MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities

FROM: George Zegarac
Deputy Minister

DATE: December 10, 2012

RE: School Board Amalgamations Update

In May, the Ministry asked you to be part of a process to find greater efficiencies at the school board level through possible amalgamations. This was necessary to ensure that the Ministry of Education could find a pathway to the long-term sustainability of our publicly funded education system.

Finding greater efficiencies in how we deliver education is an important piece of moving toward sustainability. In this work, we have an opportunity to be creative and innovative as we work together to ensure that student needs are met. We also entered this initiative recognizing that we wanted it to be very different from previous amalgamation processes. We made it clear that we wanted to hear from you with your best advice, ideas and insights.

Since then, the Minister of Education has met with each school board association and the ministry met with school board staff over the summer to get input on principles for moving forward with effective processes and also to solicit feedback. During regional pre-consultation sessions, many participants were clear that this was not the right time to move forward with school board amalgamations. It was also shared with us that there could be other ways to find savings including back-office consolidation.

As a result of this feedback, we have made a decision to meet the savings target associated with board amalgamations through other means. The expectations of the education sector in helping to meet the Ministry of Education budget target remain unchanged. We still need everyone to do their part. And we continue to work with boards and their communities to ensure student needs are met.
When this initiative was launched we asked that boards adjust their financial and operating planning horizons with respect to the hiring of senior staff and long-term projects and agreements. While we will be returning to a more normalized footing, I would ask that boards continue to exercise good judgement about such decisions in the current fiscal environment.

I encourage boards to make progress on the commitment you have expressed in the past several months in finding opportunities for more innovative partnerships and greater efficiencies.

Protecting what we value most in education in Ontario in these tough financial times is a challenge that will require the best of our energies and ideas. We look forward to the opportunity to re-group and re-engage with school boards and education partners on finding solutions that will work across the province, and that will have us make further progress as a world leader in education.

Thank you, as always, for your hard work and dedication to Ontario’s publicly funded education system.

George Zegarac  
Deputy Minister