MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education  
FROM: Barry Pervin  
Assistant Deputy Minister (A)  
Instruction and Leadership Development Division  
DATE: December 12, 2008  
SUBJECT: Support for Closing the Gap: Funding for Safe, Equitable and Inclusive Schools

I am pleased to provide you with details on funding to promote school safety, equity and inclusive education, and to address harassment in our schools. Providing young people with an opportunity to grow and develop in a safe and respectful society is a shared responsibility in which schools play an important role. All students deserve to learn and develop in a safe, respectful and welcoming school environment; schools must be places where all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable and accepted.

The Ministry’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy will recognize diversity and promote inclusive education, as well as identify and eliminate discriminatory biases and barriers related to student learning, growing and contributing to society. Within the strategy, fairness and respect will be reaffirmed as essential principles of our publicly funded school system and will be integrated into all Ministry school board and school policies, procedures, programs and practices. The Ministry will be providing more specific direction to boards on equity and inclusive education shortly.

The government has already taken a number of steps in the past few years to address safety in schools. The Safe Schools Action Team (SSAT) was re-engaged earlier this year to look into the issues of gender-based violence, homophobia and sexual harassment; during its consultations, the SSAT also heard about issues of equity.

In response to the recommendations in the most recent SSAT’s report, Shaping a Culture of Respect in our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships, and in recognition of the Ministry’s commitment to an equity and inclusive education strategy for Ontario schools, the Ministry will be providing $4M as a one-time investment in order to support boards’ efforts to target systemic barriers related to gender, race, ethnic origin, religion, socioeconomic background, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation or other similar social or cultural characteristics and to prevent gender-based violence, homophobia and sexual harassment.
The funding may be used for any of the following:

- developing training materials and delivering training for new and existing safe schools initiatives/responsibilities (including, but not limited to, sensitivity training, identifying and reporting sexual abuse, serious incident investigations by principals), and the equity and inclusive education strategy;
- the purchase of resources that focus on prevention, intervention, outreach and awareness raising of gender-based bullying, homophobia, sexual harassment, inappropriate sexual behaviour, equity and inclusive education, critical media literacy, and safe internet use;
- planning and/or coordinating activities in support of initiatives that promote equity and inclusive education and that are designed to target systemic barriers and all forms of discrimination named as prohibited grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code; and/or,
- supporting board activities related to reviewing, developing or implementing safe schools or equity and inclusive education policies, programs and action plans.

In considering the best use of their funding, schools should base their decisions on what program best meets the specific needs of the school community. The school climate survey is a very useful tool to use in determining these needs, and the Registry described below will also assist schools and their safe schools teams in making programming decisions.

A board by board allocation is attached as well as a Transfer Payment Agreement indicating your board's/school authority’s total allocation for this initiative. Please print and sign two copies of the Transfer Payment Agreement and return them to the Policy and Program Branch by December 19, 2008. Funding will flow to boards in January; funds are to be spent in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

I would like to take the opportunity to inform you of updates that we have made to some tools to assist you in making your schools safe, equitable and inclusive.

**Registry of Resources for Safe and Inclusive Schools**

To assist schools in identifying which resources might best meet their needs, the online Registry of Bullying Prevention programs is being updated and expanded in the new year to include resources that help prevent gender-based violence, homophobia and sexual harassment, as well as target systemic barriers and all forms of discrimination named as prohibited grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code. Resources may also help teachers to identify and/or develop inclusive classroom strategies that reflect school-wide equity and inclusive education policies and practices, or provide guidelines on how schools can actively engage the community to provide representation of diverse groups on school committees. Schools are encouraged to consult the Registry in the selection of their programs/resources.

The Registry will continue to help to inform educators and school based teams about which elements of an effective prevention/promotion program are present in each program and resource, as well as their cost and age appropriateness.

Companies, vendors and boards who wish to have their programs classified and included on the Registry are encouraged to do so. The Registry will be updated regularly.

**School Climate Surveys**

PPM 144: *Bullying Prevention and Intervention*, states that boards must establish a monitoring and review process to determine the effectiveness of their bullying prevention and intervention policies and procedures. This process should include an analysis of the school climate through anonymous surveys of students, staff members, and parents provided by their schools.
A revised version of the sample school climate surveys will be available on the Ministry’s website in early 2009; they have been revised to capture more information around incidents of sexual and gender-based bullying, as well as homophobia. The format of the surveys will also be changed to allow more flexibility in their delivery. The survey will be available to be completed online, or schools may download them in pdf (read only) format or in Word which would enable schools/boards to add/revise questions to make them relevant to local circumstances. The online version of the survey will soon be linked to a calculation/assessment tool that will allow principals to print reports specific to their school’s results.

Training Resources
The Ministry is committed to provide training resources that promote safe schools, equity and inclusive education. These resources will also address gender-based bullying, homophobia, sexual harassment and are designed to target systemic barriers and all forms of discrimination named as prohibited grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code. Following the release of the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and consistent with the Ministry response to the most recent SSAT report we will be working with key partners to develop training resources for the coming school year.

I would like to thank you for your ongoing efforts to support student success and well being. We want to build upon those and ensure that all students feel safe in their schools and that schools are inclusive places to learn. We will continue to update you as information becomes available. If you have any questions, please contact your Ministry Regional Office or Norman Stormes, the Safe Schools Implementation Co-ordinator at Norman.Stormes@ontario.ca.

Original signed by
Barry Pervin
Assistant Deputy Minister (A)

c. Ministry of Education Regional Office Managers