

Ontario, Canada

DALTON MCGUINTY, *Premier of Ontario, Canada*: I've come to the conclusion which I think many people have arrived at for some time now, which is that the single most important thing that we can do to guarantee our future economic success, and to enrich our children's lives, is to invest in their skills and education, and it's the kind of thing that we've become seized with early on in our mandate, and we've driven very hard to obtain measurable improvement.

TITLE: "Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Ontario, Canada"

MARY JEAN GALLAGHER, *Assistant Deputy Minister of Education, Ontario*: Our goals are very clear -- to raise the level of student achievement, and our Premier has set targets of 75% of our students by age 12 reading and writing and using the skills of mathematics with very high levels of competency, and improving our graduation rate from high school to 85% of the cohort entering Grade 9 graduating within five years.

DALTON MCGUINTY: First of all, you need to bring to the task a sense of urgency- a sense that this is a very high priority. Then you need a plan. Then you need to enlist people to your cause, teachers included. And then you need persistence. Well, close to four out of 10 Ontario students are immigrants, so we have a student population that is extremely rich in its diversity.

MARY JEAN GALLAGHER: We need to deal with that diversity. And so, it's not seen as a barrier; it's seen as an opportunity and a challenge. And I think one of the ways in which we've done that is by ensuring that we provide more supports and more resources in meaningful ways to schools that are more challenged. So, we can identify the proportion of children living in poverty in a particular school population; we can identify the proportion of children who come to school without either English or French as their first language. And then we can work with that school in that school district to provide additional resources and additional... and to build additional capacity in the teaching staff and in the leadership of those schools and districts to assist them in meeting the needs of those children.

TEXT SLIDE: Ontario provincial standard in reading, writing and mathematics:

- 2002-03: 54% of students met the provincial standard.
- 2009-10: 68% of students met the provincial standard.

TEXT SLIDE: Ontario high school graduation rate:

- 2004: 68% of students graduated
- 2008: 77% of students graduated

TEXT SLIDE: OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In 2009, Ontario ranked among the top 10 performers in reading.

TEXT SLIDE: 4 out of 10 students in Ontario schools are immigrant children. Yet immigrant and Canadian-born children perform equally well in the PISA assessment.

TEXT SLIDE: How might Ontario's policies help students to succeed in a diverse context? The Unionville High School experience...

TEACHER: *In the beginning of semester, you keep telling me, "I need to improve my speaking skills." So this is part of it, okay? The opportunity for you to speak orally. And another thing I would like to emphasize is that now all the vocabulary is on the board. Correct?*

BEN LEVIN, *Former Deputy Minister of Education, Ontario; Professor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education*: We placed a lot of emphasis on building on good things that were happening in the system. We started with the idea that there were lots of good things happening, and what we needed to do was scale those, have more people know about them, celebrate them, support them, and make them more widespread. And we certainly tried to create a feeling across the province that everyone was in it together.

MICHAEL FULLAN, *Special Advisor on Education to the Premier of Ontario; Professor Emeritus, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education*: An essential part of the strategy is to first of all have the specific goals, to have the "every child can learn," all the subgroups, to have the strategies that will improve the teaching. And then we need to monitor it in order to know whether you're... not only whether you're getting somewhere, but to feed back that knowledge from the monitoring into new strategies.

TEACHER: *Okay, how far did you get? Did you get to the end of the book? Okay, what's happened since I read with you?*

MARGUERITE JACKSON, *Chief Executive Officer, Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) Ontario*: For children individually, what we know from our research is, it matters that they learn and achieve early. We assess reading and numeracy at age 8, and again at the Grade 6, which is age 12, and then of course PISA is at age 15. We now are able to track children from that first assessment at age 8, and we know a couple of things. We know that if the children are able to demonstrate that they can show us how to read and do numeracy to the level that we consider really a mastery level for that age group, that by the time they're at Grade 6, and again by the time they're 15, they will hold that mastery.

TEACHER: *Do you find these words help you understand this work?*

STUDENT: *I think so.*

TEACHER: *Or are these words just as difficult? And then this is what the dictionary says, a planned method to get a goal or result. So can you use that word for me in a sentence?*

MARGUERITE JACKSON: We also know- and this is where the emphasis has really been put in the last few years- that we can provide interventions for children who aren't achieving that mastery, and we have very significant data that shows that when you put interventions

in place, who you see that a child isn't achieving, and you put the interventions in place, by Grade 6 they are. And then we track again at age 15, and those children hold their achievement.

BEN LEVIN: For each strategy we had a pretty sophisticated process of trying to keep track of whether we were making progress. So, you know, if I can use as an example high school graduation, one of the interesting things in 2004 is that our high schools didn't know what proportion of their kids would graduate, and they didn't know which kids were on track to graduate. Schools couldn't tell you how many kids were getting all their credits in Grade 9 or Grade 10. A year later, they all could, because we insisted that they be able to do that, and so those were our monitoring vehicles. We know that if kids are getting all their credits in Grade 9, their chance of graduating from Grade 12 goes dramatically up. So, we built a structure, as it were, a process for doing that, so every school and new schools would get together, talk about what they were doing, what was working, what wasn't working -- all of that by way of making it kind of normal practice for schools always to be asking about, "How are we doing and how could we do better?"

MICHAEL FULLAN: What the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat does is, annually, as part of the data that EQAO produce, is, they start to identify the performance of all the schools, so you can go to any given district and find out how English language learners are doing, or special ed, or immigrants, for example. So, all of those are part of our monitoring system. So what you end up with is integrated data around with the strategy, and we can tell, for example, if we take 10 schools, which schools are doing well and better for English language learners? Which schools are doing better in boys and literacy? Everything we know just by that, and we want to know it, and then what we want to do is get at some of the specific practices that are getting the success, and identify those clearly and spread them.

TEACHER: *Alright, let's see what happens here. Dynamics, articulation... here we go, let's make some music out of this.*

BEN LEVIN: One of our important mantras was, "Every school needs to improve," and we did not say we're going to concentrate on the bottom 10% or the bottom 15%. Every district and every school must be involved in improvement, no matter what your current status is. And then, because we knew there were big achievement gaps in Ontario among particular groups, we set out to do things particular to those. So, for example, we have a big English language learning community in Ontario. And so, we developed an English language learner's strategy because it turned out that there was no consistency in practice in how we dealt with donning the speaking students or non-French-speaking students across the province at all. So, that has to be built. New policies had to be put in place. Teachers had to be trained to do that.

TEXT SLIDE: Student Success Strategy in Ontario

- decrease drop-out rates
- increase graduation rates.

As part of that strategy every school in Ontario created a new faculty position:

- Student Success Teacher

- to coordinate faculty attention on struggling students.

PAT JOHNSON: *Semester 1, he has... he has Period 1 off; he has art, Period 2; he has... he is good at strings- his music mark is good. So he will also get a credit after school. And I don't think he needs the language skills, he speaks quite well."*

SUSAN LOGUE, *Principal, Unionville High School*: Well as soon as I heard anything about student success, I was really excited and interested in it as a Ministry objective, or an initiative. And I was excited about it because anything that was about students and connected to success was... they were speaking my language. And I am thrilled by what it stands for, which is supporting every student, and ensuring that every student has multiple opportunities to be successful.

TEACHER: *What is support for him? There's going to be a new drama class created, and it's going to be a 9/10 split drama. That might be a good place for him to be able to acquire some language.*

PAT JOHNSON (repeated): *Semester 1 he has... he has Period 1 off; he has art, Period 2; he has... he is good at strings- his music mark is good..."*

PAT JOHNSON, *Student Success Teacher, Unionville High School*: A lot of our students come with enough credits that they would not be identified through government statistics. They have been successful in their own country. And, what happens is, they're not successful here with the transition to English, and so they fall behind and we have to find a way to make sure that they don't- that they can continue with the success they've had at school.

PAT JOHNSON: *So, are you going to join our sports teams?*

STUDENT: *Yes*

PAT JOHNSON: *That's good. And what is your favorite sport?*

STUDENT: *Track and field.*

PAT JOHNSON: *Oh, track and field. Oh yeah, we have a great track and field um... but that's not until the spring, are you going to play something in between? Okay, so we're not going to put a second science into the second semester. This one is going to not work out for you because we're changing the level here. Okay, so we'll put something else, that's something we'll have to find. Okay, what changes would you like to make?*

SUSAN LOGUE: There are countless ways we can support learners in the school, and in every school, really, through a student success lens. Generally, the entire school staff needs to be involved. This is a collaborative effort. Although one person has the time dedicated towards making sure it all comes together, really it is a full school initiative. And some of the ways we do this at Unionville is really through staff meetings, is a large group meetings, where we all have involvement with hard-to-serve students or at-risk students.

PAT JOHNSON: *So she had a good semester last year. English, we continue to try the academic level because Mom would like her to continue. She is floundering right now, she has already found me, and, um, I worked last period with her. The 3U is very difficult for her. She doesn't, understand what is being asked of her.*

PAT JOHNSON: We have weekly meetings. It brings our team together, and it allows us to track the students that we are watching, and it's made up of members from guidance, special ed, alternative ed, our literacy teachers, our administration- we all sit in... in that meeting. And we're able to review the students that don't seem to be successful.

TEACHER: In order to graduate, you have to have 18 compulsory credits, and then you have to have another 12 elective credits. According to the report card you brought from Hong Kong, that you didn't get enough credits.

SUSAN LOGUE: Some students come across the table... they're failing all four subjects. They don't have money for a transit pass. They're living with no parents in the country- the parents might be living in China. And that team will network- everything from the cultural settlement worker to the administrator, to, say, an Alt Ed teacher, to make connections and set up that program for success. That's the best example of a student success team, is looking at the child and looking holistically how we can support them.

PAT JOHNSON (reading book with student): *And she's going to school... it's funny that they say I actually felt awake. So maybe she, this was something new to me. This would look a lot better after 9 hours of sleep. So she actually stayed in in the evening.*

PAT JOHNSON: The one-on-one that's needed for some kids to be successful can't be done when you have another job happening. You can't sit and take the time to read with a student, to oversee projects when students don't understand projects. It's difficult, 'cause you've got your other workload. So, this position is created so that we simply are able to fulfill more of... of what a student needs. And they really need that extra time.

SUSAN LOGUE: We need to really turn our thinking around about our students that come into ELL and are new to Canada, and look at this as an assets-based student walking into our school. What are they bringing in from a country around the world that we don't provide them, or haven't had an opportunity to provide them, and how can we be their champion and support them as a learner and take it from there? So, in an ideal situation, we look at something that's going to make them feel good about themselves on that timetable, and then really work with the language, and then combine them and find excellent teachers in conjunction with the Student Success Team to support their learning.

MARY JEAN GALLAGHER: In the five or six years that we've been working at this, the performance gap for our English language learners in this province has been closed by about half of that gap. The line on any of the graphs that shows the performance of our new English language learners is a much steeper improvement piece, and evidence of improvement, than the general population, and that's absolutely critical in a province where up to 40% of our children are, in fact, coming from places outside of our province.

BEN LEVIN: I like to tell the story of going to visit one of our turnaround schools. This would have been in 2005 or 2006. This is a school that had 18% of their kids performing at standard, and three years later we're at 71%. So, a pretty significant improvement. And what those teachers said is, "Any school could do this, because there's nothing exceptional about us, and we will never go back to teaching the way we used to teach." That's sustainability; that's the sustainability for improvement. 'Cause those teachers absolutely believed, quite rightly, that the way they were working now was vastly superior to the way they used to work. More satisfying for them; better for their kids. So, that's why it's so important to have an approach that is not punitive and negative, but that is positive and enhances professionalism, because when your principals, when your teachers, when your students, when your parents see the difference and believe in it, then they will keep doing it.