

Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy

In Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario, ensuring equity is one of the four goals outlined for publicly funded education: "All children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood."

Why do we need a strategy?

Ontario is home to people from over 200 countries who speak more than 130 languages, including English and French. We believe that Ontario's diversity is one of its greatest assets – both today and for the future. Embracing this diversity and moving beyond tolerance to inclusivity and respect will help us reach our goal of making Ontario's education system the most equitable in the world.

Publicly funded education is an essential part of our democratic society. Ontarians share a belief in the need to help students learn and to prepare them for their role in society as engaged, productive and responsible citizens. Some groups of students may be facing barriers and struggling to succeed, including recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students and students with special education needs, among others.

Equity and excellence go hand in hand

Equity and inclusive education aims to identify, address, and eliminate the biases and barriers that limit students' prospects for learning, growing, and fully contributing to society. Barriers may be related to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, race, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic background, physical or mental ability, or other factors.

An equitable and inclusive education system is essential for all students to reach high levels of achievement. It is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high-quality education for all learners (UNESCO, 2008). Equitable, inclusive education is also central to creating a cohesive society and a strong economy.

VISION

We envision an inclusive education system in Ontario in which:

- all students, parents, and other members of the school community are welcomed and respected;
- every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning.

Everyone in our publicly funded education system – regardless of background or personal circumstances – must feel engaged and included.

To achieve an equitable and inclusive school climate, school boards and schools will work to ensure that all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. We want all staff and students to value diversity and to demonstrate respect for others and a commitment to establishing a just, caring society.

Why now?

Canadians embrace multiculturalism, human rights and diversity as core values. However, there are ongoing incidents of discrimination in our society that demand attention. Bullying, hate propaganda and cyberbullying are major concerns for parents and students. Racism, religious intolerance, homophobia, transphobia and gender-based violence are still happening in our communities and, unfortunately, in our schools. This can lead to students feeling rejected, excluded and isolated at school. This may result in behaviour problems in the classroom, decreased interest in school, lower levels of achievement and higher dropout rates.

Ontario is Canada's most diverse province, and we must find solutions to these concerns. We must address the needs of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex society by ensuring that our policies evolve with changing needs.

WHAT IS ...

DIVERSITY: The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity can include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

EQUITY: A condition or state of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

What is Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy?

Launched in 2009, Ontario's award-winning Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy aims to help the education community identify and address discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to support the achievement and well-being of all students. The strategy builds on successful ministry, school board, and school policies and practices. As a result of the strategy, every school board has an equity and inclusive education policy and a religious accommodation guideline in place.

Parent engagement is an essential part of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Research shows that student achievement can improve when parents play an active role in their children's learning, and that good schools become even better when parents are involved.

What does the strategy accomplish?

To achieve equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools, we have identified the following three goals:

- 1. Shared and committed leadership** by the ministry, boards and schools will play a critical role in eliminating discrimination through the identification and removal of bias and barriers.
- 2. Equity and inclusive education policies and practices** will support positive learning environments. All students can feel engaged in and empowered by what they are learning; supported by their teachers and staff; and welcome in their learning environment.
- 3. Accountability and transparency** will be demonstrated through clear measures of success and communication to the public about our progress towards achieving equity for all students.

Who is involved and how?

Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy calls for:

- each school to create and support a positive safe school climate that fosters equity, inclusive education and diversity
- each school board to develop and implement an equity and inclusive education policy and a religious accommodation guideline for the board and its schools
- Equity and Inclusive Education Implementation Networks to share effective practices and resources and promote and participate in collaborative learning opportunities
- diverse education and community partners to support school and board efforts by providing resources and professional learning opportunities
- the ministry to provide direction, support and guidance.

Learn more about:

- Equity and Inclusive Education at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.html>
- Parent Engagement with *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools* (2010) at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/policy.html
- *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (2014) at www.ontario.ca/eduision