



Submission to the Ministry of Education Building The Next Phase in Ontario's Education Strategy

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) welcomes the opportunity to provide our comment on the Ministry of Education, *Building The Next Phase in Ontario's Education Strategy*.

OSSTF/FEESO is a diverse union representing 60,000 educational workers from across the province of Ontario. Our union works to protect our membership which is represented in 140 bargaining units across Ontario. OSSTF bargaining units represent both English and French members in elementary and secondary school workplaces, private schools, consortia offering support services to school boards and universities.

OSSTF/FEESO welcomes the fact that the ministry is seeking feedback to improving Ontario's education system with a goal of providing the best possible outcome for all students. Overall, we support a plan to build upon a successful education system that will prepare our students for a rapidly changing, technology-driven, globalized world. However, OSSTF/FEESO has concerns about the plan to launch a new education system early in 2014. Change of this magnitude and importance requires careful and thoughtful planning.

Since the consultation process began, much input has been provided not only in response to the seven questions but most importantly, about the underlying premise of the consultation itself. Two faulty assumptions have been the basis of many remarks made in the consultation process. One, that the next phase of education is primarily dependent upon the enhanced use of technology and two, that teachers and educational workers are fearful or reluctant to move ahead.

There is no question that technology is important to learning. OSSTF/FEESO promoted technology in education when hosting its 2010 conference, offering 48 workshops to almost 400 attending participants. Educators were excited to learn how to use technology at this 2010 event and remain committed to student learning and student success. However, 21st century learning must take place in 21st century schools. The physical state of many buildings and classrooms undeniably impacts the use of modern tools by our members when teaching their students.

Understanding and utilizing technology is important to innovation in education. However, innovation is not dependent solely upon technology. According to Webster, innovation is "something new, a new idea, method or device". History will long remember Edison, Einstein and Gates but each important innovation was based on a creative idea found in the inventor's mind; not in the equipment they worked with.

OSSTF/FEESO believes strongly in public education as the key to Ontario's future. Our schools must continue to equip our students with the knowledge, skills and sense of community that will make our province prosperous and dynamic. Our dedicated staff must be provided with the resources to accomplish those important objectives. Our students must be supported by a caring society in order to achieve the ability and confidence necessary to meet the new challenges of the 21st century.

Specifically, we agree that too many First Nations, Inuit, Metis learners, children and youth in care, learners with mental health issues and those who require the support of special education are still struggling within the current system of education. The need to present those learners with the greatest opportunity for success and achievement necessitates commitment to increased awareness, improved understanding and enhanced supports and services that will see all learners become healthy, well-rounded and resilient young adults.

OSSTF/FEESO is pleased to share its vision for education in response to the Ministry of Education's request for feedback.

Question 1

What are the skills, knowledge and characteristics students need to succeed after they have completed school, and how do we better support all learners in their development?

OSSTF/FEESO believes that better support of all learners will be realized when success is not measured solely by standardized testing and graduation rates. Successful learners will have the skills to communicate so that they may interact with the world around them. They will also be skilled at critical thinking so that they understand when an attempt to manipulate their thinking is occurring. Successful learners will have the ability to collaborate with others so that they may become positive agents of change in society. Finally, creativity is essential to contribute to society and make it a better world will also add to feelings of self-worth and fulfillment.

Question 2

What does student well-being mean to you, and what is the role of the school in supporting it?

Physical health, mental health, emotional health is all important to every student. Schools should provide a safe and secure environment not only to meet the physical health needs of every learner but emotional and mental health needs as well. It is important to note that schools should support student well-being but cannot be solely responsible for everything that contributes achieving wellness. For example, breakfast and nutrition programs do not address the societal issues of poverty.

While it is the policy of OSSTF that access to necessary support services provided by professional school board personnel to best meet student needs be available, student well-being would best be

supported when outside resources can easily be accessed to offer medical, dental or nutritional needs as well.

Question 3

From your perspective, what further opportunities exist to close gaps and increase equity to support all children and students in reaching their full potential?

OSSTF/FEESO believes it is important to not only maintain but to increase support for students with special needs with emphasis on meeting student potential rather than provincial standards of achievement. Progress should be measured and evaluated using the student's entry into the program as the baseline rather than comparison using standardized measures.

It is also important to recognize cultural differences when delivering curriculum. To make this happen, it will be necessary to create and then provide additional professional development for staff. This will result in the necessary increased awareness of differences and allow for the development of strategies and provision of materials to adapt the curriculum delivery for these students.

Finally, the next phase of Ontario's education strategy should break down stereotypes and address the stigmas that currently exist in the sector. Specialist High Skills Majors and Apprenticeship programs are steps in the right direction. Increased access to practical courses and exposure to trades will provide the opportunities necessary for more students to reach their full potential.

Question 4

How does the education system need to evolve as a result of changes to child care and the implementation of full-day kindergarten?

OSSTF/FEESO has been a strong advocate for full-day kindergarten and believes the educational experience offered using play-based learning does not end when a student moves into grade one. Programming and curriculum should be child-centred, developmentally appropriate and support growth in all developmental domains that provide a high quality and well-resourced learning and care environment for every student.

Finally, every student should be provided with integrated before and after school programs not only for full-day kindergarten programs, but for any student requiring child care where requested. It will be essential that this be available at reasonable costs for families. Such programs should be fully-public and not-for-profit.

Question 5

What more can we all do to keep students engaged, foster their curiosity and creativity, and help them develop a love of life-long learning?

OSSTF/FEESO members strive to help every student realize his or her potential to become worthy and effective members of society. Students need to understand the spirit of inquiry, the acquisition

of knowledge and understanding, appreciation of standards of excellence, and thoughtful formulation of worthy goals in order to become life-long learners. If the goal of a new education system is to foster curiosity and develop critical thinking and decision making skills, the current focus on the outcomes of standardized testing needs to change,

Question 6

How can we use technology more effectively in teaching and learning?

OSSTF/FEESO has supported the effective use of technology to support teaching and learning. However, education is a human centric activity and cannot be replaced by technology; only enhanced by it. According to Dr. James Comer, "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship."

Human interaction is critical for success in developing all cognitive areas and not just in the delivery of facts and knowledge; the path to learning is highly individualized and can only be mapped from the real-time interaction between people. Technology cannot possibly provide students with the teachable moments that occur in classrooms every day.

Technology should only be used when there is a particular role for its use and not just for the sake of using it. When used, it should be promoted by well-prepared educators with the principles of Digital Citizenship as a basis. When building the next phase of Ontario's education, the use of technology should be promoted with consideration given to the goal of success and well-being of students.

Question 7

In summary, what are the various opportunities for partnership that can enhance the student experience, and how can they benefit parents, educators and our partners too?

OSSTF/FEESO believes that educational change should enhance the principles of universality, comprehensiveness, proficiency and accountability. The purpose and goals of this next phase in education should include a clear vision of student outcomes for all students. Such change will need to involve true collaboration with all partners in the educational system.

As a partner in delivering education, OSSTF/FEESO members should have meaningful involvement in the process that is being considered as it will impact publicly-funded education. The implementation of such innovations to Ontario's education system should be undertaken only after proper pilot testing occurs in a controlled environment and with members involved officially, as equal partners, in the implementation and evaluation teams.

As for other stakeholders including parents and community, the student experience is enhanced when the education system reinforces the importance of citizenship, co-operation and resilience. The role of parents and community supporting the success of every student will be accomplished when the individual talent and dedication are combined to support the competencies and qualities that

employers will look for. More importantly, these learners will be the healthy, well-rounded and resilient citizens Ontario truly needs.

OSSTF/FEESO believes the discussion about the next phase is timely and will address the many questions that exist around improving Ontario's education system. We ask that the suggestions in our submission be given due consideration.