April 30, 2018

Dear Minister and Premier,

We are honoured and thank you for the opportunity to co-facilitate the Transformation Steering Committee (TSC). In collaboration with students, parents, trustees, members of the public, educators, professional support staff and administrators, we have had a positive and productive year of rich dialogue on the important and complex topic of modernizing school curriculum, assessment and reporting across Ontario to best support and enable all students to reach their full potential and succeed as compassionate, engaged citizens.

As you know, the Transformation Steering committee was established in October 2017 to “inform, monitor and guide coherence across the broad and transformative changes (i.e., three to five years)” that were announced in the first week of this school year (Appendix A).

We are writing to you at this time to provide an overview of the nature of the working relationship within the TSC, share details of our progress to date including preliminary outreach, and to submit to you, on behalf the TSC, preliminary areas of consensus and recommendations on the following:

- general principles of a transformed curriculum;
- recommendations for broader outreach;
- principles of effective implementation; and
- priority areas for further study and consideration and action by the TSC.

Rationale for the Modernization of Curriculum in Ontario

The transformation or modernization of Ontario’s curriculum is timely. In order for Ontario to continue to be a global leader in education and to meet the changing needs of all students today and in the future, a complete review of curriculum, reporting and assessment is needed. This review will ensure that our students continue to be supported and prepared both for their learning today and for their full participation in society and workplaces of the future.
Equity, inclusivity and well-being were central to all of our discussions about the need for and nature of curriculum transformation. It was recognized that curriculum must include multiple and diverse perspectives that reflect our pluralistic society, and that we must honour the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Fundamental shifts in education are occurring globally. Students today have instant access to factual information on multiple digital platforms, which means they must also become discerning, critical thinkers who are able to process, analyze and use this knowledge for action. In an increasingly inter-connected world, students and educators need to be agile, flexible and able to work collaboratively with diverse groups of people locally and from afar.

In the recommended principles of the modernized curriculum which accompany this letter, it is recommended that transformation should not just be about what needs to change or be added. It is about considering what is working well and therefore retained. Further, consideration must be given to what may no longer be relevant or necessary in today’s and tomorrow’s world.

The Work of the Transformation Steering Committee

The Transformation Steering committee’s work and advice have been informed by and aligned with the four goals of Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario: Achieving Excellence, Ensuring Equity, Promoting Well-Being and Enhancing Public Confidence.

The approach of the TSC has been consistent with the principles of collaborative professionalism as set forth in Policy and Program Memorandum (PPM) 159 (Appendix B). These principles are: value all voices; foster a trusting environment and respect for all; allow open sharing of ideas to achieve a common vision; focus on research, evidence and effective practices; respect for the Education Act, other relevant Acts, Regulations and Agreements; and respect and promote the distinct missions of Ontario’s four publicly-funded school systems.

We are pleased to report that the nature and tone of the dialogue over the course of our work this year has been consistent with both the priorities outlined in Achieving Excellence and the high standards of collaborative professionalism. As one of the TSC members recently wrote, “From the very beginning there has been a willingness to listen – by all participants – and a willingness to delve deeply into the issues and examine the evidence, rather than sticking to organizational positions. As a result, it is becoming increasingly apparent how this process can, in concrete and detailed ways, support the province’s plans for its young people, its communities and its economic and social health.”
As co-facilitators, we are appreciative and proud of the positive, constructive tone that permeates our rich dialogue and consideration of critically important topics about the future of public education in this province. It is rewarding to hear and observe the voices of students, parents, community members, trustees, educators and educational leaders shift from unique valuable perspectives to common understandings and points of consensus.

There have been five formal meetings of the TSC this year along with numerous sub-committee meetings. In addition, TSC members have access to a shared website containing reports, minutes and notes from previous meetings as well as research and materials for review and feedback. This platform enabled ongoing collaboration and information sharing between meetings.

**Principles of Consensus**

At the beginning of our work together, we reached agreement on the principles of consensus that would guide our decision making and reporting. These have served us well in all subsequent discussions. The three principles are as follows:

**Principle 1:** The goal is to achieve consensus. – Those topics, upon which consensus is achieved, will be identified as consensus recommendations.

**Principle 2:** There will be no veto power. That is, if there is no agreement on the part of one or more members or organizations represented on the TSC, it does not lead to an outright veto.

**Principle 3:** Recommendations and summaries of decisions will provide information about the degree of support (e.g., unanimous, overwhelming, majority).

**Sub-Committees and Access to Research**

Over the course of the year, the TSC has created sub-committees on a frequent basis to guide and prepare for the discussions of all members. To date, subcommittees have supported our discussions on “report cards”, “outreach,” and “Grade 9 refresh/equity”. Attached is an overview of these sub-committees as well as an overview of that work was undertaken (Appendix C).

One of the roles of the subcommittees is to assist in identifying materials including research that will inform upcoming discussions. These materials are placed on the member’s site mentioned earlier. This has greatly enhanced our progress to date. A summary of some of the research that has informed our work is included in Appendix 4.
Report Cards and Transferable Skills

As part of our mandate, considerable time was devoted early in the year to the announced intent to implement province wide changes to report cards in September 2018 through the inclusion of transferable skills. Members of the TSC were pleased that you supported the consensus recommendation to not proceed with September 2018 province wide implementation of this change. Members of the TSC support a more thorough investigation of this important topic, including collection of best practices and pilot approaches, with due attention to appropriately sequencing any changes to assessment and reporting in light of overall curricular modernization. Parent and student members of the TSC along with many others were relieved as they were concerned that the concepts and terminology of transferable skills are not familiar to students and parents across the province. Many other important questions have been raised about the best way to teach, assess and report on skills that students will require in the future. As one member of the TSC said, “This is too important to rush.”

Renewed Approach to Grade 9 and Equity

At both the subcommittee level and in our discussions at the full TSC, it was agreed that the issue of appropriate pathways could not be successfully addressed solely at the Grade 9 level. While research indicates that there is a disproportionate number of students from low-income families, racialized students, Indigenous students and students with special education needs enrolled in applied courses, the members of the TSC believe this is a much more complex matter that requires further consideration. This is consistent with feedback secured by the co-facilitators in meetings with various Advisory Committees and other groups.

Central to this discussion was ensuring the conditions and supports are in place to allow all students to reach their full potential and succeed throughout their years at the elementary and secondary school levels and beyond.

It is a fact that changing the program structure in Grade 9 will not address challenges that students confront in primary, junior or intermediate years. There was recognition that a factor in pathway choices was the information provided to, awareness of, and involvement of parents in decisions about education pathways and supports for their children. The importance of guidance teachers at the Grade 7 and 8 level was cited as one example of supports necessary for students and parents as enablers for improvement.
There was an acknowledgement that further and more in-depth study and research was required to capture the scope and nature of the challenges throughout, and the resources and supports for students throughout elementary and secondary school, particularly in transition years.

Consultation and Outreach

Broad consultation and outreach will be important throughout the entire transformation process. While broad province wide outreach is planned for the upcoming years, considerable engagement and outreach has already taken place.

As co-facilitators, we met on a regular basis with Dr. Carol Campbell and her colleagues who were responsible for the "Independent Review of Student Assessment and Reporting". Given the obvious connection between their findings and the longer-term mandate of our committee, this interaction has been essential. Regular updates, including presentations by Dr. Campbell, have been provided to the TSC.

In the preparatory phase of the TSC, we as co-facilitators met with a wide range of sector associations. We also met with the Initiatives Committee (IC). As a highly representative body with a parallel mandate, the IC was invaluable in helping guide the initial creation of the TSC. Given that the IC is responsible for advising on existing and upcoming ministry plans, we committed on behalf of the TSC to liaising regularly as the longer-term transformation takes shape.

Over the course of the year, on behalf of the TSC, we as co-facilitators have liaised with and sought input from a number of standing advisory committees, including the First Nation Lifelong Learning Table, Minister’s Advisory Council on First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education, the Curriculum Council, the Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education and the Premier’s Council on Youth Opportunities. These meetings have been invaluable both as an opportunity for us to communicate the work and focus of the TSC with these groups but to seek their initial advice on matters related to our mandate.

More recently, we have met with many associations and public bodies including cultural, advocacy, employer and post-secondary representatives. To date, we have met with over twenty-five such groups with many more have been identified as key contacts for further engagement in the fall. We have summarized and shared the feedback from these meetings with the full membership of the TSC (Appendix E). Of note is the fact that there been great interest in the work of the TSC and considerable consistency in the input received to date. We were struck by the commonality of responses and points of consensus from the many groups we have met with.
As mentioned earlier, broader outreach and consultation is planned for the upcoming year(s). The TSC has spent considerable time over the course of this year discussing important questions of who, when and how to maximize this outreach. A key focus of the discussion is how to reach out to optimize involvement of many different voices, including students – particularly those who may not have had a sufficient voice or opportunities to date. Recommendations of the TSC regarding outreach and community engagement are included with this letter.

Working Relationship and Support from the Ministry of Education

Over the course of this year, the TSC and we as co-facilitators have benefited from the support of a small but capable and efficient ministry team. We can’t say enough about how appreciative we and all members of the TSC are of their support. They assisted us all year with organizing outreach, arranging meetings and materials, taking notes and helping us move forward in our mandate.

As important as this organizational support has been, there was intentionality in the early stages of our work to reinforce to members of the TSC and broader sector that the transformation process is a genuine one and that decisions on what, when and how had not already been made.

As our work progressed, TSC members have appreciated ongoing presentations by ministry staff and increasing direct support by a broader group of ministry staff who bring expertise in equity, Indigenous education, curriculum, special education and policy development. Again, we thank them immensely for this support.

In the coming years, the relationship between the TSC and the ministry will continue to evolve as the ministry works with the TSC and the entire sector to bring the modernized curriculum, assessment and reporting to fruition.

We thank Deputy Minister Bruce Rodrigues and members of his senior team for their support and advice over the course of the year.

The Years Ahead

In the coming years, the TSC will continue to meet on a regular basis. Our meetings will continue to be informed by the experiences and expertise of the members as well as research on effective practices here in Ontario and beyond. In addition, as mentioned we will conduct a broad public outreach and continue to meet with associations and public bodies from across the province. Feedback from this outreach will inform the ongoing discussions of the TSC.
As we move forward, we as co-facilitators would recommend that the TSC plans to utilize “working groups” to focus on specific dimensions of our overall mandate including such as supports for marginalized students, including those with exceptionalities. Working groups will report back to and inform the dialogue and recommendations of the TSC. Not only will these groups provide focussed attention to priority areas of the transformation, they will enable broader participation and expertise.

A number of important topics that came up in our discussions this past year will continue to be high priorities for the TSC in the coming year. While dialogue to date has been rich, given the complexity of the topics, the members of the TSC concur that these are priority areas for consideration and action in the coming year.

Reflections and Lessons Learned

As co-facilitators, we wish to share our own personal reflections at this point. As with any complex process, there are many “lessons learned” along the way. We offer the following reflections regarding next steps in the transformation process based on these lessons. The lessons learned apply to both the TSC’s internal processes but also to how our work connects and engages more broadly with the sector and public:

1. “Go slow, go together, go further.” This has been a recurrent theme in all our discussions and underscores the importance of taking time for all parties to engage in rich dialogue in the spirit of professional collaboration. It also speaks to the importance of ensuring that due attention is paid to appropriate sequencing in building the vision of transformation together. We must ensure sufficient time for a successful co-development process, that we create an implementation plan containing adequate supports and resources, and that there is effective communication within the sector as well as with parents, students and the greater community.

2. Use diverse methods of reaching out and engaging everyone in this important dialogue. Use compelling, plain language communication that motivates interest, broadens understanding and invites input – with particular attention to those who have had less involvement in earlier transformational processes.

3. Be explicit in connecting dots and building relationships. This includes, but is not limited to, connecting transformation to the work that is currently underway in schools, school boards and the ministry. It also includes connections to work in other ministries and communities across the province. Relationships and trust are integral to building and communicating this connectivity.

4. A transformation process of this magnitude is both unclear and unsettling. It requires a new way of thinking, acting and interacting. All of this underscores the importance of taking time, building trust, communicating broadly and listening carefully to all voices.
In closing, once again we thank you for this incredible opportunity. We also thank all the talented and passionate members of the Transformation Steering Committee for their dedication and time.

We submit and draw your attention to the following pages which reflect the best thinking and consensus recommendations of the members of the Transformation Steering Committee at the culmination of our first year of deliberation. We trust that these recommendations will provide a solid foundation for the important work that lies ahead.

Sincerely,

(Original Signed By) (Original Signed By)

Marilies Rettig Ken Thurston
TSC Co-Facilitator TSC Co-Facilitator
Senior Advisor Senior Advisor
Office of the Minister of Education Office of the Minister of Education

Enclosures:

- Guiding Principles of a Modernized Curriculum
- Requirements for Successful Implementation
- Recommendations for Successful Outreach and Consultation

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Terms of Reference
- Appendix B: Collaborative Professionalism - PPM 159
- Appendix C: Subcommittees
- Appendix D: References
- Appendix E: TSC Outreach Overview

Appendix F: Members of the TSC