DEAR COLLEAGUES,

Another busy and productive school year is drawing to a close, but I am aware that many of you are still hard at work and will continue to be so throughout the summer. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your tremendous leadership, ongoing support for the government’s ambitious education agenda, and firm commitment to Ontario’s students.

During my short time as acting Deputy Minister of Education, I have been constantly impressed with the positive mood and energy in our publicly funded systems. I am pleased to highlight some of our collective accomplishments over the last few months, as well as ongoing work and items on the horizon.

**Updates**

**Timely information** — This year, we have attempted to be much more proactive in providing timely information to support you in your budget planning. Many of you have told us that the earlier announcement of Grants for Student Needs and advance notice of additional investments have been very helpful. Almost all boards have now passed their budgets. Thank you for all the hard work and planning that has gone into this process.

To further support you, we are continuing our efforts to streamline administrative and reporting requirements, including those related to teacher performance appraisal and special education, so that system leaders can focus on the critical issue of improving student outcomes. We recognize that much more needs to be done in this area.
The goal for the 2007–08 school year is to ensure that 90 per cent of primary classes have 20 or fewer students and that no primary class has more than 23 students.

The ministry has engaged three “coaches” to work with boards that are having difficulty meeting the primary class size goal. The three advisers – Pierre Boutin, Bill Gordon, and Joe Hubbard – will be known to many of you, as they are former school board supervisory officers with extensive experience in school and board organization and planning. They have already completed a best practices review and are meeting with boards.

Student Success/Learning to 18 — Last month we initiated the 2007–08 application process for Specialist High Skills Majors and set ambitious expansion goals for the province and ministry. A total of 224 applications have been reviewed and we are moving to secure approvals and final school board confirmations. In all, there will be 153 high skills major programs offered by 67 of 70 eligible school boards in 2007–08. In addition to the five high skills majors currently offered, there will be majors in four new sectors: Business, Environment, Health and Wellness, and Transportation. A sincere thanks to school boards and your local partners for embracing this new Student Success component since its launch just last year.

In 2006–07, French-language school boards participated in 7 high skills major pilot projects and 20 dual credit pilot projects as part of the School-College-Work Initiative. For next year, these numbers will jump to 32 high skills major projects and 47 dual credit projects. This increase clearly shows the spirit of cooperation and initiative between the two learning ministries, as well as between the French-language secondary and postsecondary sectors. It also shows that we’re building on the tremendous success of Destination réussite, an approach unique to French-language school boards that supports the implementation of Student Success/Learning to 18.
We have received a record number of proposals for dual credit projects under the School-College-Work Initiative. Projects to be funded for 2007–08 have been approved. We anticipate that the program will expand to include up to 4,500 students.

**Report of the Working Group on the Environment** — On June 22, the Minister announced the direction for Environmental Education in Ontario based on the advice provided by the Curriculum Council. The report of the working group, *Shaping Our Schools, Shaping Our Future*, which contains 32 recommendations for moving forward, has been published and is posted on the ministry's website. In the coming months, we will be moving forward on all the recommendations, including initial development and implementation planning for a new course with an environmental focus in Grade 11 and for supports for embedding environmental education in all grades and subjects in elementary and secondary curricula.

**Supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorders** — Policy/Program Memorandum No. 140, “Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Into Programs for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)”, was released last month, and the report of the Ministers’ Autism Spectrum Disorders Reference Group, *Making a Difference for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Ontario Schools: From Evidence to Action*, was posted on the ministry's website in February. Over the past month, teams from each board have been invited to one-day regional training sessions to clarify the expectations articulated in the PPM on ABA. In addition, regional training sessions for school teams will be offered this summer for staff directly serving students with ASD (see page 7, “Summer Professional Development”). A $1 million investment will fund a four-day workshop on school team training for up to 1700 principals, teachers, and teacher assistants, plus a one-day session for up to 1400 principals. An additional $2.7 million investment will support continued training, through Geneva Centre, for school teams during the 2007–08 school year.
The ministry announced funding on June 8 for four projects under the “Prohibitive to Repair” school capital program.

Bill 212 will come into effect February 1, 2008, allowing school boards the time they need to put programs in place to fully meet the requirements of the new legislation.

The government has allocated $31 million annually, beginning in 2007–08, to make Ontario’s schools safer.

“Prohibitive to Repair” projects — We are in the process of publicly announcing funds to remove or replace schools that are no longer in reasonable condition. Thank you for your cooperation in our effort to identify a final list of projects. As work continued to review and prioritize the school facilities in the province that need to be replaced, the ministry announced funding on June 8 for four projects under this important school capital program. A number of other local announcements are also scheduled to take place.

Safe Schools — Bill 212, which amended the Safe Schools provisions of the Education Act, passed with the unanimous consent of the legislature earlier this month. The new legislation strikes a balance between applying discipline and providing opportunities for students to continue their education. The government has allocated $31 million annually, beginning in 2007–08, to make Ontario’s schools safer. This includes $23 million for programs and supports to address inappropriate behaviour and for programs for expelled students and students on long-term suspensions. Training will be provided to principals and vice-principals on changes to the act and on ways to apply discipline in a non-discriminatory manner. The bill will come into effect February 1, 2008, allowing school boards the time they need to put programs in place to fully meet the requirements of the new legislation.

Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat — On June 19, 2007, the Secretariat was honoured with the Government of Ontario’s Amethyst Award. The Amethyst Award, established in 1993, recognizes individuals and groups who have made outstanding contributions in client service, innovation, valuing people, and professional achievement. The Secretariat shares the award with school boards whose focus and commitment to student achievement has made this recognition possible. The Secretariat continues to work collaboratively with boards to build capacity and to implement high-yield strategies to improve student learning.

Character Development — Since the Character Development Initiative was launched last year, 15 community consultations and 9 training events for board staff
We will be revising our Character Development discussion paper for release in September, and we will communicate future directions for schools as they begin to implement the initiative.

Providing our students with the best opportunity to succeed requires leadership at all levels of the system.

Leadership development — Leadership development continues to be a priority for the ministry. As you know, system leadership is critical to setting the overall direction and focus of a board in supporting improved student outcomes. We have delivered on a number of key commitments outlined in Leading Education: New Supports for Principals and Vice-Principals in Ontario Publicly Funded Schools and will continue to move forward on this work in the coming months. Our focus on leadership development will also include a strategy to support supervisory officers and directors in their role as system leaders. We will continue to engage you in dialogue as we move forward in developing supports for senior administrators.

The Institute for Education Leadership — Providing our students with the best opportunity to succeed requires leadership at all levels of the system. The Institute for Education Leadership continues its unique partnership among the principals’ councils, the supervisory officers’ associations, the councils of directors of education, and the ministry. Now entering its second year, the institute is committed to exploring leading-edge thinking on education leadership and applying that expertise to the development of high-quality resources and learning opportunities for school and system leaders.

OnSIS — Thank you, once again, for maintaining a focus on submitting timely and accurate data to the ministry, especially at this busy time of year. As you know, OnSIS data is required to support both financial and policy-related activities. The dedication and commitment demonstrated by board and school staff across the province to ensure OnSIS deadlines are met is very much appreciated.
Many of you have shared with us various strategies that have been put in place to ensure that this critical activity is supported throughout the summer. Some have pointed out challenges in attempting to meet deadlines. A number of boards requested the option to enter data sooner for both panels, and we have since accommodated this request. We are also making enhancements to the OnSIS system that will result in continued improvements for board users. Ministry staff are working closely with your OnSIS contacts to provide assistance where feasible, and we are scheduling meetings with a small number of boards that are facing particular challenges.

As our consultations continue with boards in the weeks ahead, we are prepared to consider a minor extension to the July 31 deadline for secondary school data. Don Young will be communicating with you on this matter shortly.

**PD calendar** — As promised in Ben’s last letter to you, we recently launched a Calendar of Professional Learning Activities ([http://calendar.edu.gov.on.ca/](http://calendar.edu.gov.on.ca/)). This calendar represents a vital step in meeting our commitment to help boards and teachers plan for ministry PD activities. It lists large-scale professional learning activities for teachers, principals, system leaders, and support staff, and covers events either planned or anticipated by the ministry for the 2007–08 school year. While some summer PD is included in the calendar, additional opportunities have arisen since the calendar was launched. Some of these are highlighted below.

**On the horizon**

**Summer Professional Development**

- The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, in cooperation with district school boards, is pleased to offer summer programs again this year. These professional development opportunities in literacy and numeracy will be offered in July and August to elementary educators working in Ontario’s publicly funded school system. Since 2004, these programs have allowed thousands of elementary teachers to participate in a wide variety of two-day
workshops related to literacy and numeracy. The workshops provide educators with the opportunity to collaborate, observe specific teaching strategies, and reflect on their practices. All course offerings are available on the EDU website at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

- Again this year, the French-Language Education Policy and Programs Branch is funding Summer Institutes, through FARE, for teachers working in French-language schools. Building on last year’s tremendous success — more than 2,500 teachers participated in the workshops, an increase of close to 30 per cent over 2005 — the Summer Institutes will provide teachers with relevant, practical quality workshops to support student success. The courses will be offered from August 13 to August 30 and will address a variety of topics, such as educational approaches in a minority and/or multicultural context, strategies for teaching mathematics in elementary schools, and effective classroom management. Register early at www.cforp.on.ca.

- Training is also being offered this summer for board teams on the implementation of PPM No. 140, on Applied Behaviour Analysis, in schools across the province. Principal Training is scheduled for August 14, 15, and 16. School Team Training is scheduled for August 20–23, inclusive.

**Aboriginal students** — On November 26–28, 2007, the Ministry of Education is hosting "Circle of Light – A First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Conference: Achieving Excellence for All Students", in partnership with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. The purpose of the conference is to provide strategies, tools, and resources to support the achievement of Aboriginal students in Ontario.

**Education in the spotlight** — We are entering a period during which we can expect much discussion about our school systems and about the public sector in general. Perhaps more than ever, we need to continue to focus our attention on our key priorities and strategies – Literacy and Numeracy, Student Success, and Primary
Class Size. As we continue with implementation, we must constantly demonstrate to the public how the government’s significant additional investment in education over the past few years is producing results for students.

We have made significant progress in improving student achievement over the past few years, and we have managed to increase confidence in the publicly funded school systems. We must be diligent in maintaining this focus.

We must also continue to make progress in closing the gaps in the outcomes of groups of students such as boys, English language learners, Aboriginal students, special education students, and others. Some exciting new supports are now in place for these groups, but more must be done. Summer is always a good time to "refresh our thinking" – to take a hard look at what has been effective in our particular areas of work, what were the high-yield strategies, and so on. Ask yourself what it would take to close the achievement gap for these students. Think of one or two things that your board could undertake in the coming year or two, based on evidence and research, and that your whole system would endorse, to help bring about the necessary improvements.

Senior management and staff in the ministry will work over the summer to review our best advice on implementation strategies for the coming years. Input from you as to how we could do things differently, where we need to direct more attention — or, perhaps, less attention — would be useful. Do not hesitate to contact ministry staff with your advice, as you have done to such positive effect in the past.

**Champions of education** — Over the summer, I hope you will have time to reflect and recharge. As you do, I would like to encourage you to continue to demonstrate leadership, individually and as a group, as true champions of Ontario’s publicly funded education system in your communities.

As directors, you know at first hand how much has been achieved. And you also know that reaching our goals for students and for our school system will require even
stronger partnerships with our communities. You play a pivotal role in helping to build a sense of pride and to boost public confidence in our school system. I encourage you to tell your success stories boldly.

Finally, I am pleased to tell you that I expect to continue to serve as acting Deputy Minister of Education throughout the summer and into the fall, as the search for a permanent Deputy Minister continues. I look forward to your ongoing support and advice. Thank you once again and please accept my best wishes for a great summer.

Sincerely,

Philip Steenkamp (Acting)
Deputy Minister of Education