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Archived - September 2016 Mandate letter: Education - Early Years and Child Care

Premier's instructions to the Minister on priorities.



September 23, 2016

The Honourable Indira Naidoo-Harris
Associate Minister of Education (Early Years and Child Care)
900 Bay Street
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Dear Associate Minister Naidoo-Harris:

Welcome to your role as Associate Minister of Education (Early Years and Child Care). As we mark the mid-point of our mandate, we have a strong and new Cabinet, and are poised to redouble our efforts to deliver on our top priority — creating jobs and growth. Guided by our balanced plan to build Ontario up for everyone, we will continue to work together to deliver real benefits and more inclusive growth that will help people in their everyday lives.

We embark on this important part of our mandate knowing that our four-part economic plan is working — we are making the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history, making postsecondary education more affordable and accessible, leading the transition to a low-carbon economy and the fight against climate change, and building retirement security for workers.

Building on our ambitious and activist agenda, and with a focus on implementing our economic plan, we will continue to forge partnerships with businesses, educators, labour, communities, the not-for-profit sector and with all Ontarians to foster economic growth and to make a genuine, positive difference in people's lives. Collaboration and active listening remain at the heart of the work we undertake on behalf of the people of Ontario — these are values that ensure a common purpose, stimulate positive change and help achieve desired outcomes. With this in mind, I ask that you work closely with your Cabinet colleagues to deliver positive results on initiatives that cut across several ministries, such as our Climate Change Action Plan, Business Growth Initiative, and the Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy. I also ask you to collaborate with the Minister Responsible for Digital Government to drive digital transformation across government and modernize public service delivery.

We have made tangible progress and we have achieved the following key results to support early years and child care in Ontario:

- Made full-day kindergarten available to every four- and five-year-old in Ontario since September 2014.
- Since 2003-04, doubled child care funding to more than \$1 billion annually and increased the number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario to nearly 351,000 — an increase of 87 per cent.
- Modernized child care and early years legislation, which came into effect August 31, 2015, supported by new regulations.
- Implemented regulations to support before- and after-school programs for 4- to 12-year-olds, where there is demand at schools serving children from JK_K – Grade 6, effective September 1, 2017.
- Introduced regulatory changes to end fees for child care wait lists.
- Launched a plan to create Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres to make access to child and family programs easier.

As Associate Minister of Education (Early Years and Child Care), you will lead our efforts, in partnership with the Minister of Education, to build a high-quality, accessible and affordable early years and child care system that supports parent choice and flexibility and promotes healthy development. Your specific priorities include:

Creating More Accessible, Affordable, High-Quality Early Years and Child Care Programs for Families

- Building on work to date, develop a plan to build a continuum of high-quality, accessible and affordable early years and child care programs that support parent choice and flexibility and promote healthy development. This plan should:
 - Look at ways to make it easier for families to find and access child care that supports their needs, including through the use of technology.
 - Continue to support expanded capacity in child care to support parent choice and flexibility regarding child care options — including exploring opportunities for expansion in areas such as workplaces — to increase the number of licensed spaces by 100,000 within five years, starting in 2017.
 - Support the pathways and transitions of children and families across the continuum of early years and child care programs and into school.
 - Explore financial policies and supports to help families pay for child care.
 - Include a focus on healthy development that is measured across programs and services.
 - Work with the College of Early Childhood Educators and early childhood educator training programs to support the recruitment, training and retention of high-quality early childhood educators in early years and child care programs.
- Continue to implement wage enhancement funding for early childhood educators and other child care professionals in licensed child care settings.
- Continuing work to put in place a renewed and co-ordinated system of Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres to better serve families by January 2018. This includes working with municipalities, school boards and other community partners in the planning of services and sites to support the development and delivery of programs that are responsive to the needs of communities.

- Building on efforts in the education system, establish ways to engage families on the continuum of early years and child care programs in Ontario informed by their wants, needs, and experiences.

Collaborate Across Government and with Partners

- Collaborating with ministers across government and other partners to inform the development of the plan to build a high-quality, accessible and affordable early years and child care system, and ensure this work is aligned with other strategies and initiatives across government, such as the development of a Gender Wage Gap strategy and government-wide approach to the economic empowerment of women.
- Working with the federal and provincial/territorial governments on a national early learning and child care framework, which builds upon extensive progress in Ontario to date.

As you know, taking action on the recommendations contained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is a priority for our government. That is why we released *The Journey Together*, a document that serves as a blueprint for making our government's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples a reality. As we move forward with the implementation of the report, I ask you and your fellow Cabinet members to work together, in co-operation with our Indigenous partners, to help achieve real and measurable change for Indigenous communities.

Having made significant progress over the past year in implementing our community hubs strategy, I encourage you and your Cabinet colleagues to ensure that the Premier's Special Advisor on Community Hubs and the Community Hubs Secretariat, at the Ministry of Infrastructure, are given the support they need to continue their vital cross-government work aimed at making better use of public properties, encouraging multi-use spaces and helping communities create financially sustainable hub models.

Responsible fiscal management remains an overarching priority for our government — a priority echoed strongly in our 2016 Budget. Thanks to our disciplined approach to the province's finances over the past two years, we are on track to balance the budget next year, in 2017–18, which will also lower the province's debt-to-GDP ratio. Yet this is not the moment to rest on our past accomplishments: it is essential that we work collaboratively across every sector of government to support evidence-based decision-making to ensure programs and services are effective, efficient and sustainable, in order to balance the budget by 2017–18, maintain balance in 2018–19, and position the province for longer-term fiscal sustainability.

Marathon runners will tell you that an event's halfway mark is an opportunity to reflect on progress made — but they will also tell you that it is the ideal moment to concentrate more intently and to move decisively forward. At this halfway mark of this government's mandate, I encourage you to build on the momentum that we have successfully achieved over the past two years, to work in tandem with your fellow ministers to advance our economic plan and to ensure that Ontario remains a great place to live, work and raise a family.

I look forward to working together with you to build opportunity and prosperity for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Wynne
Premier

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