June 29, 2011

To: Directors of Education
   Directors of Autism Intervention Program
   Directors of Community Agencies

From: Kevin Costante, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education
      George Zegarac, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children and Youth Services

Re: Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD): Connections for Students

Thank you for contribution to the successful province-wide implementation of the Connections for Students model this past year. As you know, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and the Ministry of Education (EDU) have been working closely to improve supports for students with ASD through the implementation of Collaborative Service Delivery Models (CSDM) for Students with ASD (Phase 1 and Phase 2) and the full implementation of the Connections for Students model.

Connections for Students transition teams have been established and are now available in all 72 publicly-funded school boards in the province for all students leaving Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) services delivered through the Autism Intervention Program (AIP) and starting or continuing in the publicly-funded school system. Connections for Students has provided more seamless transitions for school-aged children and youth with ASD, enhanced collaboration among school staff, parent(s)/guardian(s) and community providers to plan and support students’ transitions from IBI to Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) in school settings, and enhanced school board and school capacity to meet the needs of students with ASD and their families.

As of September 30, 2010, 819 children and youth were served province-wide through Connections for Students. In order to build on our current success, school boards and regional autism service providers are encouraged to continue to collaborate and work
together to achieve improved outcomes and seamless transitions for the 2011-12 school year. As clinical decisions are made regarding the readiness of a child to leave the AIP, regional autism service providers and school boards should be communicating and initiating the transitions process for those children and youth that are identified as ready for transition to ABA instructional methods in publicly-funded schools.

To provide further support, a range of resources to support implementation of the *Connections for Students* model continue to be available on the *Council of Ontario Directors of Education* (CODE) website at [www.ontariodirectors.ca](http://www.ontariodirectors.ca). Additionally, the Provincial Advisory Team (PAT) has identified best practices regarding the implementation of the *Connections for Students* model, based on their experience and participation as an advisory team to the Ministries of Children and Youth Services and Education during the various phases of CSDM for Students with ASD (see attached appendix).

The effective work relationships, shared approaches, and best practices developed through the implementation of the *Connections for Students* Model have broad applicability to all students with special needs/special education needs. Your work over this past year has demonstrated the positive impacts of successful collaborative relationships.

We would like to thank you again for your commitment to the provincial implementation of *Connections for Students* model. We sincerely appreciate your continued efforts to support children/youth with ASD and their families.

Please contact your local MEDU or MCYS regional office if you have any questions.

Kevin Costante  
Deputy Minister

George Zegarac  
Deputy Minister

Attachment: