inclusion of financial literacy across the curriculum provides the kind of practical learning that students will need in life. Programs such as **dual high school and college credits** and the **Specialist High Skills Majors** program have helped increase the graduation rate and raise expectations for excellence. And while all secondary school graduates complete their



Making real world connections is essential ... [we need to] observe what students are interested in and use this to foster creativity.

– An educator and consultation participant

## Goal: Achieving Excellence (*continued*)

### Plan of Action

#### To achieve success, Ontario will:

- Invest in the technology, design and infrastructure required for the classrooms of the future to serve the needs of all communities.
- Invest in innovative teaching practices and instructional methods enabled by technology to more precisely engage and address the learning needs of all students.
- Work with partners including TVO and TFO to build on existing online resources for students, educators and parents.
- Extend the principles of play-based learning established in full-day kindergarten and child care.
- Give students more flexibility and ownership in their learning, allowing them, for example, to determine whether they want to spend more time on e-learning or on learning outside of the classroom.
- Integrate family support programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Child Care/Family Resource Centres, and Better Beginnings, Better Futures, and create a common look and feel.
- Expand relevant new learning opportunities, including the Specialist High Skills Major program and the Dual Credit program.
- Foster more young entrepreneurs in Ontario schools by expanding the availability of the certification in *Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship*.
- Increase student engagement in mathematics, science and technology by expanding opportunities for K–12 students to explore the relevance of these areas to their future pathways.
- Promote the value of the arts, including the visual and performing arts, in developing critical and creative thinking skills that support success in school and in life.



- Provide greater support to ensure parents and guardians are welcomed, respected and valued by the school community as partners in their children's education.
- Expand learning opportunities outside school to include community-based, civic, humanitarian, scientific and artistic activities, as well as cross-cultural and international experiences.
- Explore different models of learning, such as project-based learning or learning across multiple subject areas.
- Document, develop and implement innovative leadership practices and resulting clear improvements in student learning.
- Continue the trend of increasing the four-year graduation rate, which has increased by 19 percentage points since 2003–04 and

**To assess progress towards this goal,  
Ontario will:**

- Continue measuring progress towards an 85 per cent five-year high school graduation rate and a 75 per cent success rate on elementary EQAO assessments, with a particular focus on mathematics.

## Goal: Ensuring Equity

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With the hard work and dedication of our education professionals, performance gaps between students have narrowed, and in some cases, closed. For example, elementary students participating in English as a Second Language programs now perform almost as well as the general student population. The achievement gap between boys and girls is also narrowing, as is the gap between elementary students with special education needs and elementary students generally. Work in these areas needs to continue, but we also need to push beyond what we have already done to make sure all students get the support they need.

Equity and excellence go hand in hand. So while Ontario has come far in closing gaps for many learners, more needs to be done for those students who struggle the most.

### **Why We Need to Do This**

It is clear that students who feel welcome and accepted in their schools are more likely to succeed academically. By ensuring equity in our education system, we can help all students achieve excellence.

One of the great strengths of Ontario's publicly funded education system is the commitment to help all learners – from young children to adults – to achieve their full potential in life. Education creates opportunity. The MCID w

In the summer of 2013, the Minister's Student Advisory Council met to brainstorm about the future of education in Ontario. The following image was created to capture the ideas from their discussions.

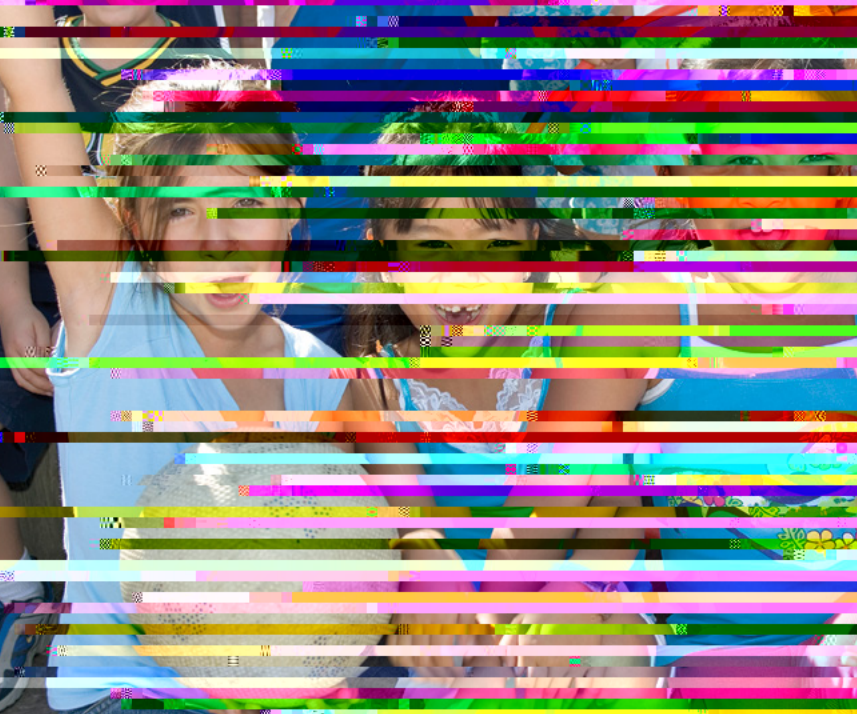


Goal: Ensuring Equity (*continued*)

## Plan of Action

### To achieve success, Ontario will:

- Intervene in a timely and effective way to help children and students who are struggling.
- Increase knowledge and understanding of First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures and histories to enhance the learning experience of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
- Provide greater support for First Nation students when they transition from on-reserve schools to provincially funded schools.
- Provide new online learning and professional development opportunities for both teachers and students, particularly those in rural and remote communities, including opportunities for virtual cooperative education placements.
- Increase the integration of education services with services delivered by other ministries and community partners for children and youth with special needs.
- Support the accurate and up-to-date identification of children and youth with special education needs.
- Increase academic support and provide engaging programs for youth in care.
- Ensure that the adult education system better supports adult learners in their efforts to



Improving student achievement and student engagement is directly linked to ensuring that we work collaboratively and in a purposefully integrated way for the social, emotional, mental and physical well-being of all children and youth.

## Goal: Promoting Well-Being

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Children and students who have strong relationships and a positive sense of self – and who can understand and manage their own health and emotions – are in a better position to reach their full potential in the future. Their sense of well-being supports their learning because it makes them more resilient and better able to overcome challenges. Ontario's education system needs to help students build the knowledge and skills associated with positive well-being and become healthy, active and engaged citizens.

Developing child and student well-being means supporting the whole child – not only the child's academic achievement but also his or her cognitive, emotional, social and physical well-being. It also means ensuring that our schools, child care centres and early years programs are safe and welcoming physical environments. Achieving success in this goal will depend on the knowledge, wisdom and willingness of students, parents and guardians, community organizations, service providers, government ministries and others to create an environment that is healthy, safe and caring.

As child care, early learning and the education system become increasingly integrated, more children will benefit from a stronger start in life. Family support programs offer a wide range of opportunities that promote healthy child development, foster children's early learning through play, and support parents and families in their role as primary caregivers. The work that has already been done to create healthy, safer schools and to support the mental and physical health of children and youth provides an excellent blueprint for how we must work together in the future. This renewed vision must ensure that we build on the momentum we've achieved and equip our children and students with the skills they need to seize opportunities and overcome obstacles.

## Why We Need to Do This

Over the past 10 years we have seen growing evidence demonstrating why student well-being is an important element of overall student success. Students cannot achieve academically if they feel unsafe at school or are bullied online. They cannot be expected to reach their full potential if they have mental health issues and if we do not provide the support they need. And they cannot be their best if they are not given the tools and motivation to adopt a healthy, active lifestyle, both in and outside of school.

That is why the well-being of children and students needs to move to the centre of the education system's priorities. This will require all of our partners to learn together and build capacity across the system to support our learners. By elevating child and student well-being as one of our four core priorities, we recognize its fundamental importance to our learners and their futures.

Student well-being is a goal that requires attention and commitment beyond the hours of the school day.



## Goal: Promoting Well-Being (*continued*)

### Plan of Action

#### To achieve success, Ontario will:

- Work with partners inside and outside the education sector to increase interest among children and youth in being physically active, and to increase their motivation to live healthy, active lives.
- Work with our partners to make early years programs and services easier to navigate and offer greater convenience for parents and families.
- Ensure that parents, guardians and caregivers are aware of the range of child care and early years options available.
- Recognize and encourage a wide range of opportunities for parent, guardian and caregiver engagement and involvement in their children's learning.
- Support all students and staff in finding ways to be leaders and contributors to the school and broader community.
- Continue to support education sector initiatives for Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions Strategy in collaboration with other ministries, including the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

- Work with provincial, regional and local education and health partners to support optimal delivery of, and access to, services and ongoing health supports for children, youth and families.

#### To assess progress towards this goal, Ontario will:

- Work with our partners to identify the factors that support student well-being and then adopt ways to measure them.
- Monitor children's success beyond full-day kindergarten through existing mechanisms (e.g., school report card information, ongoing implementation of the Early Development Instrument and EQAO annual assessments) to ensure that children continue to benefit throughout the later grades.
- Work with school boards to ensure that efforts to build safe and accepting schools are supported by high-quality data, including data from school climate surveys conducted every two years.



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## Why We Need to Do This

Ontarians want to have confidence in the ability of our publicly funded education system – from the ministry to the school board to the classroom – to meet the needs of our children. The consultation on a renewed vision for Ontario's education system revealed a tremendous confidence in our ability to set and achieve ambitious goals. Ninety-five per cent of Ontario children attend a publicly funded school – a testament to the confidence of parents and families across the province.

Our education system is consistently recognized as one of the best in the world, and for good reason. This international recognition also builds confidence among Ontario's parents and families, who have come to expect extraordinary results. This success has been achieved in partnership with educators, support staff and leaders who are committed to innovation and improvement in teaching and learning. Ontario benefits greatly from the high-quality teaching and education professionals who work in our schools.

Parents and guardians have also been a critical part of our success in education. We know that good schools become great schools when parents are engaged in their child's learning, and over the past number of years there have been more opportunities for parents to become engaged, both at the local and the provincial level. [Parents](#) have helped parents come together in their communities to discuss local priorities, while **Parent Involvement Committees** are ensuring that the parent perspective is incorporated into provincial policies. While these have been extremely successful, we need to consider how to give even more parents opportunities to engage in their child's learning in the future.

To move forward, we need to ensure that the allocation of resources in the education system continues to be efficient and effective. We must also continue to support our educators in their professional learning, ensuring they remain proud members of a profession that is crucial to the future prosperity of our province. At the same time, we must continue to explore new and creative avenues for parents to engage in their child's learning.

## Plan of Action

### To achieve success, Ontario will:

- Give our students a solid education in the basics and beyond, to help develop well-rounded young adults who are ready for their future.
- Improve our initial teacher education programs to ensure that high-quality professionals are prepared to be successful in the complex classrooms of today.
- Partner with community organizations and businesses to provide students with more experiential learning opportunities.
- Ensure that school buildings and classrooms provide positive learning environments for all students.
- Promote greater collaboration between early years and education partners.
- Foster increased parent engagement through ongoing communication about what their children are doing in school and how parents, guardians and caregivers can further contribute to their learning.
- Work with the Open Government initiative to provide the public with relevant information about Ontario's publicly funded education system.
- Increase public awareness and understanding of the innovation and learning taking place in schools.
- Collaborate with education partners across the province to ensure that this renewed vision becomes a reality.
- Broaden the measures of success and the use of perceptual and demographic data (e.g., perceptual surveys) so that program and service enhancements address the specific needs of students who continue to struggle.

### To assess progress towards this goal, Ontario will:

- Continue to monitor the percentage of children who attend a publicly funded school.
- Determine how many students across Ontario take advantage of increased experiential learning opportunities through cooperative education with community organizations and businesses.
- Work with boards to measure public perception through regular surveys and focus groups.

## Promising Practices for the Future

At Halton's *Our Kids Network*, members believe that the entire community – including the public and private sectors – shares in the responsibility for achieving the conditions for well-being among children and families. The work of *Our Kids Network* is focused on child development from birth to 18 years, and is founded on evidence-based strategic directions. Sector leaders from education, government, health, mental health and special needs, along with police services and the multicultural community, provide direction and planning.

By integrating and aligning services, *Our Kids Network* provides leadership and support to help children and the community thrive.

# Conclusion

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The world is changing rapidly. That is why *Achieving Excellence* challenges the education sector in Ontario to transform to meet the expectations of today and build the vibrant, prosperous province of tomorrow. Through this renewed vision, Ontario is setting its sights on a comprehensive and continuous education system that supports children all the way from birth to adulthood. It will be a system that recognizes well-being as an instrumental factor in students' academic success, and promotes greater equity to ensure that all students can be their best.

This is an exciting and inspiring time for education in Ontario. Our past accomplishments have built a strong foundation for future success. We have so much to be proud of, and now is the time to aspire to even greater accomplishments for all of our learners.

By raising expectations for what our education system can accomplish, *Achieving Excellence* can help uncover and develop the potential of all learners. It will reveal their hidden gifts and spark new passions for future careers. We can develop compassionate and actively engaged citizens who graduate high school equipped for the technology-driven, globalized world. They will be well-rounded individuals who have not only strong basic skills but also the critical thinking skills, imagination and resilience to excel in – and create – the new jobs of tomorrow.



