White Paper on Education

Reaching Every Student
A Smarter Ontario

December, 2007

This paper is about the two million students in Ontario's publicly funded school system.

In our first mandate (2003-2007) the government inherited a crisis in education. We responded by making education our first priority, set bold targets, and invested in the improvement of schools in partnership with local educators and communities. Together we were successful — test scores are up, the graduating rate from high school has increased, teacher morale has improved, and overall, people are satisfied with the direction of the reform.

But this is not nearly enough as we begin a second mandate. There are two kinds of dangers. One that we merely continue down the linear path of incremental improvements, or two that we enlarge the agenda so much that it becomes unwieldy and diffuse. We have struck a middle ground in this paper that involves substantially extending and building on our first platform.

It is common for second term governments to lose the fresh momentum they had created in their first term. England obtained substantial improvements in literacy and numeracy in its first term under Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1997-2001. Then performance plateaued as the government lost focus in its second term (2002-2006) even though it had received a decisive majority from the electorate. Recently, Sir Michael Barber, the chief architect of England's literacy and numeracy strategy was asked what he wished they had done differently in their second term. He responded by saying, "I wish we had:

- Kept the sharp focus on literacy and numeracy;
- Sustained the core implementation methodology for another four years;
- Showed how we were strongly supportive of a broad curriculum with literacy and numeracy deeply and widely integrated with the education of the whole child. (November, 2007)

This White Paper lays out our focus in substantially improving the public education system in Ontario. We will do it in partnership with the

public and the education sector. This second term mandate consists of four interrelated themes: outcomes, core priorities, surrounding priorities, and means of getting there.

A Smarter Ontario: Themes

Themes

Outcomes

The detailed priorities are discussed in the next two sections. The key outcomes (which will improve all through the process) are threefold.

1. Students with the skills and characteristics to survive and thrive in Ontario's and in Canada's growing multicultural, diverse society, and in the increasingly interdependent global societies of the 21st century.

2. Teachers and administrators who are skilled, enthused and engaged in their profession — educators who are excited about the profession and see it as a profession of the highest calling, and equally of the highest fulfillment.

3. A public — parents and non-parents alike — who have a growing confidence in the publicly funded education system — a public that is enthusiastically proud of its schools, and sees them as among the very best in the world.

The commitment is to *every* student. This means 'raising the bar and closing the gap' in learning for all students regardless of background. Equity and excellence go hand in hand. And a quality education for all in public schools is a key feature of fostering social cohesion — a society where integrated diversity is the hallmark, and where all cultures are embraced within a common set of values. In the election campaign we saw how strongly averse Ontarians are to any policies that tend toward divisiveness. Our goal is the proactive opposite — to foster cohesion through a public education system that respects diversity as it is integrated through a shared set of learning experiences.

If we had to pick a single word that would epitomize our aspirations for the second mandate it would be a system that "energizes" everyone within it or who comes into contact with it. Education and schooling is the key to future prosperity but it also presents a very tough day-to-day proposition. It takes a great deal of commitment to achieve the ambitious agenda that we have set out. With all the challenges, complexities and emotional demands, and with all that is at stake, it is easy to get discouraged and to feel depressed on given days. We cannot guarantee that every day will be uplifting, but we can commit to establishing a mandate and corresponding conditions that can unleash the potential of all students, and will galvanize all levels of the system and its partners into actions that provide results on the three key outcomes listed above.

In short, a measure of success at the end of our second mandate in 2011 will be the felt excitement and pride that stakeholders have about

their experiences within and in relation to the 4,900 publicly funded schools in Ontario.

Finally, it should be noted the education improvement agenda plays a major developmental role in relation to the government's targeted priority to reduce poverty across the province.

Core Priorities

It is essential that the core and supporting priorities be seen as integrated. Within the context of the previous section on outcomes there are three core priorities:

1. Going deeper and wider on literacy and numeracy including reaching the targets of 75% of students at the provincial standard in grade 6.

2. Continuing innovation in high schools in reaching the 85% graduation rate

3. Greater two-way communication with the public to inform the implementation of the mandate and to foster public confidence.

We will be expanding and deepening the implementation of high quality literacy and numeracy practices and achievement in the 72 districts, 4,000 elementary schools, and 900 secondary schools.

Within the goal of having 75% of students achieving a high standard of proficiency we have a strong commitment to closing the gap as we raise the bar. Specific strategies focus on boys' literacy, ESL, special education, performance of different ethnic groups, schools facing difficult circumstances arising from poverty in the community, and schools not showing improvement for whatever reasons.

We also plan to increase the number of schools achieving 75%. Research tells us that a school's overall performance creates an atmosphere or climate that affects the whole school (for better or for worse depending on the scores). The percentage of schools achieving 75% or higher in grade 6 reading, for example, has doubled from 13% in 2003 to 25% of schools in 2007. Our target is to double this figure again to 50% of schools by 2011. Similarly, we will continue to reduce the number of schools with relatively low performance, so that 80% of all schools have at least 50% of students reaching the standard.

Finally, in combination with our continuing efforts in the early elementary years we will be paying additional attention to improvements in grades 4 through 8.

All of this enlarges the literacy and numeracy mandate, but it is also necessary to address two major myths that surround the 75% achievement goal. The current average achievement in reaching proficiency in literacy and numeracy in relation to the standard we have set with the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is 64% for students in grade 6. The first myth is that 36% of students

cannot read and do simple arithmetic. This is not true. The Ontario standard requires that a student achieve a 70% or B passing grade. If we take simple 'passing' of 50% or better as the minimal grade, as Alberta does, over 90% of our grade 3 and grade 6 students can read and write and do basic arithmetic.

We set the standard high at 70% passing or better because mere passing is not good enough for students heading into the world economy and society of 2008 and beyond. The second myth is that our tests measure only the basic ability to read, write, and do math — the basics as most parents would remember them. The new literacies for the 21st century however are much more demanding than basic literacy. Literacy in both language and mathematics is constantly evolving and today require highly sophisticated understanding and skills. These definitions of literacy are reflected in the 'higher order' skills assessment components of the EQAO tests. These more advanced literacy and numeracy definitions are captured in the following table.

Literacy in the 21st Century	Numeracy in the 21st Century
Literacy is defined as the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, view, represent and think critically about ideas. It involves the capacity to access, manage and evaluate information, to think imaginatively and analytically, and to communicate thoughts and ideas effectively. In Ontario, literacy includes critical thinking and reasoning to solve problems and make decisions considering issues of fairness, equity and social justice. Literacy connects individuals and communities, and is an essential tool for personal growth and active participation in a cohesive democratic society.	The study of mathematics equips students with knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that are essential for successful and rewarding participation in society. Mathematic structures, operations, processes, and language provide students with a framework and tools for reasoning, justifying conclusions, and expressing quantitative and qualitative ideas clearly. Through mathematical activities that are practical and relevant to their lives, students develop mathematic understanding, problem-solving skills, and related technological skills that they can apply in their daily lives and in the future workplace.

Our goal from the beginning has been to deepen and widen students' literacy and numeracy. Deepen in the sense of the two definitions above, and widen in relation to how these qualities must interact with other aspects of learning to affect the development of the whole child (see the section on surrounding priorities).

Literacy and numeracy, as long as they are not narrowly defined, are the keys to future successful lives and to a prosperous society. The research is clear — growth in a country's economic and educational competitiveness is significantly attributable to placing a strong emphasis on literacy in the early years of school. Approaches to improve adult literacy are important, but are less effective and efficient than early intervention.

Reading achievement is the foundation for success through the school years. Children who successfully learn to read in the early primary

years are well prepared to read for learning and for pleasure in the years to come. On the other hand, those who struggle with reading in grades 1-3 are at a serious disadvantage. Academically, they increasingly fall behind in other subjects. They are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, and in their teen years, are more likely to drop out. Similar findings are found about positive attitudes towards mathematics and understanding of key concepts and mathematical skills.

Strong literacy and numeracy skills, in other words, are key to future freedom and well-being. If we don't get literacy and numeracy right (again, defined deeply and widely) almost everything else becomes endangered.

The second core priority involves the Learning to 18/Student Success Strategy. Much has been achieved over a short period of time (2005-2007) towards having 85% of our high school students graduate. This would put Ontario's graduation rate among the best in Canada. The next steps consist of continuing the focus on helping all students graduate through meaningful learning experiences. There are two interrelated aspects to this strategy. The first concerns program innovation. We will continue the expansion of course choices, program innovation and options including: cooperative education, dual credits, specialists high skills majors, credits for external credentials and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program. Program innovation also involves enhancing modes of delivery such as expanding e-learning opportunities and resources for students, and parents, piloting specialist schools in science, the arts, sports, and expanding opportunities for experiential learning with community partners.

The second and related aspect concerns providing more personalized help and support to students. It is well established in research that high school students often experience the school as impersonal, and that often those on the verge of dropping out stay because of the support of a caring adult in the school who takes an interest in their success. For this reason we have provided funds and developmental support for each of the 72 school districts, and each of the 900 high schools, to establish 'student success leaders'. There are now over 1,000 full time student success teachers — full time teacher leaders who are devoted to working with students, and with school administrators and other teachers to target support to help students stay in school and receive relevant, personalized attention and programs.

In addition to this across-the-system strategy, we have recently announced funding of $19 million to the highly Successful Pathways program that began in Regent Park and is being extended with financial investment to other high school students in need. The program directly help vulnerable students stay in school through program and apprenticeship pathways suited to their needs.

Our student success strategy will maintain high standards for our students. It is about making our high schools smarter, not easier, and supporting students so that they can achieve high levels of skill and understanding across a broad curriculum.

Our third core priority concerns public confidence in the quality of our schools. Ontario does increasingly well on international tests (and will do even better as the impact of our strategies takes effect). A recent report from the highly respects PIRLS study (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), the only international study focusing on elementary schools (grade 4 reading), displays results from 45 countries. Ontario was in the top seven countries clustered with five countries/provinces in the third to seventh places (only Hong Kong

and Russia were significantly better). Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia were among a group of jurisdictions that ranked near the top; only Hong Kong and Russia were significantly better.

The high quality Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests overseen by OECD which examines performance of 15 year-olds in literacy, mathematics and science released its most recent report on December 4, 1007, based on assessments conducted in 2006.

PISA results tbd….

Despite the strong international showing on high performance assessments we cannot be complacent. All countries are pushing forward, and to stand still is to move backwards in global terms. Moreover, the public is still not impressed as indicated by the recent survey on public attitudes toward education commissioned by the Canadian Education Association (2007). Canadian provinces had a very high rating by the public in the early 1980s when some 60% rated schools as A or B. Support fell to just 48% in the early 1990s where it has remained for most of the past decade and a half. Part of the explanation is that the public is more educated and more demanding than it was 20 years ago, i.e., the public have higher standards and expectations compared to earlier years. And well it should. Part also is likely attributed to a less than stellar improvement performance, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s. And part may be related to a lack of knowledge or lag in knowledge about our recent improvements and strong performance internationally.

No matter how you slice it, the broader public feels we have an adequate or good education system, but not a great one. One of our core priorities, then, is to shift this perception by making publicly funded schools the schools of choice for discerning parents, and through continually improved performance and two-way communication to make the broader public and community and business leaders justifiably proud of our quality and internationally competitive standing.

Surrounding Priorities

The surrounding priorities are intimately related to the core priorities. The two sets of priorities together constitute the education of the whole child, and the conditions under which students will thrive. We identify surrounding priorities as *direct* in their relation to the education experience of students, or *enabling*. These are listed in the following table.

Direct	Enabling
Early Childhood	Labour Peace and Stability

Character Education Arts Education Health and Safety	Better Facilities Class Size, including grades 4-8 Teacher Education School and School Board Leadership

Direct Surrounding Priorities

In each case, direct surrounding priorities work to strengthen the education of the whole student and their role as skilled and compassionate citizens.

First, in *early childhood*, in a major new commitment we will provide full day learning for all four and five year-olds by 2010. To this end, $200 million will be allocated for 2010 and $300 million for 2011. The success of this program will depend on strong integration with the community and with all schools. The issues of implementation are considerable and we have appointed Charles Pascal as Special Adviser to the Premier, who will work with the government and with schools and communities to ensure high quality implementation. This commitment will crucially feed into our growing success at the elementary level, and will enhance the life-long success of students who benefit.

Character development is another key reinforcing initiative fulfilling the Premier's commitment to support schools as agents of social cohesion and in nurturing both the academic and the personal-social development of students. Led by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, a strong start has been made with the publication and piloting the document *Finding Common Ground*. The best work on character development, integrates respect for diversity, citizenship development, personal and social emotional intelligence, moral charter, and academic achievement. In a nutshell, effective character development helps students become *good* and helps them becomes *smart*. Personal and social development and academic achievement go hand in hand.

A third part of the rounded curriculum is to continue our support of *arts education*. There is a strong two-way link between mathematical reasoning and expression, and music. Expression through drama is enhanced by literacy and vice-versa. We have been and will continue to be strong supporters of the arts in both elementary and secondary schools.

Fourth, *healthy and safe schools* represent an essential basis for all of our agenda. Emphasis and progress for reducing bullying, increasing healthy eating, increased physical activity, are part and parcel of the well-being and thriving of students. Fortunately, if carried out in an integrated way all of our priorities feed on each other in a positive spiral. The more successful we are in one area the more it helps another

and vice-versa.

We are not ignoring the other specific areas of the curriculum such as science, technology, or history. These subjects are taught in their own right as schools go about implementing the required curriculum, and they are strengthened considerably by our core priorities. For example, in the just released PISA results that were referenced above, science achievement had the greatest gains of any curriculum area over the past six years. Canada was third in the world with only Finland and Hong Kong ahead of us among 57 countries. All subjects improve when literacy across the curriculum is a priority.

Enabling

There are five other components that are not direct curriculum matters but which heavily affect the lives and performance of students. If neglected or done poorly they represent major 'distractors' or drains on the system and the energy levels of all within it. If done well they are a huge boost.

The first and most immediate abler or disabler facing us is the end of the four-year collective agreements that were obtained in 2004 across the 72 school districts. We began our first mandate facing the fact that a staggering 26 million learning days were lost in our schools in the previous eight years through strikes, lockouts and work stoppages. Our first-term *peace and stability* priority was highly successful in establishing four years of a positive climate where not a single learning day has been lost to strikes. This four-year agreement expires in August 2008. It is our priority to facilitate a continuing period of peace and stability in which everyone gains. We will need the help of teacher unions and schools boards in this respect. The fact that the overall health of the system is strong helps but this does not guarantee agreement. If we together get this wrong it will have adverse effects on virtually every major priority in this white paper and will undermine public confidence in schools.

It is not just labour peace and corresponding motivation of teachers that matter. Positive relationships with and commitment from custodians, secretaries, parent and teaching assistants all add up to make a daily difference in the lives of students.

Visibly better facilities are also badly needed in many areas. Nothing undercuts the confidence of parents more than when they contemplate or send their children every day to shabby physical facilities. Nothing undermines the motivation of teachers and students more than trying to learn in dull and dismal surroundings. Much improvement has occurred in the last four years, but the job isn't done. We will continue to invest in capital funding to improve thousands of schools around the province. This will require the cooperation of each school board, and especially cooperation between adjacent Catholic and related public boards. On our main priorities we have one publicly funded education system in Ontario, and it must operate this way when it comes to facilities and performance. We want parents, students and education to be proud of the surroundings in which they work. There would be few more direct indicators of quality than to see it visibly reflected by attractive, comfortable physical facilities.

Reducing class size has and will continue to be a priority of this government. We have always addressed this goal in conjunction with improving classroom instruction. Teaching doesn't improve just by reducing the number of students in the class. This is why we have so

directly focused our improvement in instruction. This fall, 90% of primary (grades 1-3) classrooms now have a maximum of 20 students. We will bring this to 100% during our second term. In addition, we have allocated $150 million for grades 4-8 to be used selectively to improve class sizes and instruction thereby reinforcing our commitment to the entire early and elementary years from four year-olds to the end of high school.

The *teaching profession* and teacher education is a key feature of our success. A recent report by McKinsey and Company which examined 'the top performing' school systems in the world (including Ontario) found that "selecting, getting and supporting the right people into teaching" was one of the most important qualities of high performing systems. The right people meant two basic qualities: 1) intellectual achievement, and 2) commitment to and love of teaching. Ontario does well in this respect but it cannot be taken for granted. We need to continue and support attracting top university graduates (in terms of skill and commitment) to the teaching profession, give them strong integrated theory and practice experiences, and support them with teacher induction in the critical first years of teaching. We will place special emphasis on enhancing the highly successful teaching induction program that was established in our first term. Research by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) shows how critical the overall climate and specific practices can be for the motivation and commitment of teachers. In the 1990s when morale was low, OCT found that for any given three-year cohort of new teachers, approximately 30% dropped out by the end of their third year. The most recent statistics show that percentage at less than ten.

School and school board leadership can make or break all good intentions. Research shows that school leadership, especially by the principal, is "the second most important factor (next to the teacher)" but only if school leaders devote their energies to the core priorities and their interrelationship with the surrounding priorities. Right now school principals are overloaded, and we will address this matter in the final section of the paper. School principals have a special responsibility to focus on what it takes to implement the core priorities.

School board leadership (trustees, directors and supervisory officers) also needs development. Some of this involves getting board leaders to act together within the district, again in relation to the core and surrounding priorities. In this respect improvements in school board governance and the relationship between trustees and directors are needed. A second aspect involves developing cooperation between Catholic and adjacent public boards. A third component relates to sharing across districts within a region or in the province as a whole, especially around effective practices in literacy, numeracy and Learning to 18.

The Means of Getting There

The very fact of clearly setting out, defining and committing to a small set of key interrelated priorities is itself the first step in getting there. Many of the strategies and means of getting there are embedded in the previous two sections. There are four additional critical means that we have been and will continue to employ:

1. Resources

2. Capacity building

3. Monitoring and intervening

4. Communication, communication, communication

Money by itself achieves nothing but waste. But if put forcefully in the service of the agenda just outlined it pays dividend many times over. In the first term we invested an unprecedented 11 billion new dollars. In 2007-2008 we are spending $3.7 billion more per year than the previous government did representing an increase of 30% of the base budget for per pupil expenditure since 2002-2003. We will continue to increase this investment as long as we are getting improved results. In particular, we will continue to improve the funding formula ever year with a full review of the formula by 2010 to ensure that there's enough money — and that it is going to the right places. In dollars and cents we will invest an additional $3.1 billion by 2011 which means that during the eight years of our first and second mandate we will have increased the overall budget by close to 50% of the total that was inherited from the previous government. Much of this money is pinpointed to the specific priorities identified in this white paper.

Capacity building has been the foundation of our strategy in the core priority areas of literacy, numeracy and high school graduation and will continue to be so. Capacity building concerns strategies to develop new knowledge, competencies and effective practices to increase literacy learning, mathematics learning, and high school graduation. Our Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat has spearheaded this effort for the first two priorities, and the Learning to 18 group in the Ministry has led in the third area. A strong feature of the success of the strategies has involved partnerships between the Ministry of Education and local schools and boards including partnership across school and boards where people receive money and opportunity to learn from each other about the most effective practices. Drawing on and leveraging the wisdom of the field has been an economical and powerful means for achieving improvement in a relatively short time.

We will continue and build on this work, but in addition we will place a special focus on school and board leadership and on teacher induction. The agenda we have set out is prioritized and integrated, but it is a heavy and demanding one. It would be easy, especially in a second term, for people to feel overloaded, complacent, feeling that they are doing all they can. Nothing could be worse for the system as a whole — no sense of urgency, no sense of excitement, no 'wow' factor.

We commit, in partnership, with the field to re-vitalize the agenda and provide the support that will be required to make it work — and making it work itself will provide additional energy. Teachers and principals need to feel supported, need to focus, and need to use the most effective practices, but they also need to be additionally creative. They need breathing room for thinking and for developing new ideas. To this end, in addition to all of the strategies and resources already mentioned, we will expand our support for new teachers, and for continuing teachers, and we will add additional resources for school leadership which will allow principals to be supported in shifting their main roles to leading improvement on a continuous basis. Improvement is not possible when teachers and principals are always stretched to the limit. When they are supported and energized there is no limit to what we can accomplish together.

Capacity building always needs to be linked to *monitoring, assessment and intervention* at the early stages when things are not improving.

Teachers, schools and districts are helped to do this for each and every student as part of 'the assessment for learning' methodologies they use in the classroom. At the institutional level — schools and districts — our Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat have established a highly successful Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP) that involves over 1,000 of the 4,000 elementary schools, and all 72 districts. The key features that make OFIP work are: partnership with schools and districts, early and effective intervention to help, additional resources, and a real climate of positive improvement instead of the stigmatized 'name and shame' basis of interventions in many other countries.

Another feature that reinforces accountability and performance is the transparency of targets, results and plans for improvement that characterize all of our strategies.

Finally, another means of getting there requires constant and open *communication, communication, communication*. Some claim that part of the reason that the public is not more satisfied as indicated in the CEA survey is that the good things are not being communicated effectively to the larger public. There is likely some truth to this, and the best ambassadors are local teachers and principals.

Beyond this we need more frequent two-way communication with parents and the public. Some districts and schools conduct regular surveys with students and parents. This should become a regular practice. Measures of achievement and satisfaction should be juxtaposed and both should reflect movement upward.

The government too must launch a strong two-way communication strategy about the agenda set out in this white paper. The Premier and government have made education their top priority including education's contribution to the reduction of poverty. If we know anything else about successful regimes it is that *staying the course* despite a host of urgent distractors along the way matters like no other factor.

In this white paper this government commits fully to the agenda set out in these pages. We will stay the course. Reaching *every* student for a smarter Ontario depends on this commitment.