MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education

FROM: Janine Griffore
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DATE: May 13, 2013

SUBJECT: Graduation Rates at the School Board Level

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform you about the Ministry’s plan to calculate and provide school boards with their graduation rate for the 2012-13 school year in March 2014 and to publish school board graduation rates for the 2013-14 school year in March 2015.

The graduation rate is a key indicator of student success. In Ontario, the provincial graduation rate has steadily increased from 68% in 2003-04 to 83% in 2011-12. The Ministry will continue its practice of providing preliminary information on cohort student counts and corresponding graduates to school boards ahead of publicly reporting the rate. This will allow school boards time to prepare for managing issues that may arise as well as helping to confirm the accuracy of the data.

The publication of school board graduation rates will improve transparency of the Ministry’s mandate to promote a strong public education system through reporting high levels of student achievement. In addition, the Ministry is committed to comply with the 2011 Student Success audit by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario which recommended that the Ministry and school boards develop a common method for school boards to calculate and report graduation rates and other student success indicators.
As you are aware, there has been considerable discussion around this refinement of the use of graduation rate data. In the spring of 2010, a working group was established to identify a consistent and accurate method of calculating individual school board graduation rates. The working group included representation from school boards, the Managing Information for Student Achievement (MISA) Advisory Committee and the Ministry of Education and made a number of helpful recommendations.

A presentation was made to Directors of Education at the August 20, 2010 CODE meeting and the indication at that time was that Directors preferred that data necessary to calculate board graduation rates be provided to boards in advance.

Based on feedback received from the field, another working group involving school board and Ministry personnel was convened to review the original working group’s recommendations and identify options that the government could consider. The working groups agreed upon a number of factors relevant to determining board-level graduation rates including:

- The use of standardized calculations that are consistent with those used to determine the provincial five-year cohort graduation rate;
- That students who transfer between school boards within Ontario will be counted as part of the cohort of students of the board in which they first entered grade 9;
- The inclusion of associated student mobility data to be released to boards at the same time as the graduation rate in order to provide a clear indication of the extent to which these board transfers affect graduation numbers.

The Ministry made formal presentations at the MISA events on March 24, 2011 and October 26, 2011 and comments from MISA representatives supported the concept of the Ministry calculating and reporting board level graduation rates.

Currently the provincial graduation rate is based on the percentage of students who graduate within five years after starting grade 9 in Ontario. For alignment with the provincial graduation rate, the same methodology will be applied to calculate school board graduation rates.
The Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) is the data source used for calculating graduation rates. After six years of ongoing quality assurance, validation and verification of the data in OnSIS, the Ministry in collaboration with schools and school boards has made improvements to the quality and completeness of the data. The most recent example of our commitment to working collaboratively towards improving data in OnSIS is the Confirmation of Diploma Data for Re-engaging Students and for Verifying Completeness exercise in January 2013. It is through the efforts of schools and school boards that the Ministry is now in a position to calculate graduation rates at the school board level.

Thank you for your ongoing support and co-operation. The Ministry has built a board interface portal which provides detailed diploma information at the board and school level. The Ministry will continue to support school boards during this transition period and after. If you have any questions or comments, please contact the OnSIS help desk at 416.212.6366 or 1.888.275.5934 or by e-mail at onsis_sison@ontario.ca.

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