June 17, 2011

Memorandum to: Directors of Education
Partnership Table members

From: Kevin Costante
Deputy Minister

Subject: End of School Year Message

Dear Colleagues,

As the 2010-11 school year draws to a close, it is a good time to reflect on what we have accomplished as a sector in the past year, and to look forward to the upcoming year.

Thanks to your efforts, and those of the entire sector, we have continued to make good things happen in Ontario’s schools over the past eight months. Many of our achievements are measurable: EQAO assessment results show 68 per cent of Ontario’s students in Grades 3 and 6 are achieving at or above the provincial standard in reading, writing and math – a 14 percentage points increase since 2002-03. I want to particularly note the achievement of our French language boards – they are making great progress and seeing excellent results.

81% of students are graduating with a high school diploma. This means 72,000 more students graduated than would have had the rate remained at the 2003-4 level. I think it’s worth noting that student success isn’t just about increasing achievement and narrowing the gap, or the graduation rate -- it is about ensuring that every student can graduate from high school with a very positive outcome and the best chance for success.

Back in September 2010, Ontario hosted ‘Building Blocks for Education: Whole System Reform’ -- an international summit featuring delegates and speakers from 11 countries who shared ideas and looked at new ways to help solve the challenges facing students from Ontario and around the world. It was an inspiring start to the school year.

Our achievements have been noted on the international front, including PISA results, the McKinsey study “How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better” and others. We talk about our success as a system a great deal, and we have the international information and data that makes it very clear that, as a result of our good work together, Ontario’s students are doing better.
Of course, there is always more work to be done – and more to learn. With your support and help, we have laid the groundwork for increased success in the upcoming year. I'll point out a few highlights.

- By all accounts, our first year of full-day kindergarten has been a great success. Parents, administrators, kindergarten teams – and especially the children themselves – are giving the new play-based program rave reviews. I am proud of what we have accomplished in such a short time thanks to the outstanding work of all of our partners.

- We've now announced all five years of FDK sites, so boards, parents and communities know when this program will be coming to their local school. It’s great to know that every 4- and 5-year old child will be able to go to full-day kindergarten by September 2014.

- We now have responsibility for child care policy and contract and program management. We are now working with municipalities and with 57 First Nations to finalize contracts for child care funding. As I've visited some child care centres, I’ve come to realize more than ever that bringing child care into this ministry is a recognition that learning happens just as much in those early years as is does during grade school or beyond. We’re looking forward in the year ahead to integrating child care more fully into every aspect of our work in EDU.

- More than $600 million in capital projects has been announced for new schools, additions and renovations. This investment in the education sector will result in over 70 new or renovated schools for Ontario’s students.

- In recognition of the impact leadership has on student achievement and well-being, we continue to put in place supports to leverage that strength:
  - More than 3,500 principals and vice-principals have benefited from the support of a trained mentor over a 2-year period; and 2000 principals and vice-principals have acted as mentors.
  - Principal Performance Appraisal is being implemented and an appraisal system for supervisory officers is currently under development.

- On the student success front:
  - A promising re–engagement initiative called Twelve Twelve Plus was introduced, targeting students who had accumulated a grade eleven equivalency or more -- within a year of graduating -- and then disappeared from the system.
  - Through the initiative, 14,000 students were contacted; 7,000 re-engaged; 3,500 remained enrolled into the second semester.
  - Specialist High Skills Major and Dual Credits programs are showing unprecedented growth.

- The School Food and Beverage Policy, including the nutrition standards (PPM 150) comes into effect in September 2011.

- Financial Literacy will be integrated into the curriculum this September, enhancing students’ financial literacy education. Teachers will have additional supports to connect financial literacy topics across the curriculum to deepen and enrich student learning.

As we get closer to achieving our goals, the work becomes more difficult, and requires personalization and precision to ensure our efforts reach every student. The road to our best
education system isn’t – and won’t be – an easy one, but it can be exciting, interesting and energizing

Thank you for your contributions and commitment through 2010-11. I hope I can count on your continued collaboration and dedication as we work for the success of all Ontario’s students and their families.

Sincerely,

Kevin Costante
Deputy Minister