

MOVING ONTARIO STUDENTS TO THE HEAD OF THE CLASS

BY

JOHN SNOBELEN

MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 1996

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

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Thank you for the introduction Derek.

It's great to be here in such illustrious company. I'm referring, of course, to the recent "excellence in education" award that Humber Summit received from the National Quality Institute.

Congratulations! A national award is a clear indication that you've lived up to your reputation as a "Centre for Change" by providing a learning environment that is responsive and challenging for all students.

I'm going to touch on these themes today, as I speak about a subject that's close to all our hearts -- the schooling of young people.

All Ontarians -- not just today's students and their parents -- every person in this province has a vital stake in our education system. The quality of schooling we provide for our students today will be a significant factor in how well they fare in the future. It will also influence the standards of living and quality of life for future generations.

Beyond Ontario's borders, the foundation we build for our young with a quality school system has a direct bearing on the future of Canada.

As we all know, times are changing radically. We are living in a world that is undergoing the most profound transformation since the Industrial Revolution.

International borders are falling. Our economy is a global one, where competition has reached unprecedented levels.

The revolution in information technology is changing the way we do business, transforming the workplace, and creating a whole new range of possibilities.

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Obviously, schools have a central role to play in preparing our young people for the future.

Information technology provides many of these new possibilities and expands our definition of literacy, but it remains clear that basic skills - reading, writing, and mathematics, are critical to the success of students.

The pace of change is tremendous. The specific skills required -- even over the next 10 years -- are difficult to predict.

But as was true for my generation, the ability to change and adapt -- an ability essential for our young people -- is enhanced by the confidence inherent in a solid foundation of these core skills.

How well has the school system done in this regard? In some respects, very well. In others, much more needs to be done.

Over the past decade, study after study -- including the Royal Commission on Learning -- has recommended system-wide changes.

Witness the need for remedial programs in first-year college and university programs, to help students improve skills they should have acquired in high school. And these are the 30 per cent or so of students who have been most successful in school!

It's little wonder that parents are concerned about the quality of education their children are receiving.

They are very concerned when their children fall behind their counterparts elsewhere in the country and around the world.

Many parents believe that their children are not sufficiently challenged, and that standards are not high enough. Some feel that standards are declining. At the same time, parents fear experimentation, but want changes that will improve the education their child is getting.

When Ontario students are tested -- as they have been over the last 10 years -- the results are average or below average in critical areas such as reading, writing, math and science.

Just a few days ago, we heard, yet again, about test results that point to the need for significant improvement. I'm talking about the Third International Mathematics and Science Study test held last year. Ontario, like Alberta, New Brunswick and British Columbia, participated along with more than 40 other countries.

Ontario's results cause me great concern. They're below the international and national average in most instances. Our students lag behind other Canadian provinces like Alberta, and other countries like Singapore, Japan, Austria and Bulgaria.

Below average is not okay. It's not a reflection of the potential of our students or the talent and commitment of our teachers.

In addition to concerns about the quality of education their children are receiving, parents have told me they are troubled about the safety of their children while in school. Students and teachers alike are aware of the possibility of violence.

I am happy to be able to come here today and say that the government of Ontario is addressing all these issues. Some of the work is well underway. More is coming.

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People want to know where all the reform and change is taking us.

I'm here to outline our vision.

This government is committed to improving the quality of schooling for every student in this province, and to making the system more accountable to parents and taxpayers.

We are committed to providing our children with a solid foundation upon which to build their lives. A foundation upon which Ontario's future prosperity depends.

Today we are making a pledge to parents: We will provide our students with a solid school program that gives them the knowledge and skills to compete and succeed in Ontario and around the globe. And we will do this in schools that are safe and free from violence.

The hallmarks of Ontario's new education system will be high standards and accountability.

To this end, we will implement a rigorous and demanding curriculum for every grade.

The basic elements of curriculum will focus on: reading, writing, spelling and grammar, math, science, geography and Canadian history.

Our standards will be clear, measurable and comprehensive in all grades. And the new, revised curriculum will be the same throughout the province.

Curriculum reforms will be phased in over five years, beginning in 1997. And, beginning next spring, we're going to publish our own report card and ask the public and parents to grade our efforts. We believe it's the best way to make the system more accountable.

Parents throughout the province have encouraged me to be specific when it comes to curriculum. People agree with the principle of a common curriculum but they want substance and details.

To me, this is a very legitimate request, and one on which I'm happy to provide more details today.

I urge everyone to pick up a copy of the background material I brought with me entitled "New Ontario Curriculum," which provides much of the information people are asking to see.

Parents will know exactly what their children are expected to know, learn and be able to do at various stages of their schooling.

Rigorous curriculum, high standards, accountability, schooling that is second to none. That's the pledge I am making to parents today.

To gauge how well students are learning, we will conduct tests.

After all, parents deserve to know how well their children are doing in school and how well their children's schools are doing.

Beginning next year, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) will conduct regular, province-wide testing of students to determine their level of learning.

And we will require standard student report cards by the fall of next year. Sample cards are being pilot-tested now at several schools. It is our intention that the standard report card will tell parents, in clear and understandable terms, exactly how well their child is doing in each subject.

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In another area of accountability, we've established the Ontario College of Teachers, which will develop and enforce standards for teacher training, certification and practice.

Our commitment to the College underlines the respect we have for the profession of teaching, the importance of teachers now and in the future, and the nature of the public trust that teaching entails.

But, people ask, can the government really improve the quality of the education system while it's reducing funding and trying to put its fiscal house in order?

The answer is yes. Our school system doesn't lack money. Ontario spends more per student than any other province and, as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study results prove, Ontario students are lagging behind those in British Columbia and Alberta.

This is unacceptable. We have to make sure that more money and resources get back into the classroom to educate our students.

Our commitment to the future of our young people is the reason behind the changes to our schools. It is that same commitment that makes the current practice of sending our children the bill for their education so repugnant.

Make no mistake about it. Provincial debt and deficits have done just that. When our government took office, the debt amounted to more than \$40,000 per student - a staggering sum that only diminishes their future.

This is just indefensible.

But, we're going to change all that. It's time Ontario students moved to the head of the class - where they belong.

In the coming weeks, I'm going to announce some important government decisions that are going to help with that move.

The choices we make will have the effect of focusing resources and expertise where they belong. On students. On student learning. On the classrooms of this province.

It's time Ontario students took their rightful place at the head of the class. A diploma from an Ontario high school must be a passport to opportunity.

We have a first-class teaching profession. Our students are as capable as students anywhere.

But reforms to the system are essential. And we are making them.

Your children and all Ontarians will be the beneficiaries.

Thank you.

News Release Communiqué



Ministry of Education
and Training

Ministère de l'Éducation
et de la Formation

January 2, 1997, new date for submissions on high school reform

November 25, 1996

TORONTO — The deadline for submissions on high school reform will be extended to January 2, 1997, Education and Training Minister John Snobelen announced today, to give parents more time to provide their input.

"There is a great deal of interest in this reform and we have received requests for more time for people to complete their submissions on the discussion paper," Snobelen said. "We are pleased that so many people have chosen to respond to the paper and are providing a grace period for submissions."

The ministry has embarked on one of the most ambitious consultations ever on education in the province, Snobelen said.

Over two million copies of the discussion paper *Excellence in Education: High School Reform* were distributed to parents through elementary and secondary schools. Toni Skarica, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister has met with representatives of schools, colleges, universities, business and labor and has conducted public meetings in eight Ontario cities. As well, ministry staff have held information meetings with over 7,000 educators.

In the past month, the ministry has received over 5,500 submissions on the paper. The paper presents proposals for reform and invites public input on four key areas: how many and which courses should be compulsory; how to integrate co-op education into a new high school program; the role of provincial testing; and how Grade 9 fits into the new program.

The paper may be obtained by phoning (416) 325-6198 or 1-800-562-9566. It is also on the Ministry's World Wide Web Site at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>. Written responses to the paper should be sent by January 2, 1997 to: Secondary School Consultation, Ministry of Education and Training, 900 Bay Street, Mowat Block, 10th Floor, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2. E-mail address: secondary.reply@edu.gov.on.ca.

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SPEAKING NOTES
BY
JOHN SNOBELEN
MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
1997-98 TRANSFER PAYMENTS

DECEMBER 20, 1996

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Hello. Thank you very much. I know everyone is eager to begin holiday celebrations, so I'll get right to the point, but first allow me the opportunity to wish everyone here all the best for the holiday season.

It's no secret that Ontario is engaging a time of profound change on all levels. We are carefully examining everything we do, and asking ourselves if we can do it better. We have asked Ontarians for their input into building the future of our province. Many distinguished citizens have volunteered their efforts.

We are weighing the opinions we have received so far, and waiting for others to come in -- including the final recommendations of the Who Does What panel.

In the meantime, of course, the business of the province must carry on.

On December 4, the Premier promised that ministers would confirm transfer payments over the next few weeks. Today I'm pleased to announce the transfer payments for 1997-98 to school boards and colleges and universities.

And I know that people are anxious to start planning their budgets. Therefore, I think it's only right to let everyone know that there will be no further reductions to education transfers for 1997-98.

In 1997-98, the government will transfer almost \$3.9 billion to school boards. Colleges will receive \$686 million and universities will receive approximately \$1.5 billion.

We have decided not to introduce new savings targets for school boards next year, because at the moment we're considering a number of different proposals and reports dealing with diverse functions of the education system.

We've been busy doing our homework, and will soon be making careful and informed decisions on items like school board restructuring and education finance reform.

We will have decisions on these important points in the new year, and after that, we'll take another look at how we can make the best use of the resources that are available to us.

We will also be announcing capital funding for schools in the new year.

As far as postsecondary transfers go, I've only just received the report of the Advisory Panel on Future Directions for Postsecondary Education, which has made some important recommendations about funding, tuition fees, and reforms to student assistance.

The panel put a great deal of time and effort into their report, and it deserves careful study.

At the same time, we recognize the need of colleges and universities to start planning for next year. That's why I have announced their 1997-98 funding today.

I can say, however, that when I have studied the panel's report I may have further announcements to make early in the new year.

The government is looking carefully at all the panel's recommendations, but one in particular that makes a lot of sense to me is that more money be devoted to university research.

Ontario colleges and universities have enormous potential to contribute to the productivity and quality of life in this province. By supporting leading-edge research, we can improve the quality of education that our students receive, while helping Ontario industries to compete world-wide.

Having outlined some areas where we can expect change in our education system, let me tell you why we're doing this.

In everything we are doing, our goal is to ensure Ontario get the high-quality education they need. And through the announcement our government is making today, we are helping to ensure the quality of education we are providing.

It doesn't matter if we're talking about a young person entering Grade 1 in Kapuskasing or a graduate student at the University of Toronto.

We want to be sure that every individual student across the province has the same opportunities to learn and develop. We want Ontario students to excel and to succeed to the best of their abilities. If we continue to put the needs of students first, we can't go wrong.

We want Ontario students to excel and to succeed to the best of their abilities. If we put the needs of students first, we can't go wrong. Thank you.

News Release Communiqué



Ministry of Education
and Training

Ministère de l'Éducation
et de la Formation

No further reductions for school boards, colleges and universities

December 20, 1996

TORONTO — Ontario Education and Training Minister John Snobelen today gave school boards, colleges and universities an opportunity to start planning next year's budgets by announcing that funding for 1997-98 transfer payments will not be reduced further.

Universities will receive approximately \$1.5 billion and transfers to colleges will be \$686 million. School boards will receive just under \$3.9 billion for the coming fiscal year. The Minister said capital funding for schools will be announced in the new year.

"We've been busy doing our homework — looking at how we can improve postsecondary education, how schools may best be governed, and how education should be financed," said Snobelen. "It's important that we take the time to make careful, informed decisions that will result in a high-quality education for all Ontario students."

"Today's announcement will give school boards additional time and a stable financial environment in which to prepare for reforms envisaged for 1998. Our goal is to make sure that tax dollars are focused on the classroom, where students will get the benefit," Snobelen added. "And we want to be sure that all students across the province get a solid education that gives them the knowledge and skills to compete and succeed in Ontario and around the globe."

On the postsecondary side, Snobelen said he would take time to study the recommendations of the Smith advisory panel on postsecondary education before making further changes. He also acknowledged Smith's recommendation to stabilize funding this year.

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