



Consultation: Education in Ontario

Response presented on behalf of CODE, the Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators

The **Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE)** greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the Ontario Government's consultation process.

CODE is the subject association representing over 1000 drama and dance educators across the province. We provide curriculum resources and professional development to educators, faculties of education, and other organizations, and are one of many stakeholders who have provided input into past curriculum consultations. CODE also continues to forge partnerships with organizations such as the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Association of Ontario (FNMIEAO) and deepen our learning about Indigenous education and history, and to reflect that important perspective in our practice.

In regards to the key areas identified in the online consultation survey, CODE would like to offer the following feedback. We would welcome the opportunity to provide additional input and attend future stakeholder meetings with the Ontario government as this curriculum consultation process continues.

Improving student performance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and preparing students with job skills

In this curriculum consultation process and future reviews, the Government of Ontario has an opportunity to not only improve student performance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, but to position itself as an educational leader in ALL areas of learning in the provincial curriculum. Languages, history and geography, social sciences, the arts, and health and physical education are all critical to the development of healthy, well-rounded, contributing citizens.

The Government of Ontario can become a leader and innovator by positioning STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) in future curricula. Research

findings about STEM/STEAM and the [Global Competencies](#) highlight the importance of creativity and innovation in creating solutions for technology, sustainable energy, and other important areas of job growth. Deloitte's 2015 report *Tech trends 2015: The fusion of business and IT* states that 'creativity is a key priority and that STEM educators need to embrace the arts in order to foster students' creative design and performance, using various media.'

The Government of Ontario should consider consulting current research, expert stakeholders, and STEAM-based curricula in other countries such as Australia, Korea, and the United States as part of the curriculum consultation process. By looking to current data and approaches, Ontario could join these nations as a trailblazer in STEAM-based approaches to learning.

This curriculum would equip Ontario students with the skills necessary for the ever-changing world of work and the increasing focus on creativity, problem solving, and innovation. For example, the focus should move beyond number sense (operations) to address other big ideas of the Mathematics strands such as geometry, patterning and algebra, probability and data management, earth and life sciences, matter and materials and physics.

We at CODE know that the arts play a key role in preparing students to work collaboratively, communicate effectively, solve problems ethically, and problem-solve creatively, which are all necessary for the workforce today and in the 21st century. The [World Economic Forum](#), in its comparison of job skills needed today versus those required in 2020, identifies key areas such as negotiating, coordinating with others, and emotional intelligence-- all areas that the arts are uniquely positioned to address and enrich. By drawing upon the expertise that exists in Ontario through CODE and other educational partners in arts and science, the Government of Ontario has a unique opportunity to draw disparate parts of learning together and create new areas of discovery for students in STEAM-related job fields.

In his 2016 article '[Why is a STEAM curriculum perspective crucial to the 21st century?](#)' Professor Peter Charles Taylor details the benefits of uniting science, arts and humanities together in this way:

'Recognising their limitations in developing students' higher-order abilities, visionary science educators are teaming up with their colleagues in the arts learning areas to design innovative interdisciplinary STEAM curricula and teaching approaches' (Root- Bernstein, 2008; Sousa & Pilecki, 2013).

Using interdisciplinary approaches as the basis for forward-thinking STEAM-focused education would prepare students in Ontario for jobs of the future and make the Ontario Ministry of Education a leader in educational innovation.

What measures can be taken to improve provincial standardized testing?

The review of the current standardized testing model by the Government of Ontario presents an opportunity to increase the breadth of assessment tools to ensure consistent, ongoing, and effective assessment of student knowledge and skills.

The [Partnership for 21st Century Learning](#) outlines a number of ways in which assessment practices can better reflect the complexity of student learning in the 21st century, which include:

- A balance of assessments, including effective classroom formative and summative assessments
- Useful feedback on student performance that is embedded into everyday learning
- A balance of technology-enhanced, formative and summative assessments that measure student mastery of 21st century skills [and Global Competencies]
- The development of portfolios of student work that demonstrate mastery of 21st century skills to educators and prospective employers
- A balanced portfolio of measures to assess the educational system's effectiveness at reaching high levels of student competency in 21st century skills

According to [People for Education's recent article](#) on testing in Singapore and its 2022 Growing/Declining Skills outlook, education needs to make a shift from its focus on skill development to equipping students to communicate effectively across complex contexts across cultures and differences. To improve the measures used to track student achievement, the Government of Ontario should consider developing a broad, evidence-based set of assessment tools that draw on the most recent and relevant research in the field of assessment and evaluation.

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

The goals of the arts curriculum are to equip students with creative and critical thinking skills to express themselves, understand the world in which they live, and prepare them for life beyond the classroom. These are life skills. The arts open doors for students to develop these important skills, and others such as critical thinking and problem solving.

[People for Education's Measuring What Matters](#) research cites creativity as a critical competency, one that the arts can deepen and enrich:

'In a knowledge economy, and times of rapid change, we need people with the creative capacity to adapt knowledge to new contexts, generate new ideas, and use innovative approaches to problem-solving. Fostering creativity helps students develop resilience, resourcefulness, and confidence, and is positively linked to engagement, achievement, and innovation' (People for Education).

To support the life skill of financial literacy, CODE has a series of [financial-literacy focused resources](#) on its website that can be accessed by all educators. These resources address important aspects of financial literacy and other life skills such as making choices, media literacy, personal responsibility, and environmental impact.

CODE would welcome future initiatives to address key life skills such as mental health and wellness, civic responsibility, and stewardship and environmental literacy are important avenues of exploration in the classroom. Drama, dance, and the other arts are uniquely positioned to delve deeply into these topics and CODE has a proven track record of creating support resources for educators.

The recent [Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) also highlight key areas of learning for educators and students to pave the road towards reconciliation between settler Canadians and the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities in Canada. This education, with its emphasis on respect, inclusion and relationship-building, is a key area of life for Ontario students, and should be developed in partnership with elders, knowledge-keepers, and organizations such as the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Association of Ontario. CODE is in the process of developing curriculum supports in this area along with our partners, and would welcome an opportunity to discuss these plans with the Ministry of Education.

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

All students in Ontario have a right to learn and make informed decisions about their health and well-being. They have a right to learn up-to-date and research-based health information that includes education about consent, online safety, self-esteem, and mental health. Their sexual health education should include age-appropriate information about human development, healthy relationships, equity and diversity, and respect for others, including all kinds of families and partnerships.

As with all provincial curriculum, The Health and Physical Education curriculum should adhere to the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, *Ontario's Education Act* and UNESCO's *Education for All*. The visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people and their families is a crucial component of this education, both for the safety and well-being of students and their families, and to promote acceptance and inclusion of all people in Ontario schools and society at large. The curriculum should adhere to the following sexual health education standards:

- Draft Core Principles of Sexual Health Education for Canadians (Sex Information and Education Council of Canada, 2018)
- International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO, 2018)

To create such a curriculum, proposed revisions should be vetted and validated by organizations with subject-matter expertise, such as Ophea, as well as international and national organizations that have done research in these areas and can help to produce evidence-based and scientifically accurate teaching methods. Implementation of the revised curriculum should be done in partnership with subject associations, school boards, faculties of education, and public health organizations, and should include ongoing evaluation and dialogue with classroom teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in education.

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

Education is a shared responsibility between teachers, parents, and students themselves. A 'rights-based' approach may set up an antagonistic stance between parents and the education system. If the government is committed to having a parents' bill of rights, CODE would like to see the focus to be on raising awareness and enhancing existing mechanisms to support parents, students, schools and communities to work effectively together to support student learning.

Opportunities for these partners to engage in constructive and respectful dialogue is important and valuable, and any bill of rights created should focus on strengthening these relationships. Beyond a bill of rights, the Government of Ontario should consider providing more opportunities for parents to become better engaged and have stronger

access to their school communities through parent councils and Parent Involvement committees (PICs), as detailed in the [*Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Schools.*](#)

Equity and respect for all people must be a cornerstone of any bill of rights. CODE agrees with its colleagues at Ophea that '[a] Parents' Bill of Rights should be developed in alignment with the Ontario Human Rights Code to ensure the rights and responsibilities of parents and students from all families are reflected based on protected grounds (e.g., ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation). All students and their families should have the opportunity to see themselves reflected in curriculum and educational policies and practices . . . [a] Parents' Bill of Rights should ensure they feel safe and accepted in their school community.'

Once again, CODE appreciates the opportunity to give input into this consultation process. We look forward to future conversations with the Government of Ontario about the ways in which we can work productively to improve student learning and achievement in Ontario.

Sincerely,

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