Dear Teacher Candidate:

I know you are looking forward to completing your formal teacher training soon and I hope you are strongly considering joining the profession here in Ontario. As you may already know, the McGuinty government has several initiatives underway to improve education in our province that will translate into several thousand new teaching positions, despite slightly declining enrolment overall.

Last November, I wrote to you with positive news about several improvements in our support for new teachers. We followed through with our intent to suspend the OTQT for the spring of 2005.

To allow you to teach in Ontario’s publicly funded education system without writing the OTQT, a regulatory change by the Ministry and the Ontario College of Teachers was necessary, as the previous government had embedded the pen-and-paper test requirement in legislation. The regulation confirms that you will be eligible for a Certificate of Qualification (Provisional) when you graduate. (Our alternative would have been to have you go through the time and expense of writing the test and cost the system some $4 million annually that we can now use to support new teachers instead).

Our government intends that this will be a temporary provision and that we will propose more permanent changes once we have had a chance to fully consult the sector, including you and your colleagues. We are now moving to the design stage of an induction year for new teachers that could involve mentoring, increased professional development opportunities and other resources to supplement pre-service training, which will be completed by June. As I indicated in November, there may be some form of assessment done at the end of the first year of teaching. Our goal is to streamline the various teacher appraisals, probation and other evaluations you face, so that the system is more supportive and less burdensome. We are also currently establishing a teacher-development working group, which will include teacher candidates and a corresponding member from each faculty of education.

I want to assure you that there will be many positive benefits and no detrimental impact from the changes that are underway for new and continuing teachers. You should also know that the current designation is similar to that provided by many jurisdictions, including Nova Scotia and some states in the U.S. and Australia, and will not diminish your accomplishment. All beginning teachers trained in Ontario will, of course, be operating under the same designation. Our Ministry will work with the Ontario College of Teachers to ensure that all prospective employers are kept informed and fully understand these changes.

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I appreciate that change, even when positive, can lend itself to uncertainty, but I hope you will agree that it is vital that the Ontario government improve support for beginning teachers. Previously, one in three new teachers left the profession within the first five years.

Finally, I would like to encourage you to join OPEN (Ontario Provincial Education Network), which is an e-mail network that will help keep you informed and invite your input as the new teacher development program is designed. You may join OPEN by registering online at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca.

We value your commitment to teaching and education and, in turn, our government is committed to your success. Thank you for choosing teaching and I want to take this opportunity to wish you all the best as you conclude your studies and with your career ahead.

Sincerely,

Gerard Kennedy
Minister of Education