January 4, 2010

Dear Colleague,

I am writing today to let you know that we will be beginning our annual GSN consultation in January. As part of this year’s consultation, we will be looking for your association’s views and suggestions on how to improve the education funding formula in 2010-11 and future years in the context of limited government resources and a projected 2009-10 deficit of $24.7 billion.

The needs of school boards, students, and government are always changing and evolving, and this year is no different. Since taking office, we have tried to address these changes in a thoughtful and fiscally responsible manner through increased funding and structural reforms. For example, the education system needed funding adequacy, and I am proud to say that we have increased funding to school boards by $5 billion, or 34 percent, which translates into a per-pupil increase of over $3,000 a student, or 42 percent.

We have also made a series of significant changes to the funding formula to make it more equitable, effective, and accountable. These changes include introducing measures to support student achievement and reduce gaps in achievement, moving to a more school-based funding formula, aligning grants and school board costs, providing better support for rural and northern schools, and improving the state of our school buildings. We have also introduced some modest and manageable constraint measures to protect the gains that we have made.

Most recently, we have introduced the Early Learning Program, which will ultimately be supported through the funding formula. It is important to note that we have done all this while using the formula to support a further four years of labour peace, progress, and stability.
We know that we have made important progress in reforming the funding formula over the past several years, but the funding formula will always be a work in progress. That is why we are seeking your views as major education stakeholders. What we need to know is: “Are we getting it right? Have our changes had the desired results, and, if not, what should we be doing differently, or perhaps, not at all? Are there other structural changes that might better support our objectives for education? And, perhaps most importantly, in light of the Province’s fiscal challenges, are there measures that could be taken to reduce expenditures or make the system more efficient and effective?”

We are working towards an early spring release of the Grants for Students Needs (GSN) so that boards have the time they need to make staffing decisions and plan their budgets for the coming school year. The GSN consultation sessions will again be led by my Parliamentary Assistant Liz Sandals and will be conducted in January, so that the results can be factored into the development of the 2010-11 GSN. Ministry staff will be contacting your office to set up a consultation time.

As part of the 2010-11 GSN consultations, I would ask that you submit your comments and suggestions to Didem Proulx, Director of the Education Finance Branch, at didem.proulx@ontario.ca, by February 15, 2010.

I am very proud of the reforms that we have made thus far to the funding formula, but I also know that with your help we can make it better. I look forward to hearing your views on how we can continue to refine the funding formula, with due consideration to the fiscal challenges that lay before us.

With your goodwill, and wise and generous counsel, we will continue to use the funding formula to strengthen the education sector, to support student achievement, and to increase the richness of our students’ learning experience.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education

cc. Liz Sandals, MPP
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education