

Ministry of Education

New Transition Plan To Help Struggling Students Prepare For High School

McGuinty Government On The Side Of Ontario Families Who Want The Best Public Education For Their Children

TORONTO, May 30 - The McGuinty government is implementing a strategic high school transition plan for struggling Grade 8 and 9 students that includes more teachers, intensive professional development and improved tracking of students and their progress, Education Minister Sandra Pupatello said today.

"Our government is on the side of Ontario families who want the best public education for their children," said Pupatello, announcing the plan at Lord Dufferin Junior and Senior Public School. "That's why we're helping the 20,000 Grade 8 students entering high schools in September who are already at a high risk of dropping out before graduation. Our transition plan will give teachers the tools and resources they need to welcome these students into a caring high school environment that can meet their individual challenges."

Nearly 27 per cent of last year's Grade 9 students did not earn all of their compulsory first year credits and are already facing an uphill battle towards graduation.

The Grade 8-9 transition plan is part of the McGuinty government's \$1.3-billion, multi-year Student Success Strategy, which will allow all students to customize their education based on their individual goals, skills and interests.

Over the coming months, the government will work with every school board to make sure programs are in place to help students who have been identified as at risk of dropping out. These include:

- A process for sharing student information between elementary and secondary schools
- Defined transition plans that include orientation activities, strategies and interventions
- Designated caring adults to act as advocates
- A first semester timetable that reflects students' interests and strengths
- A monitoring program with an intensive focus on the first two months of school.

In addition, regional professional development sessions about successful high school transitions have been delivered by the Ontario government to superintendents and student success leaders from all Ontario district school boards. Funded through a \$1.2-million investment, board-directed training sessions are providing intensive instruction on best practices and instructional strategies targeted to 12,000 student success teachers, principals and other Grade 8 and 9 educators.

This school year, the government provided \$89 million for an additional 1,300 high school teachers, including at least 800 new or designated Student Success teachers dedicated to helping struggling students. That investment has

been boosted to \$110 million in 2006-07 to add 300 more high school teachers.

"I'm very pleased that the government recognizes that the transition from elementary to secondary school is a critical time for students," said Scott Corden, student success leader for the Upper Canada District School Board. "The new training sessions and partnerships will provide valuable support for struggling students as they make the transition."

The Grade 8-9 transition plan will help Ontario graduate 85 per cent of its students by 2010, up from just 68 per cent when the McGuinty government took office and 71 per cent in 2004-05. The first phase of the Student Success Strategy, launched when the government took office in 2003, helped graduate an additional 6,000 students last year alone.

The Grade 8-9 transition plan is just one way the McGuinty government is improving publicly funded education in Ontario. Other initiatives include:

- Delivering peace and stability through four-year agreements
- Introducing a bullying prevention strategy and school safety audits
- Introducing legislation to keep students learning until at least age 18.

"By bringing Grade 8 teachers, high school student success leaders, teachers and principals together to work on a coordinated transition plan, we will help more struggling students embrace learning and achieve greater outcomes," added Pupatello.

Backgrounder

HELPING STUDENTS MAKE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

Student achievement early in high school is essential for long-term success. Research shows that students who fail just one credit early in their high school careers are at a significantly greater risk of dropping out.

As it stands, however, thousands of students entering high school each year are already struggling and are at a high risk of dropping out before graduation.

The Grade 8-9 transition plan brings together more teachers, intensive professional development and improved student tracking to support struggling students as they move up to high school.

Starting with a process for sharing information between elementary and secondary schools, the plan also includes student orientation activities and a customized first-semester timetable that seeks to capitalize on their strengths and interests. Students are further supported by designated adults who act as their advocates, and their progress is monitored during the critical first two months of school.

Student Success Strategy

The Grade 8-9 transition plan is one more step in the McGuinty government's \$1.3-billion, multi-year Student Success Strategy, which will

transform high schools in Ontario to allow students to customize their education based on their individual goals, skills and interests. The comprehensive plan includes:

- Expanded co-op - Students can now apply up to two cooperative credits and one career education or learning strategies credit earned after September 2005 towards their 18 compulsory credits
- Credit recovery - Special classes help students who were unsuccessful in earning a credit work on the expectations they missed, without having to repeat the entire course
- Lighthouse projects - Innovative approaches to helping students accumulate credits and earn a diploma
- Smaller class sizes in key courses and more resource teachers, such as librarians and guidance counsellors, that benefit all high school students.

The student success strategy will help Ontario reach its target of graduating 85 per cent of its students by 2010, up from just 68 per cent when the McGuinty government took office, and 71 per cent in 2004-05.

The first phase of the student success strategy was introduced in 2003 to provide immediate and remedial assistance, and included:

- Revisions to the Grade 9 and 10 applied math curriculum
- An investment of \$45 million to support the improved delivery of technological education through new and upgraded facilities
- An investment of \$51 million to fund a student success leader in every school board and resources for principals and teachers to deliver local action plans to meet the specific needs of students in communities across the province
- Six new locally developed compulsory credit courses to provide greater choice for struggling students in Grades 9 and 10
- \$18 million investment for 105 lighthouse (Learning to 18) projects aimed at increasing credit accumulation, reducing dropout rates, linking more programs with colleges and encouraging students who left school to return and complete their diploma requirements.

In May 2005, the McGuinty government launched phase two of the strategy, expanding on the success of phase one and further intensifying the effort to re-engage students and improve the graduation rates through resource and program development:

- \$18 million to expand 99 existing projects and add 26 new lighthouse projects
- \$89 million for 1,300 high school teachers this school year, including 800 new or designated Student Success teachers, dedicated to helping struggling students. These teachers work with students to track their progress, help students catch up on missing credits and support the development of better programs and services
- Class size limits for some key courses.

The current, third phase of student success, introduces an ambitious program to improve the achievement of all Ontario high school students through greater coordination and legislation. This phase includes:

- Adding the new Specialist High-Skills Major to the Ontario Secondary

School Diploma (OSSD)

- Introducing legislation that would, if passed, require students to keep learning in a classroom or workplace training program including apprenticeship until age 18 or until they graduate
- Expanding co-operative education programs through increased partnerships with business and community organizations
- Introducing a new coordinated effort and formal links between high schools and postsecondary destinations to help students reach higher.