

QUICK FACTS

Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy

The Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy is designed to support a publicly funded education system that gives all students the opportunity to reach their highest potential.

VISION

We envision an inclusive education system in Ontario in which:

- all students, parents, and other members of the school community are welcomed and respected;
- every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning.

To achieve an equitable and inclusive school climate, school boards and schools will strive to ensure that all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. We want all staff and students to value diversity and to demonstrate respect for others and a commitment to establishing a just, caring society.

Why an equity and inclusive education strategy?

Publicly funded education is a cornerstone of our democratic society. Ontarians share a belief in the need to help students learn and to prepare them for their role in society as engaged, productive and responsible citizens. Yet, some groups of students, including recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys and students with special education needs, among others, may be at risk of lower achievement.

Equity and excellence go hand in hand

An equitable and inclusive education system is fundamental to achieving high levels of student achievement. It is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high-quality education for all learners (UNESCO, 2008). Equitable, inclusive education is also central to creating a cohesive society and a strong economy that will secure Ontario's future prosperity.

Why now?

Canadians embrace multiculturalism, human rights and diversity as fundamental values. However, there are ongoing incidents of discrimination in our society that require our continuing attention. Bullying, hate propaganda and cyberbullying are major concerns for parents and students. Racism, religious intolerance, homophobia and gender-based violence are still evident in our communities and, unfortunately, in our schools. This can lead to students feeling rejected, excluded and isolated at school, which may result in behaviour problems in the classroom, decreased interest in school, lower levels of achievement and higher dropout rates.

Ontario is Canada's most diverse province, and we must find solutions to these concerns. We must address the needs of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex society by ensuring that our policies evolve with changing societal needs.

What is Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy?

Launched in 2009, Ontario's award-winning Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy aims to help the education community identify and address discriminatory biases and systemic barriers in order to support the achievement and well-being of all students. The strategy builds on successful ministry, school board, and school policies and practices.

Parent engagement is an essential component of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Study after study has shown that student achievement improves when parents play an active role in their children's learning, and that good schools become even better schools when parents are involved. *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools* (2010) formally recognizes and supports a vision of parents as both valued partners and active participants in their children's education.

WHAT IS ...

DIVERSITY: The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

EQUITY: A condition or state of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

What does the strategy accomplish?

To achieve equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools, we have identified the following three goals:

1. **Shared and committed leadership** by the ministry, boards and schools will play a critical role in eliminating discrimination through the identification and removal of bias and barriers.
2. **Equity and inclusive education policies and practices** will support positive learning environments so that all students can feel engaged in and empowered by what they are learning; supported by the teachers and staff from whom they are learning; and welcome in the environment in which they are learning.
3. **Accountability and transparency** will be demonstrated through clear measures of success and communication to the public about our progress towards achieving equity for all students.

Who is involved, and how?

Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy calls for:

- each school to create and support a positive safe school climate that fosters and promotes equity, inclusive education, diversity
- each school board to develop and implement an equity and inclusive education policy and a religious accommodation guideline for the board and its schools
- Equity and Inclusive Education (EIE) Implementation Networks to share effective practices and resources and promote and participate in collaborative learning opportunities
- education and community partners to support school and board efforts by providing resources and professional learning opportunities
- the ministry to provide direction, support and guidance.

What's next?

As a result of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, every school board now has an equity and inclusive education policy and a religious accommodation guideline in place to support student achievement and promote the well-being of all students.

The principles of equity and inclusive education are to be embedded in all ministry, board and school initiatives, policies, program and practices. The Equity and Inclusive Education Networks play an important role in supporting effective implementation of the Strategy across the province.

On September 1, 2012, Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, which amends the Education Act, came into force. It sets out expectations for all school boards to provide safe, inclusive, and accepting learning environments in which every student can succeed. It is one part of Ontario's Comprehensive Action Plan for Accepting Schools and includes provisions that build upon Ontario's Safe Schools and Equity and Inclusive Education Strategies.

The ministry continues to work with boards and schools to build and sustain positive learning environments to support student achievement and well-being.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

For more information on Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, visit:

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.html

For resources on parent engagement on the Ministry of Education website, visit:

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/policy.html

For resources on Safe and Accepting Schools, including the Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13), visit:

www.ontario.ca/acceptingschools