December 9, 2010

Dear Colleagues,

This is always a particularly energizing time of year in our sector, with the buzz, activity and excitement that go with a new school year well underway and the holiday season fast approaching. Let me take this opportunity to wish you, your staff and students much success for 2010-11.

The purpose of this letter is to update you on recent activities and upcoming plans by the Ministry of Education in the area of teaching and learning in a digital world, set within the context of our well-established whole system reform strategy.

Some of you may be aware that in January at the annual CODE CEO conference I committed the ministry to begin a process of dialogue within the sector to consider if there are technology-enabled teaching and learning innovation topics that would warrant deeper investigation at the system level.

Since that meeting, the ministry has been working to meet the commitments I made on its behalf to:

- undertake policy research to inform the discussions
- begin sector dialogues, and,
- work in partnership with CODE on a scan of current activity in district school boards on visioning, policy and initiatives connected with teaching and learning in a digital world.

It is now time to tell you about our progress and outline the ministry’s plans to lead further dialogue sessions in the sector, including hosting roundtable discussions with key education stakeholders beginning in January.

First, I am pleased to report that all commitments that I made at the start of the year have been met now, as follows.

Research was commissioned in March and a final report by Professor Jennifer Jenson of York University was received by the ministry at the end of August, with a copy attached for your information. Professor Jenson’s report on the policy trends across 15 comparator jurisdictions in the areas of technology-enabled curriculum, teacher professional development, adaptive and...
assistive technologies and student engagement will enrich our understanding of this complex policy field and help to inform our future discussions. Additional copies of the report in English and French are available electronically on the ministry’s web-site.

On June 10th, the ministry started the sector dialogue process by hosting two Expert Roundtables to discuss opportunities and challenges connected with teaching, learning and systemic innovation in a digital world. A summary of these preliminary discussions is also attached for your information (see What We Heard – June Roundtables).

Thirdly, with your commitment and that of your designated staff, all 72 district school boards completed the CODE-Field Services Branch Sector Snapshot through telephone interviews conducted by ministry regional office staff in June and July. Thank you. The ministry is delighted with this 100% participation and we very much appreciate that boards made this a priority during a very busy time in the school year.

The next steps in the ministry’s process of dialogue with the sector will be to discuss what we are learning to-date with members of the Partnership Table, and, to continue our ongoing discussions in a number of forums with directors of education about emerging themes and potential priorities for action. The ministry will be inviting members of the Partnership Table to participate in Roundtable discussions being organized for January 13, 2011, in Toronto. I have also accepted CODE’s invitation for the ministry to hold a session on teaching and learning in a digital world at the upcoming CODE CEO conference on January 26, 2011.

It is important to anchor our deliberations about teaching and learning in a digital world within a big picture context, one in which Ontario has a growing presence on the international scene as a school system that has reshaped itself and pushed the boundaries of what one can expect from large-scale reform efforts. This month’s release of the results of PISA 2009 show that Ontario’s students are among the world’s best readers and that excellence and equity are also hallmarks of Ontario’s education system. Ontario is among the few jurisdictions in the world with both high achievement in reading and a relatively small performance gap between students from high- and low-income households. This is a proud accomplishment for everyone in our schools that represents much hard work together at every level of the system, firmly focused on our three education goals—improving student achievement, closing the gap in student achievement and improving public confidence in our schools.

We are never done teaching and we are never done learning. So, even while we press forward together on deeper and more precise implementation of Ontario’s whole school reform strategy, at the same time we still need to keep learning and be alert to innovation opportunities that will help us achieve our goals for education. That’s where the Roundtables and sector discussions at the CODE CEO conference play an important role by providing forums to share ideas and best thinking on potential actions geared to assuring the ongoing and future vibrancy and success of our schools and students.
We have heard the Premier affirm the welcome role for technology in the classroom that enables and extends learning. If that’s not their use, they’re a distraction and they don’t belong. There is already a considerable body of literature available to inform our work in this area, yet important gaps in knowledge and impact evidence persist. Ontario educators have an opportunity to contribute their expertise to knowledge building in the wider global education community. In our daily practice in whatever our role is in the sector, we also share a heightened responsibility in these times of fiscal constraint to ensure evidence-based decision making when investing public resources in areas where they will make a demonstrable difference to student learning.

International bodies including the OECD, European Commission, World Bank and UNESCO are making important contributions through scholarly evidence-based research, which are helping to inform policy deliberations worldwide, built upon new evidence and emerging conceptual frameworks from the learning sciences. I draw attention to one report just released in 2010 by the OECD that is particularly timely and relevant as we begin our Ontario-based sector dialogue on teaching and learning in a digital world. If interested, further information about *Inspired by Technology, Driven by Pedagogy: A Systemic Approach to Technology-Based School Innovations* (OECD, 2010) can be found on the OECD web-site at [http://www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org).

I look forward to further discussion opportunities in the coming months with directors of education about how we may work together to best harness the enabling capacity of technologies to promote innovation and effective teaching and learning practices for a knowledge-based society and increasingly digital global economy, in keeping with the government’s system-wide goals and whole school reform strategy for education. I hope you find the enclosed reports to be informative and supportive of what we intend to be a collaborative, disciplined process of inquiry and policy development with the sector, leading to progress through action.

Kevin Costante  
Deputy Minister  

2 attachments