

## **OPSBA Consultation Resource for the Ministry of Education's *Consultation: Education in Ontario***

This consultation resource includes evidence-based information and past position statements for each government consultation question. The OPSBA Education Program Work Team and the Policy Development Work Team provided valuable input into the development of the resource. It contains information statements that can be used by and expanded upon by trustees and school boards when participating in town hall meetings and when completing the online submission and/or the online survey included in the Ministry of Education's *Consultation: Education in Ontario*. It is hoped that each school board will be able to incorporate a local perspective with specific examples to support the various statements. The deadline for the consultation process is December 15, 2018.

### **How should we improve student performance in the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)?**

- Recommend the acronym STEM be changed to STEAM to include the Arts as a key curricular area of focus. Fundamental competencies can be strengthened, expanded and reinforced through a strong Arts curriculum, in addition to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- Take stock of all evidence-based approaches for STEAM instruction in school boards in order to go deeper and to replicate these strategies provincially.
- Ensure adequate STEAM resources and professional learning opportunities for teachers.
- The “crowded curriculum” needs to be addressed to reduce the number of curricular expectations. Instructional time created can be intentionally dedicated to 21<sup>st</sup> century competency/skill development and application to relevant situations and real-world problems for maximum student engagement.
- Examine the validity of the EQAO assessment (e.g. question bias etc.) to determine why the math results are so different than other measures such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) where Ontario scores

- significantly above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average (OECD).
- Research identifies project-based learning as an important instructional strategy to support STEAM curricular areas.
  - Improving achievement in mathematics requires a multi-pronged approach, including but not limited to, adequate resources, professional development, differentiated instruction to meet individual student learning needs, and time on task.
  - All workable solutions need to be data-driven and evidence-based.

**How should our schools prepare students with needed job skills, such as skilled trades and coding?**

- A targeted government marketing and communications plan, specifically directed at parents, students and educators, is needed to elevate skilled trades to an accepted, respected pathway. This should include the research and data that shows there are, and will continue to be, many opportunities for well-paid jobs in the future.
- Promotion and awareness of career options in the area of skilled trades should begin in elementary school. Opportunities for commencing various elements of an apprenticeship and the opportunity to earn hours towards an apprenticeship should begin in secondary school.
- The Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario and College/University rules and regulations guiding apprenticeships in Ontario should be reviewed and amended as required to remove any barriers for secondary and post-secondary students to secure apprenticeship positions in the various skilled trades upon graduation (e.g. ratios, staffing numbers).
- Instead of adding more discreet elements to an already crowded curriculum (e.g. coding), educators are continually looking for ways to integrate these types of topics into existing subject areas such as mathematics, science, etc., (see [Monograph #69, 2017](#)) to make learning more current, engaging, relevant and applicable. These resources need to be expanded with supportive professional learning opportunities for teachers.
- Increase community partnerships at the local level to expand experiential learning, cooperative education and Specialist High Skills Major opportunities for students.

**What measures can be taken to improve provincial standardized testing?**

- OPSBA released a [Discussion Paper](#) in December 2016 with seven key recommendations regarding EQAO and large scale testing in Ontario. These include eliminating cultural bias, reducing student anxiety, improving communication with parents and the public positioning of EQAO results.

- If EQAO testing is either eliminated or changed to administering randomized samples, it is important that school boards have the option for “all student” diagnostic data to inform decision-making for resource allocation, strategic planning and professional learning.
- PPM 155, *Diagnostic Assessment in Support of Student Learning*, would need to be revised to ensure all students at the elementary level receive a diagnostic assessment once in the fall and again in the spring.
- Assessments should not be made public and should be used exclusively by school boards and schools in their communication with parents and students and in their plans to improve student achievement.

**What more can be done to ensure students graduate high school with important life skills, including financial literacy?**

- Definitions for clarity are needed to identify and distinguish between life skills, competencies/transferable skills and learning skills.
- Education is a shared responsibility and as such there needs to be realistic expectations placed on schools within an already “crowded curriculum.”
- If financial literacy is introduced in developmental ways across the grades there needs to be a reduction in curricular expectations (i.e. “crowded curriculum”) to allow for sufficient instructional time.
- There need to be explicit curricular references, associated resources and professional learning opportunities provided for teachers to ensure that all school boards have the same tools and expectations to implement financial literacy in a more consistent way.
- The resources need to be age-appropriate and include applications that can be used at school and shared with parents for use at home.
- Promoting positive student mental health and well-being to develop resilience, which is an essential life skill, needs to continue to be integral to a well-rounded education.
- Students cannot learn if they are experiencing mental health issues. School Mental Health Assist is a key support for school boards in the area of mental health and well-being, and it needs to continue to be funded and expanded.

**What steps could schools take to ban cellphone use in the classroom?**

- Local school boards should be permitted to make their own local decisions that allow individual teachers to make age-appropriate classroom decisions about the use of technology, including the use of cell phones.
- Students need be discerning digital citizens and opportunities should be provided within the curriculum to allow students to safely explore various uses and risks of technology in an intentionally guided and supportive environment.

**How can we build a new age-appropriate Health and Physical Education curriculum that includes subjects like mental health, sexual health education and the legalization of cannabis?**

- All students must be able to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and they must feel valued, included and respected.
- Any modernized approach must incorporate the required school board Human Rights and Equity policies and be updated/revised as new issues arise (e.g. legalization of cannabis).
- All of the components of a modernized Health and Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum need to be explicit such as mental health and well-being, student safety, consent, LGBTQ, gender identity and family realities grounded in human rights and equity, as in the 2015 revised H & PE curriculum.
- A recommended approach is to maintain the components of the 2015 curriculum, but amend some of the “prompts,” which have been the main source of controversy.

**What elements should be included in a Ministry of Education Parents’ Bill of Rights?**

- A formalized Parents’ Bill of Rights is not necessary. Our collective focus is on children and youth, and their achievement and well-being.
- Education is a shared responsibility among parents, guardians, students, teachers, trustees, board staff, community agencies, interest groups, and the provincial government (its policies and funding) and its agencies.
- The Ministry of Education and school boards should continue to promote the many opportunities for parents and guardians to be actively engaged in their child’s education (e.g. volunteering, attending meetings or being a member of a school council or the Parent Involvement Committee, attending standing committee and school board public meetings, participating in parent nights, conferences, local and board-wide consultations).
- A specific example of successful parent engagement are the Parents Reaching Out Grants that were “designed to support parents in identifying barriers to parent engagement in their own community and to find local solutions to involve more parents in support of student achievement, human rights and equity, and well-being.” Funding of these need to be reinstated.

**Do you have any other feedback or ideas?**

1. Recognition and support for the continued implementation of the Calls to Action of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).
2. The principles of equity, social justice, culturally relevant and responsive teaching need to be fundamental to all curricular revisions in order to provide a

- supportive, nurturing learning environment that is respectful and inclusive of Ontario's student diversity.
3. School boards need predictable funding levels, including a degree of local flexibility to provide support to meet student needs within their local context. Specifically school boards need to continue to provide:
- Safe, well-equipped facilities in good repair;
  - New schools in growth areas;
  - Reliable transportation;
  - Readily available and current resources for relevant instruction and learning;
  - Ongoing professional learning opportunities for educators to continually build capacity;
  - Specialized supports for students with a range of special needs and mental health issues as required;
  - Learning and working environments that respect equity, diversity and the principles of social justice.