September 4, 2013

Dear Directors of Education,

Welcome back to another school year. I hope you enjoyed your summer and were able to spend some quality time with family and friends.

The back-to-school season is an exciting time for everyone. School boards, administrators, educators, students and parents are busy preparing for the year ahead.

The first day of school marks a new beginning, a fresh start. And it is also an opportunity to build on our previous successes and reflect on our past achievements.

We have a lot to be proud of and plenty to celebrate. Our education system is world-renowned and considered one of the best on the planet. This is a testament to the hard work and dedication shown by people like you.

As we aspire to even greater heights, we will continue to focus on our three core priorities:

1) Higher levels of student achievement

2) Reduced gaps in student achievement

3) Increased public confidence in publicly funded education

In support of these priorities, full-day kindergarten remains one of our most important investments. The rollout of FDK is entering its fourth year and will now be available to three-quarters of Ontario’s four and five-year-olds. As of September, 184,000 children, at approximately 2,600 schools, will benefit from FDK, ensuring they develop the social, emotional, academic and physical skills for life-long success.

We are also committed to helping the province’s more vulnerable learners succeed. Many of our aboriginal students, children and youth in care, children with mental health issues, and those in need of special education support, struggle within our system. And the data shows there is a persistent gap in achievement for many First Nation, Métis and Inuit students. Closing these achievement gaps continues to be one of our top priorities, and some of the work you are doing to support safe, accepting and healthy schools shows promise in helping to address this.
Another top priority is to raise the bar in mathematics since strong math skills are critical to a lifetime of success. While we have made some gains over the past 10 years, we have been losing ground in the last few years. We must strive for the same kind of improvement in student achievement for numeracy that we have attained for literacy.

Collective bargaining will be another area of focus for the ministry for the year ahead. As you may know, the government has been consulting on a new provincial bargaining framework for the next round of negotiations. Your feedback during the consultation period has been invaluable. This dialogue will help shape a new legislative framework designed to clarify the roles of all parties involved during labour negotiations.

There are other consultations coming up in the near future that will help us work better together, be more efficient with our resources, and allow us to update our vision for the future. Thank you in advance for your input. We recognize that your time, and that of your staff, is valuable.

We know that there are many pressures on you as leaders of our public education system and we appreciate your skill and dedication in working towards enhanced outcomes for children and youth in our schools.

In order to clearly communicate the work of the Ministry of Education, I am pleased to let you know that Ministry of Education Update document will be sent electronically to each and every director of education and supervisory officer in the province. This document highlights key facts, describes upcoming events and initiatives, and provides funding information and links to pertinent references.

Another tool you will find helpful is the Calendar of Education Events (CEE), previously called the “Professional Learning and Implementation Supports Calendar.” This has been updated to reflect feedback we received from you, including more frequent updates and easier access. The CEE contains details about regional and provincial events. The tool is available in both English and French.

I trust you will find this information useful and encourage you to share it with your staff. Please contact your Regional Manager if you have questions about the material presented here.

I’d also like to welcome all of the directors of education, supervisory officers and principals who are taking on these roles for the first time this year. I recognize that your leadership in the system is more important than ever, and I encourage you to take advantage of the ministry resources that are available to support you.

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More and more, we are realizing how competitive our global economy is becoming and how important a solid education is to the success of Ontario and its people. This highlights the need to focus even more on higher levels of student achievement and closing gaps, while also putting more emphasis on higher-order skills. These efforts will help ensure that our students, and their parents, remain confident in our ability to educate and prepare them for the future.

As always, I thank you for your hard work, and I look forward to our continued collaboration and success in 2013-14.

Sincerely,

George Zegarac
Deputy Minister

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