Draft OCDSB RESPONSE TO MINISTRY CONSULTATION

1. How should we improve student performance in the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)

The purpose of public education is to develop a foundation of knowledge built on a comprehensive curriculum. STEM programming is vitally important, but so too are the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. Students who develop skills in critical thinking, writing, weighing evidence and empathy will be well-prepared to leverage their knowledge to face a range of future opportunities and challenges. With that in mind, in order to improve student performance in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math, the following is necessary:

- Ensure sufficient provincial funding and resources to support the building and/or renewal of specialized STEAM learning spaces in schools;
- Create opportunities for shared learning in flexible learning spaces, including commons and other flexible classroom space;
- Increase professional development to support new pedagogies for deep learning, digital lead learners;
- Provide funding for coding projects and/or programs for students including for clubs and extracurricular activities; and
- Create more opportunities for mentorship, community partnerships, and experiential learning.

2. How should our schools prepare students with needed job skills, such as skilled trades and coding?

It is imperative that all secondary program pathways are equally valued and respected. This requires a commitment to supporting student choice and opportunity and encouragement to pursue courses in a broad range of disciplines and pathway options. There has to be a collective commitment to changing the practices and social biases that direct students to particular pathways.

The challenge of preparing students with needed job skills is that jobs are changing – many students of today will have jobs tomorrow that currently don't exist. To prepare all students with necessary job skills, we have to develop critical thinking, problem-solving and other socio-emotional skills. The development of socio-emotional skills supports success in any pathway and the resiliency needed to adapt within an evolving workforce. It is important to differentiate the unique needs relative to preparing students for the skilled trades and widening career paths in computer programming.

Skilled trades are changing and the necessary skill sets are increasingly complex; the traditional perception of skilled trades lags behind the current and future complexities and value of the work. This has to be addressed both societally and academically.

The development of coding skills is important in addressing the increasing labour force need for employees with highly developed digital fluency. The curricular understanding and outcomes of coding must not only be considered in the context of developing hard skills, such as programming languages. To ensure readiness of students, it is essential that they also develop an understanding of the application and impact of artificial intelligence, big data and information management on shaping future needs. Addressing coding in the Curriculum expectations from Grades 4 - 12 will assist teachers in understanding how coding lessons can be integrated into the curriculum.

Partnerships play a key role in the student learning opportunities – this includes partnerships with post-secondary institutions, businesses, chambers of commerce, trade associations and others. We continue to resource experiential learning programs such as Secondary High Skills Majors, Dual Credit, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship programs and other similar programs. This requires not only funding for students, but appropriate funding and resources for school districts to ensure the right combination of skilled staff, technological infrastructure, and bandwidth to support the learning opportunities students need to acquire job skills.

3. What measures can be taken to improve provincial standardized testing?

EQAO was created to address concerns about the need for greater consistency and quality in the delivery of public education across Ontario. EQAO data provides an important mechanism to measure progress on student achievement year over year, by cohort, by district, between districts, and relative to the provincial average. Unlike standardized testing in many parts of the world, EQAO is based on the Ontario Curriculum. EQAO is currently involved in a multi-year modernization initiative which seeks to incorporate more digital tools, ensure assessments are culturally relevant to all students, and rooted in research and informed by student engagement. This work comes after a comprehensive study which included public consultation.

Improvements in provincial standardized testing will be achieved by allowing EQAO to complete its modernization work. In this regard, it is essential that school districts, educators, parents, and students have a fulsome understanding of value of EQAO data and how it supports student learning and well-being across Ontario. An important next step in the development of EQAO data will

4. What more can be done to ensure students graduate high school with important life skills, including financial literacy?

Life skills are broader than financial literacy. The OCDSB has defined 10 exit outcomes – the characteristics and skills we want for all learners – critical thinking, digital fluency, ethical decision-making, goal-oriented, effective communicators, innovative/creative, collaborative, resilient, academically diverse and globally aware. Internationally, there is a growing

recognition of the critical value these types of socio-emotional characteristics and skills play in success in life. The OCDSB educators embed the development of these skills and characteristics into the curriculum. Continuing to support community and industry partnerships at all grade levels would provide experiential learning opportunities for students to further develop these skills and deepen the connections between their learning, opportunities, and relationships throughout their lives.

Financial literacy is a life skill that combines an understanding of matters of personal finance (including income, taxes, mortgages, saving, investing, banking, budgeting, and household management) and economic principles (such as making rational choices with limited resources, the concepts of trade-offs and opportunity cost). There is an opportunity to reach all students by incorporating financial literacy into the required secondary Careers/Civics course. However, embedding the concepts of financial literacy throughout the curriculum will further benefit students by demystifying the concepts and making their application meaningful to their lives and futures.

5. What steps could schools take to ban cellphone use in the classroom?

Rather than a ban, educators must be empowered to manage device use in the classroom and model appropriate use. Personal cell phones should never be a substitute for access to district-funded technology. We must continue to resource classroom spaces with sufficient technology. Students today are denizens of the digital world; they do not need the assistance of their educators to learn how to use cell phones, computers or tablets. Although it is widely understood and acknowledged that cellphones are increasingly a nuisance and distraction in the classroom, outright banning their use misses the point.

The thoughtful and deliberate application of digital technology, including cell phones, computers and tablets, in the classroom is an opportunity to provide students with an appropriate and safe environment to the learn many of the soft skills they need to negotiate in the constantly connected world, including:

- Managing digital distractions;
- Safety navigating the online world;
- Information literacy;
- Social media awareness;
- Constructively engaging in online dialogue (e.g. online forums, comments, chat);
- Developing appropriate use etiquette in social and work situations; and
- Self-regulation, such as knowing when to take a break from screen-time.

6. How can we build a new age-appropriate Health and Physical Education curriculum that includes subjects like mental health, sexual health education and the legalization of cannabis?

The Ministry of Education developed a new, age-appropriate Health and Physical Education curriculum in 2015. We believe that the 2015 curriculum provides important learning opportunities for students about healthy relationships, consent, online safety, and mental health – issues that are quite different in today's society than in 1998. The OCDSB supports and encourages the reinstatement of the 2015 curriculum in all of our classrooms.

The 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum could be further enhanced with respect to:

- Tobacco and cannabis;
- Promoting physical activity through sport and other personal fitness pursuits;
- Emphasizing the relationship between physical activity and mental health/well-being;
- The role of nutrition in promoting health and wellness; and
- The impact of screen time, including social media, prolonged gaming and streaming of video on well-being;

We encourage increased funding for more after school activities and sports programs in all schools and the expansion of the Urban Priorities program to all schools. Resources and supports that encourage teachers to ebbed physical activity into their students learning environment and experiences will help students learn how to make physical activity a part of their everyday lives.

7. What elements should be included in a Ministry of Education Parents' Bill of Rights?

There is little evidence that the Province of Ontario requires a 'parents' bill of rights'. The rights of students and their parents/guardians are thoroughly documented in the Education Act and related Ontario Regulations. The perception that parents require a 'bill of rights' reveals the need to:

- Develop accessible guides to understanding the existing rights and responsibilities of parents with respect to their children's education. In addition to being provided in English and French, such guides should be made available in languages that reflect the diversity of language spoken at home by newcomers to the province;
- Fund the development of a shared online parent portal platform for school boards, allowing boards to combine their efforts to develop the online tools needed to manage the growing complexity of communicating with parents;
- Reinforce the role of school board trustees and local boards to provide support to parents at the local level and to act as parent representatives in provincial matters;
- Emphasize the partnership aspect between parents and schools;

- Maintain and protect funding for the Parent Reaching Out (PRO) grants which are an invaluable tool for helping school councils foster parent engagement in their child's education;
- Provide more information about the mechanisms that currently exist for managing and resolving parent complaints in the cases where they believe their rights are not being met, including local board complaint resolutions policy (required by all school boards), the Ontario College of Teachers, and the Ombudsman of Ontario; and
- Investigate and monitor the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms for complaint resolution.