

**Ministry of Education**

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## **Ontario Begins the 2023-24 School Year with a Back to Basics Focus**

Dear Parents,

As we welcome students back for another school year, our priority is to deliver a normal, stable and enjoyable year of learning. I'm proud to say that Ontario's education system has a renewed 'back to basics' focus, emphasizing foundational skills like reading, writing and math.

These reforms are supported by record investments in public education. Our government is providing more than \$27 billion to school boards for the 2023-24 school year, including \$700 million more in base education funding, and \$180 million in a new strategy to boost literacy and math rates, supported by the hiring of 2,000 more educators.

Ontario's government is absolutely committed to keeping kids in class. After reaching a tentative agreement on a process with OSSTF (English public high school teachers), we are again urging all remaining teacher unions to come to the table to sign a deal that ensures a process for uninterrupted learning for the next three years.

Through the *Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023*, our government is sending a clear signal to school boards that academic achievement is the priority. Through the Act, the Minister of Education will be able to establish additional binding directives to school boards that will be implemented to ensure all schools are focused on academic achievement and skills development, while delivering enhanced accountability and transparency for parents and families.

To ensure we support a stable learning environment with more accountability and a focus on academics, our government has required that all school boards adopt provincial student achievement priorities, including metrics to help measure success:

- improving EQAO scores in reading, writing and math
- raising graduation rates, encouraging more students to participate in job skills programs and take senior math and science courses
- improving student engagement and awareness of mental health supports

## **New Math and Reading Supports for 2023-24**

Reading and math skills are necessary for young people to thrive in tomorrow's economy. The province is investing \$109 million in 2023-24 so that students from Senior Kindergarten to Grade 2 can be screened in early reading. Students who are struggling will be supported by intervention strategies, including up to 900 literacy educators, who will work with those children with the aim of boosting performance.

Additionally, our government has provided \$825,000 to Dyslexia Canada and the International Dyslexia Association to develop evidence-based systematic and explicit instruction resources and professional learning supports that are now ready for launch.

Ontario is investing \$71 million to launch a new strategy to boost math competence in the classroom. This includes the doubling of math coaches, specialized math educators, along with the introduction of Math Action Teams who will be deployed directly into schools that are behind the provincial average.

## **New Language Curriculum**

The overhauled Language curriculum in English and French includes the introduction of phonics to support reading, cursive writing, critical thinking, and digital literacy skills, aligned with the recommendations in the Ontario Human Rights Commission *Right to Read* report.

## **New Financial Literacy Modules**

Financial literacy is an essential life skill. For that reason, our government is launching new modules that will help secondary students learn how to create a budget, manage their money, protect themselves from financial scams, and plan for long-term purchases such as buying a house or a car. The Ontario government will provide a further \$6.8 million over three years to further support practical, hands-on experiences for students.

## **New Mental Health Learning and Increased Funding**

Good mental health is critically important for academic success. That is why starting this September, new learning materials for Grade 7 and 8 students are being released and will help students build a mental health toolkit. The toolkit will help students learn how to manage stress, understand the relationship between mental health and mental illness and, most importantly, know when and how to get help.

Our government has increased student mental health funding in schools to a historic \$114 million in the 2023-24 school year, representing an increase of 555 per cent since 2018.

## **New Grade 10 Course Digital Technology Course**

This new course will equip students to be the leaders of the global economy by further enhancing their coding skills, building hands-on projects, and investigating Artificial Intelligence, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies.

Parents and children are the centre of Ontario's publicly funded education system. As we begin this new school year, I want to thank all parents and guardians for their commitment, and wish all educators, staff and students the best of luck.

Wishing you a positive year ahead!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Lecce". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

The Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education