Thank you for the productive meeting held at the Doubletree Hotel in Toronto on September 11th and 12th. I congratulate you on reaching a Provincial Discussion Table (PDT) Agreement involving education support workers represented by OSSTF.

Facilitators also remain available to assist with the conclusion of School Authorities’ Collective Agreements. Local Parties will be invited to attend a meeting to occur in the first two weeks of November 2008. Local Parties will be requested to limit their respective delegations to a maximum of two persons for whom the Ministry of Education will pay travel and living expenses.

The Ministry recognizes the value of ongoing provincial dialogue as a means to sustain labour peace and progress, student success and student safety.

I am pleased that your organizations have agreed to take part into a Support Workers Advisory Group (SWAG), to be appointed by the Minister. The SWAG shall be a tripartite body composed of the Ministry and representatives from unions representing education support workers and School Board Associations. It will be established by December 31, 2008 and be in effect until August 31, 2012.

The SWAG shall:

- Discuss issues brought to it by the Minister, the Ministry, or any one of the Parties that arise from the implementation of the PDT Agreement-over the course of the term of Collective Agreements;
- Advise the Minister on the implementation of Government initiatives in publicly funded elementary and secondary schools;
- Discuss the following issues:
  - Exemplary practices in labour relations;
  - Effective practices to improve the grievance/arbitration process, without loss of rights in Collective Agreements;
  - Safe Schools;
  - Apprenticeship initiatives and the shortage and difficulty in attracting skilled trades personnel in School Boards;
  - Availability of information from Ontario Students’ Records (OSR);
o Expansion of programs for four and five year olds;
  o Changes to the title of “Teacher Assistants” in the *Education Act* to “Education Assistants”;
  o Roles and responsibilities of Education Assistants;
  o Inclusion of Professional Student Support Services in the *Education Act*;
  o Issues related to declining enrolment;
  o Implications of initiatives such as Community Use of Schools and the balanced school day;
  • Consider such other issues as agreed to by the participants or that may from time-to-time be directed by the Minister.

The Minister will draft Terms of Reference, after consultation with the Parties.

A French-language sub-committee will be established to address issues of particular interest to French-Language School Boards which could include the above-mentioned subjects.

All expenses related to the participation in the SWAG and its sub-committee(s) will be funded by the Ministry of Education, with the assumption that all time spent by members to attend meetings of the SWAG shall be treated as paid time based on a regular work day.

The Ministry also intends to maintain ongoing bilateral engagement mechanisms with OSSTF, as per current practice with similar organizations.

The government recognizes that publicly funded education is best served when students and staff work in a safe and secure environment.

The government commits that a Board shall receive the Elementary supervision enhancement described in the Ministry of Education’s Memorandum 2008:B10 effective during the 2008-09 school year if the OSSTF Bargaining Unit representing Educational Assistants or the OSSTF Bargaining Unit representing Office Support Staff and the Board fully comply locally with the conditions associated with the PDT Agreement reached on September 12, 2008.

I am pleased that your organizations have agreed to join a Joint Task Group by December 1, 2008, with representation from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Education Support Workers’ Unions and School Boards’ Associations, to examine and report to the Parties on the issue of workplace violence in schools, including:

• A review of exemplary policies and procedures that deal with the prevention of violence, the management of violent situations and the support to employees who have experienced violence;
• A review of the pertinent legislation;
• The provision of appropriate training including the recognition, prevention and control of violent situations and physical intervention techniques;
• The role of the Joint Health and Safety Committees.

The Joint Task Group will develop a report which recommends effective policies and procedures to the Parties no later than December 31, 2009. All expenses related to the participation in the Joint Task Group will be funded by the Ministry, with the assumption that all time spent by members to attend meetings of the Joint Task Group shall be treated as paid time based on a regular work day. The government is committed to promoting effective inter-ministerial and community-based partnerships to foster continuous improvement in the delivery of services and/or programs to students with special
needs and/or at-risk students. Therefore, the Ministry will develop a Provincial Protocol Template and/or Guiding Principles for partnerships with external agencies in the areas of regulated health professionals, and social service professionals, in consultation with your organizations.

This new Provincial Protocol Template and/or Guiding Principles will assist Boards in developing and/or reviewing existing local Protocols. Without impeding a Board’s ability and responsibility to provide services and/or programs to students with special needs and/or at-risk students, this new resource will consider:

- The participation of local Professional Student Services Personnel staff in reviewing potential partnership opportunities with external agencies;
- Any duplication of services and/or programs already provided by Board staff or services and/or programs which could be delivered by Board staff.

Finally, the Ministry will:

- Be inviting your organizations to contribute to an external study of school operations’ costs, funded by the Ministry, to inform the 2010 funding model review;
- Provide to OSSTF and the Boards relevant student enrolment and staffing information from Boards’ Estimates, Revised Estimates and Financial Statements for each school year covered by this PDT Agreement, to monitor the provincial deployment of staffing positions provided for in this PDT Agreement;
- As jointly requested by the Parties, remove the proposed section 57.2(1)(c) of the 2008-09 Grants for Student Needs (GSN), as per the draft revised GSN regulation released on August 18, 2008. Subject to the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, this change will be reflected when amendments to the 2008-09 GSN regulation are filed.

I thank you for your ongoing commitment to labour peace and progress in Ontario’s publicly-funded schools. If you have any question, please contact Margot Trevelyan at (416) 325-2836 or at margot.trevelyan@ontario.ca

Sincerely,

Dominic Giroux
Assistant Deputy Minister
c. Directors of Education
Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities