ETFO Submission

Consultation: Education in Ontario

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) represents 83,000 public elementary school teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators and education professionals across the province. This submission is made in response to the education consultations launched by the Ontario government.

Over the years, ETFO has worked diligently with other stakeholders in the sector to help shape Ontario's internationally renowned public education system. While changes in government usually bring periods of adjustment, the current lack of meaningful engagement between the government and stakeholders such as ETFO is concerning. ETFO remains committed to forging a working relationship with the current government and to work diligently to continue to improve our public education system.

ETFO believes that a collaborative approach, as outlined in *Policy and Program Memorandum 159: Collaborative Professionalism*[1], is one of the reasons Ontario has an internationally-renowned public education system that many jurisdictions look to when making improvements. Ontario student learning has been enhanced because of the involvement of ETFO at all stages of the development process of Ministry curriculum, policies, and programs. Together, we have worked to ensure that the voice and perspectives of front-line education workers is recognized and integrated as the system works towards a shared vision for education in Ontario.

[1] *Policy and Program Memorandum 159: Collaborative Professionalism* (2016), Ministry of Education http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/ppm159.pdf

While significant concerns exist regarding the methods the government has chosen to carry out these consultations, ETFO believes it is important to put forward the views of elementary educators. In this submission, we will address the areas that the government has prioritized, while focusing on the key concerns of ETFO members. In addition, there are several challenges currently facing our public education system that have not been examined in these consultations. ETFO's latest edition of *Building Better Schools* is attached to this submission to provide a broad perspective regarding priority areas of focus to continue to build Ontario's publicly funded education system. We look forward to further discussions with the Ministry of Education to ensure that the views of frontline educators, who are true experts on the public education system, are properly considered.

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH (STEM)

Ontario consistently performs well in reading, mathematics and science when compared with other OECD jurisdictions.[2] To continue to prepare our students for their futures they need to be provided with enhanced instruction in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) subjects. Further support for these subjects in Ontario's curriculum will help spark early interest in these areas of study, while at the same time providing a vehicle for hands-on learning, exploring real-world problem-solving, developing creativity, critical-thinking and collaboration skills. Not only are these important skills in today's economy, but they have also been identified as pan-Canadian global competencies by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada[3], and are an integral part of a well-rounded education.

Currently in Ontario, there is a narrow focus placed on literacy and numeracy because these skills are measured annually on provincial standardized assessments. This over emphasis on literacy and numeracy leaves little time to devote to STEM subjects in a meaningful and integrated way.

Many classrooms do not have adequate resources to teach STEM subjects. Students require access to circuits, computers/tablets and other hands-on materials to work with. These are not funded in a consistent way across the province. In her 2018 annual report Ontario's Auditor General stated: "the availability of tablets, laptops, computers and applications varied among the

[2] *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2015 Highlights of Ontario Student Results*. (2016) Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). http://www.eqao.com/en/assessments/national-international-assessments/PISA/Communication%20Documents/PISA-highlights-ontario-results-2015.pdf
[3] *Global Competencies*, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, https://www.cmec.ca/682/Global_Competencies.html

schools."[4] While some schools are able to fill this gap through fundraising to pay for education resources, others cannot. This exacerbates the differences between schools in well-to-do communities and those in less-affluent communities. The Auditor General went on to say: "we found that some schools had new, modern equipment in classrooms, while others had outdated equipment. The age of the equipment can affect students' learning experience because outdated technology is slow and incompatible with the requirements of the latest software." [4] The government should provide additional, predictable and stable funding for the resources required to teach STEM subjects in order to ensure equitable and consistent programming across the system.

Despite the lack of adequate resources and the challenges of dealing with a crowded timetable, educators and schools are delivering STEM subjects in innovative ways. The funding and sharing of successful initiatives and best practices would raise the level of STEM instruction across the province and bring more consistency to students' education. The most efficient way to achieve this objective is by providing ongoing, practical, professional learning to elementary teachers on STEM subjects. This requires a commitment from the government and the associated allocation of financial resources to ensure this happens in a predictable and sustainable manner. The government must also ensure that elementary occasional teachers are provided with this professional learning.

[4] *2018 Annual Report* (2018). Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Vol. 1. p. 548. http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en18/v1_312en18.pdf

Even though there is no overall gender difference in science scores in Ontario[5] there continues to be a gap in enrollment in STEM subjects in higher education. The key to closing this gap may very well rely on building up girls' and women's confidence. "This includes both directly building up girls' and women's confidence and educating influential actors in their lives. Socializing messages and support from mentors, teachers, peers and parents may help counter gendered stereotypes and create spaces for girls to build confidence in their ability to succeed in math and science".[6]

The elementary school years are formative years for students. During their time in elementary school, students develop an interest in learning and begin to "discover who they are, explore opportunities, pursue their passions"[7] while exploring a range of subjects. Reintroducing Design and Technology for the elementary years would provide additional exposure for STEM subjects and assist in developing the skills associated with these areas of study, including creativity, problem-solving, collaboration and critical-thinking.

Recommendations:

1. That EQAO testing be eliminated to provide additional space in the timetable to dedicate to STEM subjects.
2. That the government provide additional, predictable and stable per-pupil funding geared towards resources and materials required to teach STEM subjects.
3. That ongoing classroom-embedded professional learning on STEM subjects be made available to teachers and occasional teachers in the elementary panel on a consistent and ongoing basis.
4. That Design and Technology be reintroduced into the elementary curriculum.

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[5] *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2015 Highlights of Ontario Student Results*. (2016) Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). http://www.eqao.com/en/assessments/national-international-assessments/PISA/Communication%20Documents/PISA-highlights-ontario-results-2015.pdf

[6] Perez-Felkner, L. (2018). *The key to fixing the gender gap in math and science: Boost women's confidence.* The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/the-key-to-fixing-the-gender-gap-in-math-and-science-boost-womens-confidence-105109

[7] *Creating Pathways to Success,* Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013 p.7

5. That any updates to the curriculum, and new or updated classroom resources address the existing gender gap in STEM disciplines.

MATHEMATICS AND 'BACK TO THE BASICS'

Ontario has an internationally renowned education system, consistently performing well in reading, mathematics and science when compared with other OECD jurisdictions. Unfortunately, there is a misconception articulated by some that Ontario's current math instruction is in crisis. It is important to dispel this myth, and while it is true that there has been a slight decline in some narrow standardized test results, it is important to highlight that limited data sources like EQAO do not provide a complete picture of the state of mathematics education in Ontario. Even when taking a narrow view of the available data, the state of math instruction is not as dire as some critics make it out to be. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), addressing the 2015 results from the Programme for International Assessment (PISA), stated, "Among the provinces, students in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia performed above the OECD average in both reading and mathematics."[8]

Another area of controversy has been focused on so-called "discovery math." The reality is that "discovery math" is not part of the curriculum. The current *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 1-8, Mathematics* includes math fundamentals at its core. The curriculum includes more than just rote memorization of basic facts so that students can "learn mathematics in a way that will serve them well throughout their lives"[9]. While certain aspects of mathematics need to be taught explicitly (e.g., mathematical conventions), students also need opportunities to explore mathematical concepts and make sense of mathematics through hands-on problem-based learning. Although the curriculum

[8] O'Grady, K., Deussing, M., Scerbina, T., Fung, K., & Muhe, N. (2015). *Measuring up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study. The Performance of Canada's Youth in Science, Reading and Mathematics. 2015 First Results for Canadians Aged 15*(p. 18, Rep.). Toronto, Ontario: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.
[9] *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8, Mathematics* (2005), Ontario Ministry of Education

already balances these various components required in math instruction, ETFO believes that there is some room for improvement.

Minor adjustments in the organization of the curriculum are necessary so that it is easier for educators to see how concepts connect between grades. Additionally, it is also important to provide elementary educators with appropriate resources to support instruction and learning in their classrooms (e.g., sample year-long outlines for each grade). As demonstrated by Husband and Rapke (2015), it is possible to use math teaching resources that satisfy both the need to teach math fundamentals while supporting problem-solving and inquiry-based learning[10].

The creation of a false crisis focused on math instruction has allowed those who disagree with the current pedagogy to demonize teachers. Recently, the government announced a mandatory math test for teacher candidates prior to receiving a teacher certificate from the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). The suggestion that this 'crisis' in math outcomes is related to teachers' basic competency in the subject is at best inaccurate and at worst offensive to the profession. The introduction of this new mandatory math test is neither necessary nor helpful. Instead, professional learning accompanied with the appropriate resources would assist educators in continuing to teach the math curriculum and engage students in mathematical learning. Funding should be reinstated in the now-cancelled but successful initiative of providing subsidies for teachers taking Additional Qualification (AQ) courses in mathematics. This initiative resulted in over 15,400 mathematics AQ courses being taken since 2014. [11]

[10] Husband, M, & Rapke, T. (2015). RECASTING MAD MINUTES: GOING BACK TO THE BASICS?. *Gazette-Ontario Association for Mathematics*, 53(3), pp.37-40. Caledon, Ontario.
[11] Ontario Teachers' Federation of Ontario. (2018). *OTF final report 2018: Kindergarten, math, wellbeing & technology*. Ontario. Ontario Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

Recommendation:

6. That changes to the organization of the current math curriculum be made to further clarify how concepts connect between grades.

7. That the government provide funding for the development of classroom resources similar to those provided to secondary mathematics educators.

8. That the government restore and increase funding for professional learning focused on math instruction at the elementary school level.

9. That any changes to the curriculum and development of additional classroom resources be made in consultation with stakeholder organizations, including ETFO.

PREPARING STUDENTS WITH NEEDED JOB SKILLS, SUCH AS SKILLED TRADES AND CODING

Ontario's public education system recognizes that education is not simply about preparing students with adequate job skills but also to produce actively engaged citizens[12]. This view can be seen in school boards across the province. For example, in its 2018-19 Annual Plan, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) states its mission: "…we empower students to learn and grow to their full potential in a diverse world"[13] and describes its vision as, "…guided by a student-generated tagline - Curiosity, Creativity, Possibility."[13] Similarly, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) states in its current multi-year strategic plan," our mission is to enable all students to reach high levels of achievement and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values they need to become responsible members of a democratic society."[14] While it is important to prepare students with needed skills so that they enter the job market successfully, this is only one piece of the overarching goal of educating the whole child.

Coding

As our economy continues to shift and technological changes drive additional demands on young people, it is important that our education system continues to adapt. The most valuable skill that our schools can provide students is the desire to engage in life-long learning. The ability to problem-solve, think critically and work collaboratively allows students to adapt to an ever-changing world and to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to be productive members of a democratic society.

[12] *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (2014), Queen's Printer for Ontario http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/renewedVision.pdf
[13] *HWDSB Annual Operating Plan* (2018), Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, Hamilton, Ontario http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/HWDSB-Annual-Operating-Plan-Updated-Sept-2018.pdf
[14] *Multi-Year Strategic Plan* (2018), Toronto District School Board, Toronto, Ontario https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/leadership/board_room/Multi-Year_Strategic_Plan.pdf

There is a recognition that coding is a skill that will be ubiquitous in tomorrow's economy. Coding has much less to do with the mechanics of learning programing languages than with the ability to break down complex problems and work collaboratively and creatively to find solutions.

Teaching coding skills should be added explicitly to the curriculum for grades 7 and 8 and introduced in the earlier grades through authentic real-world applications such as Makerspace activities or learning centres. Incorporating coding into the curriculum will ensure every student has equitable access to this critical learning.

One of the biggest barriers to teaching coding consistently across the system is the lack of sufficient computers/tablets in our schools. Many schools do not have the funds to purchase the appropriate equipment in sufficient numbers. In her 2018 Annual Report the Auditor General says "at some schools, eight students shared one computer, whereas in others each student was assigned an individual computer"[15] As has been previously mentioned, some schools attempt to fill this gap through fundraising activities; however, many schools are not able to do so. This leads to a significant inequity in the system. To close this gap, the government needs to provide additional, predictable and stable per-pupil funding to school boards so that schools can provide the appropriate devices and teaching resources.

Despite the lack of curriculum, training, and resources, many teachers are already including coding in their teaching. Their efforts would be assisted by additional hands-on resources and lesson

[15] *2018 Annual Report* (2018). Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Vol. 1. p. 548. http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en18/v1_312en18.pdf

plans. Additionally, teachers and occasional teachers would benefit from focused teacher-led professional learning in this area.

Skilled Trades

Pursuing a career in skilled trades is one of many pathways available to students today. Providing information to parents/guardians about successful career options outside of college and university and providing opportunities for students to learn about skilled trades in elementary school is key to preparing students for a variety of productive and rewarding careers. As early as the primary and junior grades, students can learn about different career paths from guest speakers (e.g. parents/guardians, community members, etc.), through story books, and by exploring the various work activities that take place in the community.

When presenting students with the various education paths available to them, it is important to consider equity and issues related to streaming students, at all grade levels. Streaming often starts as early as the primary/junior grades in many schools as a result of designated programs for students who require learning support. Evidence suggests that certain groups of students are more likely to be directed towards the trades and provided with limited pathways, including those that lead to a university education. Streaming disproportionally impacts racialized and Indigenous groups, and students of lower socio-economic status predetermining which children are destined for the trades, university, college or the work force. It is important that students see that they are represented in all professions and that they are aware that their ancestry, colour of their skin, or the wealth of their family should not dictate the opportunities ahead.

Recommendations:

10. That the government provide additional, predictable and stable per-pupil funding for the procurement of computers/tablets and other devices necessary to teach coding.

11. That coding instruction be added to the curriculum for grades 7 and 8.

12. That the government, in consultation with stakeholder organizations and experts in the field, develop lesson plans and provide hands-on resources for coding for educators.

13. That opportunities be provided for students to learn about skilled trades in grades 7 and 8.

14. That skilled trades be promoted as a viable option for students while avoiding streaming based on race, gender or socio-economic status.

IMPROVING ASSESSMENT

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was established in 1996 as one of the outcomes of the 1994 Royal Commission on Learning[16]. ETFO has consistently raised concerns about how EQAO has negatively affected elementary classrooms by promoting an overly narrow focus on literacy and numeracy to the detriment of a more holistic program and by creating a test-driven school culture.

Both preparing for EQAO and administering the assessments consume considerable classroom time and create undue stress for students, their families, and the entire school. This is particularly concerning for students in Grade Three. Other jurisdictions such as England[17], Singapore[18] and New Zealand[19] are moving away from mandatory standardized testing at an early age to avoid the negative impact on students. Given that EQAO assessments provide no data that can be used to inform daily instruction and student learning throughout the year it does not make sense to continue the grade three assessment.

EQAO tests fail to measure the more complex problem-solving, critical-thinking and collaboration skills that are essential for students, and hence provide an incomplete picture of student

[16] *EQAO: Ontario's Provincial Assessment Program. Its History and Influence* (2012), p.3, Education Quality and Accountability Office, Toronto, Ontario
[17] Adams R. (2017, September 14) Sats for seven-year-olds in England to be scrapped. *The Guardian (UK)*, Retrieved November 11, 2018, from https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/sep/14/sats-for-seven-year-olds-in-england-to-be-scrapped
[18] *Opening Address by Mr. Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Education, at the Schools Work Plan Seminar* (2018), Ministry of Education. Singapore. Retrieved December 5, 2018, from https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/speeches/opening-address-by-mr-ong-ye-kung--minister-for-education--at-the-schools-work-plan-seminar
[19] *National Standards Removed* (2017), Ministry of Education. New Zealand. Retrieved December 5, 2018 from https://education.govt.nz/news/national-standards-removed/

achievement. ETFO does not support any attempt to expand EAQO testing to measure these areas.

The emphasis on EQAO assessments has had a detrimental impact upon the entire school system. Over the years Ontario schools have seen an increased emphasis on "teaching to the test," as a result of the pressure school boards and administrators place on achieving desired results[20]. This emphasis as well as a focus on 'test taking skills' often begins in Kindergarten. These assessments have narrowed the curriculum with a decreased emphasis on the teaching of other subjects such as the Arts, Physical and Health Education, and Science due to the overemphasis on literacy and numeracy blocks in the daily schedule.

Standardized tests such as EQAO assessments also raise significant equity concerns. Due to their standardization the assessments fail to account for the impact on students with learning disabilities, recent newcomers, and students who face other systemic barriers, the results are not only misleading but help entrench socio-economic inequities.[21]

EQAO assessments were never intended to be utilized as a tool for 'ranking' schools yet over the years this has become common. Real estate agents use the public record of test results as a selling feature for homes. Similarly, organizations such as the Fraser Institute use the data to rank schools and neighbourhoods. Even the government's online School Information Finder utilizes the data to compare schools. This is socially divisive and against the intended purpose of the

[20] Kempf, A. (2016). *The pedagogy of standardized testing: The radical impacts of educational standardization in the US and Canada.* New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
[21] Froese-Germain B. (1999) *Standardized Testing: Undermining Equity in Education*, Report prepared for the National Issues in Education Initiative. Canadian Teachers' Federation. Ottawa, Ontario.

assessments. The Ministry's own policy, *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools*, highlights that the results "should not be used to rank schools or school boards. Rankings tell us nothing about why the scores are high or low. Further, rankings invite simplistic and misleading comparisons that ignore the particular circumstances affecting achievement in each school and school board. Rankings tend to distract educators and the public from addressing the critical issue of how to improve learning for all students."[22] ETFO believes EQAO's $36 million budget would be better spent if the funds were allocated to frontline education programs.[23]

The narrow focus on literacy and numeracy and on student performance in EQAO assessments over two decades has led to system fatigue. Educators – from classroom teachers to superintendents – are stressed by the drive to improved test results. And so are students. It is not only classroom educators who are calling for fundamental changes, the recent extensive review of assessment in Ontario was clear that changes should be made.[24] Ontario-based education experts advocate for a new vision for education, one that is not focused on standardized test results. This new vision is based on creating supportive and collaborative school cultures where educators can exercise their professional judgement regarding their classroom practice, curriculum and assessment strategies.

There are alternatives to Ontario's testing regime. Finland, a top-performing nation on international assessments, uses random sample tests to occasionally check if its curriculum and teaching approaches are appropriate. The international tests that Ontario students participate in, conducted

[22] Ontario Ministry of Education. (2010). Growing success: Assessment, evaluation and reporting in Ontario schools (1st ed., covering Grades 1 to 12). Retrieved from http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/ policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf. p. 93
[23] Mackenzie, Hugh (2017). *Shortchanging Ontario Students: An Overview and Assessment of Education Funding in Ontario*. Toronto: Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.
[24] Campbell, C, et al.. (2018) *Ontario: A Learning Province*. Ontario Ministry of Education.

by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), are also random sample tests.

In the end, the most effective assessment of student progress is the teacher's daily assessment. Teachers strive to balance their instruction with assessment strategies that provide students with immediate feedback about their own progress and helps them to work more productively on their own and with other students. Teachers use this ongoing assessment to reflect upon their instruction, improve their teaching strategies and respond to individual student needs. If the government were truly interested in improving the levels of student success, it would put its focus on supporting professional learning, teacher's professional judgement and ongoing classroom assessment rather than on the EQAO tests.

This view is supported by a majority of Ontarians. According to ETFO's recent poll, over two-thirds (68 per cent) of Ontarians agree that EQAO testing doesn't accurately measure student success and that teachers' classroom assessment should take higher priority.[25] Large-scale assessments such as EQAO are "an intrusive measure of a very narrow span of a student's potential that overlook the full breadth of the growth and learning of a student, something more richly reflected by the differentiated approach of his/her own teachers".[26]

Recommendations:

15. That EQAO assessments be cancelled and the funds reallocated towards frontline education programs.

[25] Stratcom (2018). *An Opinion Survey of Ontarians' Views on Public Education*. Toronto: Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.
[26] Ontario Teachers' Federation (2017). *More than dots on a chart*. Toronto: Ontario Teachers' Federation.

16. If system-wide assessments are to be maintained, they should be replaced with random-sampling assessments.

17. If system-wide assessments are to be maintained, Grade 3 tests should be cancelled to relieve the stress place on students at such an early age.

18. That teachers' professional judgement be respected, and more emphasis be placed on the role of ongoing teacher assessment of student progress.

ENSURING STUDENTS GRADUATE WITH LIFE SKILLS INCLUDING FINANCIAL LITERACY

As previously mentioned, Ontario's public education system focuses on helping students become actively engaged citizens. Life skills play a role in achieving this objective. The Canadian Council of Ministers of Education recognizes the following pan-Canadian global competencies:

- critical thinking and problem solving
- innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship
- learning to learn/self-awareness and self-direction
- collaboration
- communication
- global citizenship and sustainability[27]

These global competencies rely on students acquiring several critical life skills, including but not limited to financial literacy.

Everyone within the education system plays a vital role in assisting students to develop life skills. Life skills should include skills associated with collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and global and responsible citizenship. All these skills are necessary for our children in order to better address local, national and global issues in adulthood.

With respect to financial literacy, this is already an area of focus within the curriculum. Teachers cover these skills through explicit and indirect classroom activities. To do this they utilize the

[27] *Global Competencies,* Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. https://www.cmec.ca/682/Global_Competencies.html

resources provided on the EduGains website[28] including the lesson plans developed for grades 4 to 8 to build student financial literacy. In addition, many schools bring in speakers from organizations such as Junior Achievement or from financial planning institutions. Through the math curriculum students already work with money, percentages and other related concepts. Teachers regularly use real life financial examples to make these lessons more authentic for students.

ETFO believes that it would be valuable to develop financial literacy activities to provide consistent opportunities for learning these skills across the province. If the government intends to add new outcomes related to financial literacy in the already overloaded curriculum it will have to determine which expectations are to be removed in order to ensure that all areas of the curriculum receive the attention that they deserve.

Recommendations:

19. That life skills be specifically defined within the curriculum, in consultation with stakeholder organizations.
20. That life skills not be limited to financial literacy but include components such as critical-thinking, problem-solving and experiential learning.
21. That financial literacy be formally included in the *Ontario Curriculum: Mathematics Grades 1-8* in consultation with stakeholder organizations and that additional classroom resources be made available to educators

[28] *Financial Literacy Education*, Ontario Ministry of Education. http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/FinancialLit/index.html

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

In 2015, Ontario's Ministry of Education introduced a new Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum for grades 1-8. This curriculum was the result of extensive consultations with educators, health professionals, parents and experts in the field. This was the first significant update to the HPE curriculum since 1998.

One of the features of the 2015 curriculum was the modernization of the curriculum expectations to be covered within the Human Development and Sexual Health component. These new additions to this component were widely distorted by certain groups who opposed the new curriculum for apparent ideological reasons.

ETFO welcomed the new curriculum when it was introduced. ETFO's policies call for pro-active measures which result in equality, promote diversity, and foster respect and dignity for all. Including issues related to gender identity, same-sex families and sexual orientation in the curriculum was an extension of the Ministry's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, the stated goal of which is to ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed personally and academically, regardless of background, identity or personal circumstances.[29] It also furthered the goals of the Provincial Code of Conduct for schools that calls upon all members of the school community to respect and treat others fairly regardless of, for example, race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability.[30]

[29] *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan* (2017), p.3. Ministry of Education, Queen's Printer for Ontario
[30] *The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct* (2018), Ministry of Education.

The Ontario Human Rights Code is also relevant to the curriculum and the inclusion of issues concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. The Human Rights Code includes gender identity and sexual orientation as protected grounds. The Code applies to the delivery of education services and thus requires that services be offered without discrimination on the basis of the enumerated protected grounds.

The revised 2015 curriculum was successfully implemented starting in September 2015. Educators taught it and valued its modern, research-based and relevant approach to human development and sexual health.

On July 11, 2018, mere weeks before the commencement of the 2018-2019 school year, the Minister of Education announced that Ontario was reverting to the 1998 HPE curriculum.[31] This decision not only created confusion in the education sector at before the beginning of the school year, it also sent a message to educators, parents and especially students that the new government was willing to ignore overwhelming evidence in order to satisfy a section of its political base. This had a chilling effect upon the system.

Since then, the roll-back of the Health and Physical Education curriculum has been challenged in courts by ETFO, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), and the Grand Council Treaty #3 which represents 28 First Nations communities. In addition, individual students have filed human rights claims against the province.

[31] Thompson, N., & Jeffords, S. (2018, July 12). Ontario schools reverting to old sex-ed curriculum this fall, education minister says. *Global News (Toronto).* Retrieved from https://globalnews.ca/news/4325268/ontario-sex-ed-curriculum/

When the 1998 HPE curriculum was drafted, society was at a much different point than it is now. The Internet was a nascent technology, cell phones were a novelty that few had access to, social media had not become pervasive in daily life, cyber-bullying did not exist, same-sex marriage was not yet legal in Canada and the #MeToo movement was 19 years in the future.

By utilizing the outdated 1998 curriculum, students will receive minimal or incomplete information on sexting, consent, LGBTQ relationships and suicide prevention. There is no information on gender identity. The OHRC has stated that it "…is concerned that the interim curriculum is discriminatory because it fails to reflect and adequately address the needs of LGBTQ + students and their families, and eliminates key information about consent, which places students at greater risk of sexual violence."[32]

This regression has put a chill on classrooms and limits teachers' ability to meet the needs of students and their families. It puts students' safety at risk and has long-term negative implications for their mental and overall physical health.

The 2015 HPE curriculum introduced important concepts at age-appropriate times. The roll-back of this curriculum can only be perceived as an attack on many people's lived realities, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ. Ontario's classrooms should be building a culture of diversity and inclusion. Those who oppose the modernization of the HPE curriculum already have the ability to withdraw their children from specific lessons they may object to; the government should not allow this small minority of Ontarians to withdraw critical education from Ontario's classrooms.

[32] OHRC intervenes in education curriculum case at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ohrc-intervenes-education-curriculum-case-human-rights-tribunal-ontario

Recommendations:

22. That the 2015 Health and Physical Education Curriculum be reinstated immediately.

23. That the government consult educators and educator unions and provide resources, training and support for the full implementation of the 2015 curriculum.

24. That the government denounce any type of discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community.

25. That the government allocate resources to educate parents and the public on the contents of the 2015 Health and Physical Education Curriculum.

THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN CLASSROOMS – CELL PHONES

Under the United Nations Conventions of a Child, children have the right to get and share information. As mentioned previously in this submission, students acquire important life skills throughout their years in elementary school. These skills must include self-regulation and the appropriate use of technology if students are to be prepared for future careers and global participation. It would be negligent for an education system to hold students back from learning about and communicating thoughtfully with existent and emergent technology.

Many educators use students' cell phones as instructional tools because these tools are relevant for the students. The Auditor General outlines in her 2018 Annual Report "studying in Internet-connected classrooms lets students quickly gather information from the Web. Teachers can use IT tools to shorten the time they need for lesson planning and assessing students."[33] In other cases educators use students' cell phones as instructional tools because their schools lack the proper technology to deliver effective lessons.

While funding was provided through the annual Grants for Students Needs (GSN) for the purchase of resources prior to 2017-2018[34] the funding was not sufficient to provide devices for every classroom in the province. As a result, a blanket ban on student cell phones would not be helpful for students or educators. Additionally, cell phones are often a necessary connection between students and their families. A blanket ban would jeopardize their ability to communicate with one another.

[33] *2018 Annual Report* (2018). Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Vol. 1. p. 551. http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en18/v1_312en18.pdf
[34] *Innovation Learning Fund,* Ontario Ministry of Education http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/21stCenturyLearning/innovation_learning_funding.html

Schools have already implemented acceptable use policies for cell phones that establish helpful parameters for their use within the school. Rather than banning cell phone use schools, educators should be teaching students how to use mobile devices critically, collaboratively and responsibly; and to recognize when they are a helpful tool versus a distraction.

A cell phone ban would create issues around the care of personal devices that are confiscated, and the potential of escalating interactions with students. This would be a particular challenge for occasional teachers who are less likely to know the intricacies of the school policies or the dynamics of classroom relationships.

Ontario should learn from other jurisdictions, such as New York, which after implementing a cell phone ban has decided that the negative consequences outweigh any potential benefits and is cancelling its cell phone ban.[35]

Recommendations:

26. That the government let school boards, school administrators and educators create policies regarding the use of cell phones that work for their respective schools.
27. That the government provide per-pupil funding for classroom technology resources to eliminate inequities that arise from the use of personal devices.

[35] Taylor, K. (2017, December 21). Ban on Cellphones in New York City Schools to Be Lifted. *The New York Times (New York)* Retrieved November 29, 2018, from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/07/nyregion/ban-on-cellphones-in-new-york-city-schools-to-be-lifted.html

A PARENT BILL OF RIGHTS

Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* reads:

> "(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
>
> "(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace…"[36]

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted in 1989, reads:

> " Article 28 1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
>
> (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
>
> "Article 29 1. 1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
>
> (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
>
> (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

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36 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), United Nations, Paris, France. Retrieved November 29, 2018, from https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;"[37]

Ontario's education system strives to deliver on the basic human right to education. As part of its efforts, in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, the government defined renewed goals, including:

"**Promoting Well-Being:** All children and students will develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices.

"Enhancing Public Confidence: Ontarians will continue to have confidence in a publicly funded education system that helps develop new generations of confident, capable and caring citizens."[38]

The UDHR, UNCRC, and the current vision for education in Ontario recognize that the child is at the centre of our education system. As discussed earlier in this document, teaching the whole child

[37] UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, pp. 8-9. Retrieved on December 3, 2018 from: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html
[38] *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (2014), Queen's Printer for Ontario http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/renewedVision.pdf

needs to be the driving principle for educators and policy makers.

The creation of a Parent Bill of Rights runs counter to the vision of a student-centered education system. The right to public education, enshrined in the UDHR, is a right that every child living in Ontario is entitled to this should be the focus for the government. A Parent Bill of Rights would serve to drive a wedge between parents and the school, having a detrimental impact on the collaborative partnership which contributes to student success.

Recommendation:

28. Instead of a Parent Bill of Rights, the government should restate the rights of children to:

- High-quality, free, and universal public education.
- School environments that are healthy and that support and encourage learning.
- A public education system built on equity and inclusion.
- A public education system that is appropriately funded.
- A public education system that is truly accessible to all regardless of race, sex, ability, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.
- A public education system that strengthens the respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and that promotes friendship.
- A public education system that supports the mental and physical health of students and educators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That EQAO testing be eliminated to provide additional space in the timetable to dedicate to STEM subjects.

2. That the government provide additional, predictable and stable per-pupil funding geared towards resources and materials required to teach STEM subjects.

3. That ongoing classroom-embedded professional learning on STEM subjects be made available to teachers in the elementary panel on a consistent and ongoing basis.

4. That Design and Technology be reintroduced into the elementary curriculum.

5. That changes to the organization of the current math curriculum be made to further clarify how concepts connect between grades.

6. That the government provide funding for the development of classroom resources similar to those provided to secondary mathematics educators.

7. That the government restore and increase funding for professional learning focused on math instruction at the elementary school level.

8. That any changes to the curriculum and development of additional classroom resources be made in consultation with stakeholder organizations, including ETFO.

9. That the government provide additional, predictable and stable per-pupil funding for the procurement of computers/tablets and other devices necessary to teach coding.

10. That coding instruction be added to the curriculum for grades 7 and 8.

11. That the government, in consultation with stakeholder organizations and experts in the field, develop hands-on resources and lesson plans for coding to be accessible to educators.

12. That opportunities be provided for students to learn about skilled trades in grades 7 and 8.

13. That skilled trades be promoted as a viable option for students while avoiding streaming based on race, gender or socio-economic status.

14. That EQAO assessments be cancelled and its funding reallocated towards frontline education programs.

15. If system-wide assessments are to be maintained, that they be replaced with random-sampling assessments.

16. If system-wide assessments are to be maintained, that Grade 3 tests be cancelled to relieve the stress place on students at such an early age.

17. That teachers' professional judgement be respected, and more emphasis be placed on the role of ongoing teacher assessment of student progress.

18. That life skills be specifically defined within the curriculum, in consultation with stakeholder organizations.

19. That life skills not be limited to financial literacy but include components such as critical-thinking, problem-solving and experiential learning.

20. That financial literacy be formally included in the *Ontario Curriculum: Mathematics Grades 1-8* in consultation with stakeholder organizations and that additional classroom resources be made available to educators

21. That the 2015 Health and Physical Education Curriculum be reinstated immediately.

22. That the government consult educators and educator unions and provide resources, training and support for the full implementation of the 2015 curriculum.

23. That the government denounce any type of discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community.

24. That the government allocate resources to educate parents and the public on the contents of the 2015 Health and Physical Education Curriculum.

25. That the government let school boards, school administrators and educators create policies regarding the use of cell phones that work for their respective schools.

26. That the government provide per-pupil funding for classroom technology resources to eliminate inequities that arise from the use of personal devices.

29. Instead of a Parent Bill of Rights, the government should restate the rights of children to:

- High-quality, free, and universal public education.
- School environments that are healthy and that support and encourage learning.
- A public education system built on equity and inclusion.
- A public education system that is appropriately funded.
- A public education system that is truly accessible to all regardless of race, sex, ability, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

- A public education system that strengthens the respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and that promotes friendship.
- A public education system that supports the mental and physical health of students and educators.

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