Beyond knowledge: Preparing students for an uncertain future

Emerging vision and priorities

A discussion paper –
Ontario's Education Partner
Discussion Table

Emerging vision for Ontario's students: Beyond knowledge

If the role of publicly funded education systems is to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities that await in an uncertain future,

schools should be caring, supportive, identity-affirming and inspiring learning environments that equip students with adaptable, future-ready competencies

that foster
- resilience, agility and adaptability
- a strong and positive sense of self, a clear sense of strengths, aspirations, interests and needs, personal responsibility and self-efficacy
- a strong and positive sense of belonging, social and civic awareness and responsibility, and supportive social connections and engagement in community

to help students thrive and realize their full potential on chosen pathways through education and lifelong learning, the world of work and life.

System priorities to support our emerging vision for Ontario's students

Redefine student success and promote multiple pathways to success through education, work and life.

Equip students with adaptable, future-ready competencies to access multiple pathways through an uncertain future.

Centre the experiences of Black and Indigenous students while dismantling colonial legacies embedded in education.

Continue to amplify student perspectives and engage students, families/caregivers and community partners in meaningful ways.

Apply an intersectional lens to education policies and practices to better understand and address the disproportionate access and outcomes of students who experience multiple forms of marginalization.

Collaborate with education and community partners to implement coordinated policies and practices that promote and protect the mental health and well-being of all members of the school community.

Background

The Ontario Education Partner Discussion Table was convened by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) in spring 2021 to create space for collaborative dialogue as school boards and schools navigated the waves and impacts of COVID-19. The group, which represents Ontario's K to post-secondary education partners, was brought together to share evidence, insights and hopes drawn out of the pandemic experience to collaboratively reframe and reimagine the future of learning and teaching in Ontario's publicly funded education systems[1].

In their May 2021 discussion paper, *Transitioning from the COVID-19 school experience*, OPSBA acknowledged "the transition to school post-COVID will require a concentrated, collaborative effort to strike the right balance between all elements known to support student achievement and well-being" (p.15). Guided by the evidence and discussion questions shared in the OPSBA (2021) paper, education partners met six times between June 2021 and March 2022 to identify priorities for improving schooling in Ontario over the next decade. Discussions generated two focus areas — 1) reconciliation, equity, inclusion, diversity and human rights and 2) mental health and well-being.

Later in 2022, two papers from system partners (School and Community System of Care Collaborative, 2022; Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health, 2022) were published outlining evidence-based visions and recommendations to strengthen Ontario's mental health and addictions system of care for children and young people. Both underlined the need for greater school and community collaboration, inter-ministerial coordination, and anti-oppressive and equity-focused approaches to mental health promotion, prevention and care.

Building on this work and the continuing efforts of Ontario's education partners to drive improvements in student mental health and schools' approaches to reconciliation, equity, inclusion and diversity, the Education Partner Discussion Table reconvened in December 2022 through spring 2023 with a renewed focus on creating a shared vision for the future of Ontario schools.

To arrive at a shared set of aspirations and priorities:

- we completed and circulated the findings from a scan of relevant research, reports and guidance from other jurisdictions
- we facilitated focused consultations (three full table discussions; seven focus groups) with education partners between December 2022 and March 2023.

Conversations across education partners about possibilities for reimagined schools were grounded in a commitment to adapt systems to better meet the strengths, aspirations, interests and needs of future students. Partners reflected on current system gaps and student needs and looked ahead five to 10 years into the future to envision:

- what success could look like for students and how success could be redefined
- what competencies would equip students to navigate the continuously changing and complex realities of our world
- what is working well and what changes are needed across Ontario's publicly funded schools to help students thrive in their chosen pathways through continued education, work and life.

At each meeting of the discussion table, findings and emerging themes were shared with partners for feedback and validation to facilitate continued refinement and alignment.

Setting the table for continued collaborative dialogue

This paper outlines an emerging vision, rooted in common aspirations shared in recent conversations across the Education Partner Discussion Table, and system priorities education partners identified to realize this emerging vision.

This is just the beginning of the conversation. This document is intended to facilitate continued engagement with education partners and collaborative dialogue with the government as we work together to clarify and refine a shared vision and priorities for the future of Ontario's schools.

Below, we synthesize what we heard across recent discussions with education partners. We describe:

- education partners' hopes for Ontario's students and an emerging shared vision
- proposed priorities for system action and change to support the realization of this emerging vision
- remaining questions and considerations that need to be discussed and unpacked further through continued engagement with partners and government.

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[1]   There are four publicly funded school systems operating in Ontario: an English-language public school system, a French-language public school system, an English-language Catholic school system and a French-language Catholic school system.

Emerging vision for Ontario's students: Beyond knowledge

Reflections on the purpose of education grounded education partners' discussions of a reimagined vision for students over the next decade. If the role of education is to prepare students for an uncertain future, education partners expressed that we must move beyond a central focus on current conceptualizations of academic success. We must shift our focus *beyond knowledge* as one partner phrased it. Broadening a focus *beyond knowledge* means preparing students to become critical and discerning consumers, users and producers of knowledge that is increasingly accessible through technological advancements (e.g. social media, artificial intelligence).

Partners discussed the value of shifting and broadening the scope of skills and attributes schools help students develop towards adaptable, future-ready competencies that evolve to meet the continuously changing and complex realities students face in an uncertain future. Importantly, partners noted that existing 21st century and global competency frameworks (e.g. Council of Ministers of Education, 2017; 2020; Government of Ontario, 2016; 2023) may require significant updates given they are rooted in evidence and consultations completed pre-pandemic and the context of schools and students' lives have changed significantly in that time.

We heard that future students will require resilience, agility and adaptability to navigate the unknown challenges and positive opportunities the future holds. A clear and positive sense of self (of their strengths, aspirations, interests and needs), high self-efficacy and a sense of personal responsibility will help students find fulfilling pathways through learning, work and life and equip them with the tools to persevere on their chosen paths.

Education partners envisioned future students as connected community members — local and global citizens, who have a strong sense of belonging and a supportive network of social connections. Education partners described future students as highly aware of social and civic issues and actively engaged as contributors and leaders in advancing social justice.

To help students develop adaptable competencies that will support their journeys through education, work and life, education partners need to collaborate to create learning environments that enable students to thrive. In the remainder of this document, we describe the system priorities partners identified for action and change.

Below, we share the elements of an emerging vision for Ontario's students that have surfaced through education partners' discussions to date.

If the role of publicly funded education systems is to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities that await in an uncertain future,

schools should be caring, supportive, identity-affirming, and inspiring learning environments that equip students with adaptable, future-ready competencies

that foster
- resilience, agility and adaptability
- a strong and positive sense of self, a clear sense of their strengths, aspirations, interests and needs, personal responsibility and self-efficacy
- a strong and positive sense of belonging, social and civic awareness and responsibility, and supportive social connections and engagement in community

to help students thrive and realize their full potential on chosen pathways through education and lifelong learning, the world of work and life.

Continued discussions with education partners and government are required to clarify and refine this vision.

System priorities to support our emerging vision for Ontario's students

Consultations with education partners surfaced a set of interconnected priorities needed to support the emerging vision for Ontario's future students. Below, we summarize the key points and considerations shared at the discussion table. Each priority merits further exploration and refinement through an ongoing review of evidence, related policies and innovative practices, and discussion.

Redefine student success and promote multiple pathways to success through education, work and life.

Partners acknowledged that current, narrow definitions of success are rooted in colonial legacies and evidence points to disproportionate outcomes for students from racialized and marginalized groups using the current, standard approaches to measuring success.

Historically, success has been conceptualized as a pathway that leads students to post-secondary university studies. Education partners have called for the need to understand why some pathways are valued differently and selected over others. We heard there is a need to dismantle the dogma that positions post-secondary education, particularly university academic studies, as the epitome of student success. Related to the discussion of pathways and streaming, partners identified the need for continued work to de-stream Ontario education. Research has shown that streaming disproportionately disadvantages some students more than others. Streaming has been shown to limit the opportunities and outcomes available to Indigenous[2], Black and racialized students as well as students from households experiencing low income, students with disabilities and students requiring special education supports and services (e.g. James & Turner, 2017; Parekh et al., 2011).

Partners expressed a need to expand our definitions of student success and create culture, policies and processes that encourage

and support students to access multiple pathways from K–12 through continued education, the world of work and adult life that fit their strengths, interests and needs. When students are supported to find and access the pathways that are fulfilling and right for them, that is a more appropriate indicator of student success.

Expanding the definition of student success implies necessary shifts in curriculum, teaching and assessment. This may require new approaches to pre-service education for teacher candidates. If we support students in exploring pathways that fit their context, we need to build more flexible policies and funding models that support students who change their minds and trajectories, and need more time to find appropriate paths as they develop self-awareness and insight on their strengths, interests and needs. It is also important to acknowledge that a more holistic approach to student development does not — and cannot — rest solely on the shoulders of educators, education workers and school leaders. Students learn and grow within and outside the classroom. Schools have always actively engaged families/caregivers, community organizations and service providers in student learning and development and these relationships will be increasingly important in this reimagined vision for schools.

Equip students with adaptable, future-ready competencies to access multiple pathways through an uncertain future.

To prepare students to access multiple pathways to fulfilling lives in an uncertain future, it will be important for schools to help students build resilience, agility and adaptability, and skills to work collaboratively. In a recent report on the future of education, UNESCO (2021) claimed:

> "Education must aim to unite us around collective endeavors and provide the knowledge, science and innovation needed to shape sustainable future for all anchored in social, economic, and environmental justice. It must redress past injustices while preparing us for environmental, technological, and social changes on the horizon" (p.11).

We have a glimpse of some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead related to:

- the impacts of historic and ongoing systemic racism towards Indigenous peoples, Black and racialized communities, and the urgent need for reconciliation and measures to redress impact.

Discussion questions

- What are the implications of redefining student success and expanding student pathways for curriculum, teaching and assessment policies and practices?

- What are the implications for the training/professional learning of teacher candidates, teachers, education workers and school staff?

- How can post-secondary education institutions, apprenticeship and trades programs, and employers be engaged to align with/support a system that enables more flexible movement across multiple learning pathways?

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2   Throughout this document we use the term "Indigenous" and "Indigenous peoples" as a collective term for First Nations (status and non-status), Métis and Inuit peoples (Government of Canada, 2022; Queen's University, 2023). We recognize there are more than 630 First Nation communities in Canada, which represent more than 50 Nations and 50 Indigenous languages (Government of Canada, 2022) and that Indigenous peoples are distinct peoples with unique histories, languages and cultural practices who come from self-determining Nations (First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Association of Ontario, 2023).

- How can we apply evidence and knowledge gained through the COVID-19 school experience (regarding student strengths and needs, experiences with inequity, system gaps) to update 21st century competency frameworks to

    a) ensure they do not discriminate against or disproportionately disadvantage Black, Indigenous, racialized and marginalized students?

    b) increase relevancy to future needs and contexts?

- How can we help students become healthy consumers and creators of technology? What high-yield (focused) strategies will best serve students to develop their digital and media/information literacy as lifelong learners? What practices and evidence can we draw on to leverage appropriate use of digital technologies (e.g. artificial intelligence) in teaching and learning?

- the ongoing discrimination and oppression of historically marginalized groups including members of the 2SLGTBQIA+ community, gender diverse and transgender individuals, people with disabilities, neurodivergent thinkers[3] and people experiencing poverty and homelessness.
- the environmental, social and political impacts of climate change and movement toward clean, sustainable, accessible and affordable energy.
- the acceleration of technological development and integration of technology (e.g. social media and artificial intelligence) in our lives.
- the broader impacts of increasing income inequality, globally.
- the continued growth of economic, political and cultural globalization.

There are already important and innovative actions taking place to address these intersecting challenges and, in the next decade and beyond, public education can prepare young people to leverage advancements in technology, communication and global connectedness to "build pathways to socially, economically and environmentally just and sustainable futures" (UNESCO, 2021, p.4).

Education partners suggested that in addition to core literacy, science, mathematic and financial literacy skills, some of the competencies students will need to address these complex global challenges and leverage opportunities for positive change include:

- digital and media/information literacy
- creative and critical thinking
- collaborative problem-solving
- communication and social skills
- empathy
- social emotional learning skills

Partners highlighted a necessary move beyond STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) towards STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics), with a more intentional focus on arts to promote more imaginative and innovative approaches to problem-solving that may be required in the future. They also noted the importance of preparing students for lifelong

learning. Developing a joy for learning and "learning how to learn" (i.e. understanding one's learning styles, strengths, and how to organize, manage and assimilate new knowledge) will prepare students to access multiple pathways through the future.

Designing curriculum, teaching and assessment practices with a broader focus *beyond knowledge* means a deeper and more intentional focus on critical analysis, integration and application of different bodies of knowledge to solve complex problems. Moving *beyond knowledge* also means moving beyond an individualistic focus on academic and personal success and towards helping students build attributes and competencies that support their positive development as resilient, healthy, fulfilled, and socially and civically engaged community members (OPSBA, 2021). This shift does not discount the importance of core and transferrable academic skills but broadens the scope to prepare students for both challenges and opportunities that may lie ahead in the future.

Centre the experiences of Black and Indigenous students while dismantling colonial legacies embedded in education.

In their Identify-Affirming School Mental Health Frame, School Mental Health Ontario (2023) notes that to "dismantle oppressive systems and rebuild just ones" it is important to understand the ways by which inequality is manifested and maintained. By explicitly centring Black and Indigenous students' experiences of racism and oppression, we will "inevitably gain knowledge and understanding to inform our actions in support of other marginalized and oppressed identities such as racialized, 2SLGTBQIA+, newcomer and neurodiverse students, among others" thereby creating better futures for every student (School Mental Health Ontario, 2023).

Dismantling the colonial[4] legacies embedded in education policies and practices that perpetuate harm to Black and Indigenous students is a process that involves "continuously challenging existing structures, processes, and practices, while using our power, influence, and privilege to amplify diverse ways of knowing and being," and centring the diverse perspectives, experiences and identities of Black and

- What specific actions must be taken by education partners to centre the experiences of Indigenous and Black students, families/caregivers and staff in Ontario education policies and practices?

- How can we embed Indigenous education and ways of knowing throughout the K-12 curriculum?

- How can we celebrate and share Black and Indigenous excellence in teaching and learning?

- How can we address the harms experienced by Black and Indigenous peoples in education systems and rebuild trust and safety in engagement processes?

- How can we effectively engage Black and Indigenous education and community partners, students and families/caregivers in reimagining the future of Ontario's publicly funded schools?

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3   Neurodiversity is a concept that describes the wide range of neurological functioning that exists among humans and the ways human brains differ from each other (Connolly, 2022). Differences in neurological functioning are natural variations in the human genome. A group of people are neurodiverse, an individual is not (University of Glasgow, n.d.). Neurodivergent is a self-identifying term that has been used to describe those who "think, behave and learn differently to what is typical in society... [and] should not be considered an inherent deficit, but simply a variation in cognition" (University of Glasgow, n.d.). Examples of neurodivergence include, but are not limited to autism spectrum, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's Syndrome. "Neurodivergent thinkers face a wide range of barriers in education, employment, and day-to-day life. Policies, practices, and built environments can be made more neuroinclusive when they are designed with due consideration of these challenges" (Carleton University, n.d.).

4   Helpful definitions and examples of colonization and colonialism are outlined in the Anti-oppressive practice toolkit by the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (n.d.): "Colonization occurs when a person or group of people settle in a geographic area and work to establish control over the Indigenous people in that place (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.). Colonization is an active action or process that is put into motion by those who settle on a piece of land. Colonialism is the policies and practices that a person or group of people engage in to exert control over an Indigenous population, as well as to exploit that Indigenous population and their land (Blakemore, 2019; University of Saskatchewan, n.d.)" (p.3). For more, see: https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/anti-oppressive-practice-part-2/colonization-and-colonialism/

Indigenous people, who have been historically and are currently marginalized and oppressed (School Mental Health Ontario, 2023).

Some of the organizations represented at the Education Partner Discussion Table have identified directions, strategies and frameworks to begin the process of dismantling policies and practices embedded in colonial legacies, centring the experiences of Black and Indigenous students and implementing anti-racist and anti-oppressive policies and practices. There is an opportunity to share knowledge, tools and strategies across education partners to foster a collaborative and aligned approach to realizing the aspirations of the Ontario Education Equity Action Plan (Government of Ontario, 2017). For example, partners identified value in sharing tools and strategies for an aligned approach to professional development of educators, education workers and staff on reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion.

Partners identified a need to prioritize reconciliation and centre the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) as the foundation to the many system changes required to address inequities across education policies and practices. We heard from partners that, currently, policies, directions and curricula include only broad language and guidance on the importance of education about the rights and treaty rights of Indigenous peoples and the diverse histories, traditions, cultures and languages of all First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and groups across Ontario. There is a need to integrate education on Indigenous peoples' rights, the reconciliation of those rights and the vast and diverse bodies of Indigenous knowledge across curriculum in a more intentional and consistent manner. Partners suggested the Ministry of Education mandate Indigenous education courses and approaches to weaving/ embedding Indigenous knowledge in different courses across the full curriculum. A paper by Yakowenntoken and Karenni:yo (n.d.) for the Six Nations Lifelong Learning Taskforce describes the history and benefits of holistic education for Six Nations. The report outlines what a holistic curriculum, grounded in "natural child development, natural learning, sustainability" (p. 1) and the Six Nations community's languages, knowledges, and ways of being and doing can look like with examples of narrative-based, arts-based, experience-based, inquiry-based, project-based and cooperative-based approaches to learning.

Apply an intersectional lens to education policies and practices to better understand and address the disproportionate access and outcomes of students who experience multiple forms of marginalization.

Intersectionality "requires a consideration of the complex relationship between mutually constituting factors of social location and structural disadvantage so as to more accurately map and conceptualize equity and inequity" (Hankivsky, 2012,

p. 12). Sex, gender, sexual orientation, race or disability can intersect along with social factors such as economic and social class, family or housing status, or neighbourhood to create unique experiences of discrimination that may be overlooked or undermined by policies and rights' frameworks that do not apply an intersectional approach (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2023). Failing to apply an intersectional lens can misconstrue the reality and underestimate the depth and breadth of individuals' experience of discrimination. An intersectional approach to policy "warns us of the risks of policies that, by privileging the treatment of some inequities and ignoring the fact that inequalities are often mutually constitutive, end up marginalizing some people, reproducing power mechanisms among groups, and failing to address the creation of categories that are at the root of the constitution of inequities" (Hankivsky, 2012, p. 18). Tools like the Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis Framework (Hankivsky, 2012) can be used by governments and education partners to "pinpoint gaps in policies so that corrections can be made to current policies, or new policies can be implemented" (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, n.d., p.12) to better understand and address inequities experienced by marginalized students.

The physical closure of schools that prompted remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic amplified inequities experienced by students from marginalized and underserved communities. The pandemic school experience highlighted the importance of continued advocacy for equitable access to basic needs and food security to enable young people to learn, as well as learning supports, resources and infrastructure to support the use of digital technologies in the classroom and at home (e.g. reliable internet connectivity and digital learning devices) (OPSBA, 2021).

Education partners identified a need to strengthen approaches to understand and address the intersectional inequities experienced by:

- Black, Indigenous and racialized students.
- students who identify 2SLGTBQIA+, particularly gender-diverse and transgender youth.
- students with disabilities, students requiring special education supports and services, and neurodivergent thinkers.
- students living in care.
- newcomer youth.
- multilingual learners.
- students living in low-income households.
- students living in rural and remote areas of Ontario, particularly those in remote Northern communities.

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Discussion questions

- How can an intersectional lens be applied to provincial and community school policies and practices to better understand and address the inequities and needs of students experiencing discrimination on multiple grounds?

- How can we strengthen alignment with Ontario's French language education partners in their efforts to build a roadmap for the future of Ontario's publicly funded French-language schools?

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French language education partners identified a particular ongoing issue regarding inequitable access to French language education, services and supports across Ontario, with a pronounced need for supports in rural and remote Northern communities. Work is underway by these partners to build a roadmap to promote and sustain equitable access to French language education.

Continue to amplify student perspectives and engage students, families/caregivers and community partners in meaningful ways.

A shift towards deeper, intentional partnership across school and community partners is required to build and sustain an approach to education that centres reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion, and mental health and well-being, and their intersections with student learning and development.

Partners agreed that students' needs should be central in approaches to teaching and learning. Education policies and practices should be responsive to and inclusive of the diverse range of student needs and be reflective of the communities that schools serve. Student voices and perspectives must be engaged and amplified to design education policies and practices that are truly responsive to their needs. It will be increasingly important to create spaces and opportunities for student engagement and leadership in developing education policies, directions and plans if we are to reinforce and realize our vision of developing young people's critical thinking skills and civic and community engagement.

Communication and collaboration with families/caregivers and community partners have always been central to the work of Ontario schools. We know that parent/caregiver engagement in schools contributes to positive outcomes for students including school achievement, decreased disciplinary issues, improved relationships between families/caregivers and teachers and students and teachers, and improved school environments (e.g. Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Engagement may look different for every family; there is no appropriate uniform or standardized approach to family/caregiver engagement that will fit the diverse perspectives, needs and contexts of Ontario's families. We heard from education partners that new, more intentional and inclusive approaches to engagement are required to connect with Ontario's diverse families/caregivers in ways that are authentic and meaningful to them.

Discussion questions

- How can we create spaces and opportunities for more authentic student engagement and leadership?

- How can we identify and share/spread successful strategies for inclusive and meaningful engagement with students, families/caregivers, and community partners?

- How can we better align school resources, policies and programs to the needs of the communities they serve?

Meaningful engagement of caring adults who support students inside and outside of school will be necessary to successfully implement a deeper and more purposeful focus on:

- adaptable, future-ready competencies that promote resilience, mental health and well-being, engagement and leadership in civics and social justice.
- building empathy, collaboration and social emotional learning skills.
- centring policies, practices, culture and skills to advance reconciliation and promote equity, diversity and inclusion.

Additionally, schools have an important role to play in welcoming and supporting newcomer families to Ontario's communities. Increasing rates of immigration require new strategies to ensure schools are inclusive, welcoming and equipped to address the needs of newcomer students, families and staff.

Collaborate with education and community partners to implement coordinated policies and practices that promote and protect the mental health and well-being of all members of the school community.

Mental health and well-being, a sense of safety and fulfillment of basic needs are critical determinants of success in learning — in school, work and life. In a recent discussion paper exploring evidence from Ontario schools' transition through COVID-19, OPSBA (2021) highlighted that "school itself is a powerful intervention for enhancing student mental health and well-being. At its best, the classroom experience provides a wealth of protective influences that can bolster student mental health" (p. 10). The pandemic's impact in Ontario reduced students' access to the protective factors normally available within schools and amplified factors that placed student mental health at risk (OPSBA, 2021).

The mental health needs of Ontario's children and youth have been steadily increasing over the last 30 years (Comeau et al., 2019) and accumulating evidence shows that living through COVID-19 negatively affected the mental health of children and youth both in terms of volume and severity of needs (Boak et al., 2022; De France et al., 2022; Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child & Youth Mental Health & CHEO Research Institute, 2021; Saunders et al., 2022).

Discussion questions

- How can we support the implementation of a multi-sectoral, inter-ministerial system of care for children and youth with mental health and addictions challenges?

- How can we leverage the expertise and assets of education and community partners to create space for students, families/caregivers, and school staff and leaders to learn about mental health and how to access supports and services that promote mental health and well-being?

faith organizations, recreation partners and many others also play important roles in promotion, prevention and early identification of mental health challenges, and care.

Recognizing the importance of a coordinated multi-sector approach to young people's mental health care, Ontario's school and community mental health partners recently formed the School and Community System of Care Collaborative and outlined a multi-tiered system of mental health and addictions care for Ontario's children and youth. *Right time, right care: Strengthening Ontario's mental health and addictions system of care for children and young people* (School and Community System of Care Collaborative 2022) positions the focus of school-based mental health on mental health promotion and targeted prevention and brief services (tiers one and two in a four-tiered system of care). Specialized consultation and assessment, therapy, and intensive services (tiers three and four) are the appropriate domain of community-based mental health service providers.

Upstream approaches to prevention, promotion and brief intervention can only reach their potential if we have a robust system of supports for young people who need more intensive treatments in community and hospital settings. In Ontario, there is an urgent need for significant and sustainable investments in community mental health and addictions services to address the increasing needs of children and youth. Ontario's Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health (2022) recently recommended the provincial government commit to improved inter-ministerial coordination and collaboration across education and community partners to resource and support the implementation of the system of care described in *Right time, right care*.

The mental health of children and youth is influenced by the wellness of the important adults in their lives and their ability to provide a supportive environment, and to model resiliency and adaptive coping (OPSBA, 2021). Educators, school staff, mental health service providers and families/caregivers themselves are still grappling with the consequences of the pandemic – significant strain, burnout and declines in mental health (Bayrami, 2022; Sokol et al., 2020). To provide nurturing environments for children and young people now – and in the future – we need to protect and support the network of adults responsible for their education and care. A reimagined future for Ontario's schools includes a whole-of-community and whole-of-school or campus approach to mental health and well-being, as has been proposed by experts in school mental health across Ontario's K–12 and post-secondary sectors (e.g. Ontario Universities, Colleges Ontario, Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance & College Student Alliance, 2020; School and Community System of Care Collaborative, 2022).

Research has shown that only one-quarter to one-third of young people who need professional help with mental health and addictions concerns receive timely care (Georgiades et al., 2019) and whether young people receive treatment is associated with social inequities, which further perpetuates those inequities (Gardner et al., 2020). Marginalized groups including Black, Indigenous, racialized, newcomer, and 2SLGTBQIA+ communities, as well as people with disabilities, and those living in rural and remote areas of Ontario (particularly French-speaking Northern communities) have been historically underserved and bear disproportionate levels of mental health challenges (Anderson et al., 2015; Fante-Coleman & Jackson-Best, 2020; Georgiades et al., 2019; K–12 Education Standards Development Committee, 2020; Ormiston & Williams, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2021).

When young people do access mental health supports, they most often find it in schools (Georgiades et al., 2019). However, schools may not always be the right place or offer the right level of care for students' needs. Many sectors and partners share responsibility for the mental health of Ontario's children and young people. Community mental health agencies, schools and primary care practitioners are key access points for mental health supports. Hospitals, public health, cultural/

Next steps and recommendations

This discussion paper outlines an emerging vision for Ontario's students that is rooted in research- and practice-based guidance as well as the shared aspirations of education partners working across Ontario's publicly funded schools (K–12 and post-secondary). Ontario's education partners will play a critical role in realizing this vision. They remain committed to ongoing and meaningful collaboration with government, community partners, students and families/caregivers to advance the priorities necessary for students to thrive and realize their full potential on chosen pathways through education, the world of work and life. To achieve this, education partners need to be appropriately equipped, resourced and supported by government.

This paper identifies complex issues and questions that need to be unpacked through continued collaborative dialogue. The Education Partner Discussion Table aims to engage the provincial government in discussions centred on these issues and questions to help refine and realize our shared vision for Ontario's students.

It is recommended that the provincial government create a Partnership table, modelled on the structure/stakeholders of the Education Partner Discussion Table, to work collaboratively to operationalize the vision outlined in this paper and to discuss what needs to be facilitated (supports, services, resources and funding) to effectively achieve this vision.

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Ontario Education Partner Discussion Table — Contributing Members

Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario (ACÉPO)
Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)
The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH)
Conseil ontarien des directions de l'éducation de langue française (CODELF)
Educational Workers' Alliance of Ontario (EWAO)
Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions
Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health
Ontario eLearning Consortium (OeLC)
Ontario Principals' Council (OPC)
Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
Ontario Public Supervisory Officers' Association (OPSOA)
Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA-AECO)
Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF)
Public Council of Ontario Directors of Education (PCODE)
School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON)

For more information, please contact inquiry@opsba.org.