MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Supervisory Officers and Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities

FROM: George Zegarac
Deputy Minister

DATE: June 19, 2012

SUBJECT: Bill 13, Accepting Schools Act - Implementation

As you are aware, on June 5, 2012, Bill 13 was passed by the Ontario Legislature. The purpose of this memo is to provide you with a summary of the legislative requirements set out in Bill 13 and ministry expectations regarding implementation to assist you with your review and planning.

I would appreciate it if you shared this information with your Chair and your management team.

Our schools have made tremendous progress working together with parents, students, teachers, school staff and community members. We know there is more to do, and we want to build on the excellent work that has been done so far.

Through our strategies on safe schools and equity and inclusive education, the ministry in partnership with school boards and stakeholders has taken steps to make Ontario schools safe, inclusive and accepting places to learn. Building on the success of these strategies, the government announced the Comprehensive Action Plan for Accepting Schools in December 2011, which included:

- Legislation (Bill 13: Accepting Schools Act, 2012). This legislation will require all school boards to take preventative measures against bullying and support students who want to promote understanding and respect for all;
- New mental health workers in schools – as part of Ontario’s 10-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy – and expanded telepsychiatry (video counselling) services for kids;
- Direction to Ontario’s Curriculum Council to report on strengthening equity and inclusive education principles, and bullying prevention strategies across the curriculum and suggesting ways to support this learning in Ontario schools;
A public awareness campaign that will stress that all Ontarians have a role in preventing and ending bullying; and
An Accepting Schools Expert Panel to provide advice on evidence-informed resources and practices that focus on a whole school approach, including bullying prevention and intervention.


As you know, a positive school climate is critical to student achievement and well-being. We have seen the statistics and we know that safe, inclusive and accepting schools are key to supporting our students to reach their full potential — both in the classroom and beyond. Research has shown us that rejection and exclusion are associated with behavioural problems in the classroom, lower interest in school, lower student achievement and higher dropout rates. These findings also show that students who feel welcome, accepted and connected to school are more likely to succeed.

That’s why the Accepting Schools Act is clear about our commitment to safe, inclusive and accepting schools for all students. This new legislation sets out clear expectations and ways to increase our accountability to parents and the public and creates legal obligations for school boards and schools to take additional measures to prevent and address bullying, as well as other inappropriate student behaviour. Attached please find a summary of Bill 13 legislative requirements. You will also see that we have included preliminary expectations with regard to implementation and timing. The ministry plans to invest approximately $64M in 2012-13 to support safe, inclusive and accepting schools, which includes new funding of $6.6M for accepting schools initiatives to support students and provide training for school staff.

Creating and sustaining a positive and inclusive school culture is a complex challenge and requires evidence-informed solutions. A strong legislative and policy framework, coupled with the whole school approach are important steps to bringing about necessary systemic change. The whole school approach to positive, healthy behaviour involves using multiple strategies that have a unifying purpose and reflect a common set of values. It requires that all stakeholders work together to create a safe, inclusive and accepting environment. The whole school approach requires policies, procedures and programs at all levels. As you know this culture change will require your strong and committed leadership.
The ministry will continue to work with you and our diverse stakeholders as well as the Accepting School Expert Panel to support implementation of the legislation and embed the whole school approach.

I appreciate all the work that boards have undertaken to support all our students to achieve their full potential and look forward to working with you in the months ahead. If you have any questions, please contact your Regional Office Education Officer Lead.

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George Zegarac

Attachment

cc: Regional Managers
    Partnership Table
    Members