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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Ontario | 32e | 4e | Discours sur l’éducation | 28 novembre 1984 | Bette Stephenson | Minister of Education | Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario |

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to introduce the remainder of the discussion of the financial estimates for the Ministry of Education for the 1984-85 fiscal year.

There is no doubt that education is a continuing process and many of our most important activities involve strengthening and extending elements of our education system in response to changing social and economic conditions.

We are, in a very real sense, challenged by our own successes in education. Public interest in education, together with increasing expectations, demands that we no longer follow societal trends but that we try to keep abreast of them as we plan for the future.

More than anything else, our activities during the past year have been characterized by this approach, and I do not think we would have it any other way within the educational community where there is a strong conviction that only by continually monitoring and, where necessary, adjusting our education system can we hope to achieve that to which we all aspire, which is excellence in education. It is a theme that is increasingly being voiced and to which we are all committed.

During the past year we have taken a number of steps to ensure this goal is realized and I would like to take this opportunity to share a few of these initiatives with you.

The importance of early primary education is, I am sure, something upon which we would all agree. We have always attempted in our schools to provide our children with the soundest educational foundation in their early years, but there have been various, and sometimes conflicting, currents in early primary education.

On the one hand, the importance of play, especially creative play, is stressed in many circumstances, with a concomitant focus upon developing early social skills in young children. We are urged not to hurry our children since, in doing so, we may subject them to stresses that could be injurious to their development.

On the other hand, there is the belief that children, even at a very early age, should be challenged. Since children develop at an astonishing rate-acquisition of language being an oft-quoted example-it is believed that we should utilize their natural and irrepressible urge to learn by focusing on academic skills more intensively at an earlier age.

It was to explore issues such as these that on January 2, 1984, the early primary education project was established. Its purpose is to examine the quality of programs and the quality of services being provided to children in Ontario between the ages of four and eight years, and also to develop a direction for early primary education in the future.

The project will be recommending policies and priorities in early primary education and developing materials and strategies to assist school boards in developing and maintaining high-quality programs for young children.

In accordance with the ministry's tradition of intensive consultation and discussion with the community on projects of this nature, regional study sessions for teachers and parents, forums for community representatives and meetings with interest groups and professional organizations have been held across the province.

A communication package has also been distributed to school boards, elementary and secondary schools, community colleges and faculties of education, describing the project and requesting input from those educators and parents who are involved in all the circumstances.

On the basis of all of the information gathered through these vehicles, a report recommending policies and priorities in early primary education will be submitted to me in the spring of 1985.

In September 1984, in keeping with our commitment to the renewal of secondary education, we began the implementation of Ontario Schools, Intermediate and Senior Divisions curriculum guidelines in all school boards in the province for students entering grades 7, 8 and 9.

OS IS, as members of the committee know, calls for a single secondary school diploma requiring at least 30 credits, 16 of which are compulsory. In addition, OS IS provides a variety of programs that will assist students in the transition from school to the world of work.

As a result, we have undertaken revision of many of our curriculum guidelines to ensure that course content is consistent with the needs of students in our secondary school system.

The impact of this curriculum renewal is being felt right across the province as draft documents, in both English and French languages, are being developed and validated by literally thousands of persons in our schools, colleges and universities. 3:30 p.m.

They are engaged in the most comprehensive program revision to the intermediate and senior division curricula in the history of this province.

Curriculum guidelines for computer studies and guidance have recently been released. This fall, the guideline for the Ontario academic course in English was distributed to school boards. The grades 9 to 12 personal life management guideline and the first part of the new technological studies document will be released within the next two months, to be followed by Schools General, a circular describing overall ministry policy.

Throughout the year there will be a continuous flow of new curriculum documents to school boards. It is planned that by next summer full intermediate and senior division guidelines for grades 7 to 12 and the Ontario academic courses in music, technological studies, family studies and the visual arts will be issued. Others such as mathematics and science will follow.

The curriculum renewal program will be completed by 1987 and implementation is being closely monitored through provincial reviews. When we say the curriculum renewal program will be completed, we mean the first phase of the curriculum renewal program will be completed by that time, because it is to be subjected to continuous reappraisal from there on.

The provincial review process is an important and evolving instrument in our determination to achieve excellence in education. Besides monitoring implementation and identifying needs for the development of new and revised guidelines, it includes audits and exploratory probes into areas where policy does not exist but may be required. A number of recent reviews examined board policies and procedures across the province with particular emphasis on public accountability and exemplary practices. To date, 51 review reports have been issued, 15 more reviews are in progress at this time and eight others are already approved for 1985-86.

Another evaluation mechanism that is proving to be particularly valuable is CEDSS, our co-operative evaluation and development of school systems program. This is a joint venture involving Ministry of Education personnel, the staff of the school being evaluated and educational experts external to the board in which the schools exist. These co-operative evaluations are a powerful and positive means for assessing a broad range of school board activities and for stimulating the development of improved programs and practices. To date, approximately one third of all the boards in the province have taken advantage of this service.

To facilitate interschool student mobility at the secondary level and to assist employers and post-secondary institutions in determining student achievement more accurately, we have developed a common course coding system for secondary school subjects and an Ontario student transcript that will be used by all schools in the province.

We also have addressed the matter of student achievement in other ways because we believe a commitment to excellence in education is a commitment to standards. We have been working in the past year to design a province-wide testing program to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum and the performance of students in the elementary and secondary schools.

A provincial advisory committee on evaluation policies and practices, chaired by Dr. Bernard Shapiro, director of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, includes representatives from business, labour and parent groups as well as from the educational community. It has been considering briefs and submissions from individuals and organizations from across the province. The committee has submitted two reports to me to this point. These reports will assist the Ministry of Education in developing a testing program.

As you have seen today, technology is playing a very important part in our plans. The government of Ontario has given a high priority, not just to assisting the development of the microelectronic sector and applying the new technology to established industry, but to introducing the new technologies to the educational system and developing appropriate forms of technological training.

There are imperative economic reasons for these initiatives, but the communications revolution is also providing us with the opportunity to strengthen systematically the learning skills of our students across the curriculum.

For many years, Ontario has sought, through its educational policies, to individualize instruction to meet the unique needs of each learner. Now, with technology like the Icon/Lexicon educational microcomputer system, designed specifically to meet the ministry's functional requirements for educational microcomputers, and the development of high-quality educational software, we are really in a position to begin to individualize instruction to a degree that has never been possible before.

This is a very exciting prospect, but there is another prospect that is perhaps even more exhilarating and represents a more elusive goal. It is that of mastery learning. In fact, mastery learning may be brought much closer to fulfillment as a result of our use of the new technology in schools. Some of the research carried out demonstrates this to be a possibility.

There are early indications that if students can use the microcomputer in an exploratory, creative way, the rate of cognitive development may be significantly enhanced. These developments may force us to revise our ideas about how much and how quickly students can learn. All students, including those with special needs, will benefit from our exploitation of the microcomputer's potential within our schools.

Two years ago the ministry arts group was formed. In September 1984, that group released a discussion paper on the arts in Ontario schools to stimulate discussion and develop strategies to improve visual and performing arts programs for all students within the school system.

We believe a complete education must include opportunities for students to participate as fully as possible in the arts. The responses to the discussion paper will form the basis of a comprehensive, long-term plan for the province in this area.

Just as Ontario is a leader in Canada in applying technology to education, it is also a leader in special education. No other jurisdiction commits as many resources to meeting the educational needs of exceptional students, nor has any other jurisdiction passed legislation as comprehensive as Ontario has to protect the educational rights of exceptional students.

We have been implementing the legislation on a carefully planned, phase-in basis, which is a model of its kind. I believe it is one of the most challenging, organized and productive implementation programs in education this province has ever witnessed.

In 1984, each school board submitted to the Ministry of Education a report on its annual review of and amendments to its special education plans. Procedures are now being issued to all school boards to assist them in 1984-85 to prepare a dual report covering not only amendments to the base plans, but also a complete compendium of their planning activity. Each board will indicate how its commitment to the requirements of our special education legislation will be met by September 1985.

Another important piece of legislation received second reading in the House on October 16 of this year. Under Bill 119, every Frenchspeaking person who qualifies under the Education Act as a resident pupil will have the right to receive his or her education in the French language.

These pupils will receive their education in their own language in classes or schools provided by their own board or through services purchased by their board from another board. A board purchasing such services will ensure access to such services by providing daily transportation or room and board. These rights will apply equally to English-speaking pupils who find themselves in a minority language situation.

As well, we are now preparing legislation to implement the proposal regarding the governance of French-language schools contained in the government's white paper of March 1983.

The French-language section of a school board will have exclusive jurisdiction over French language schools and classes in such areas as the planning, establishment and administration of instructional units, programs and staffing.

These provisions would apply to approximately 20 boards of education in which the minority language enrolment is more than 500 full-time resident pupils or 10 per cent or more of the board's total enrolment. They would also apply to approximately 23 Roman Catholic separate school boards which meet the same conditions. In these cases, minority language sections would be added to the school boards at the time of the municipal elections in 1985.

I have described a number of the many important activities in which the Ministry of Education and the school boards of this province are now engaged, including some of the monitoring systems we have instituted in our pursuit of excellence in education.

Since we believe an effective educational system is one which is open to new ideas and which actively seeks the participation of the widest possible cross-section of the community in its development, we have involved as never before parents, educators, trustees, representatives of business and industry, other provincial ministries and volunteer and professional organizations in our planning and monitoring activities.

Even in those instances where we appoint a one-person commission to investigate a particular area, we ensure that the mandate of the commissioner includes the consideration of input from any individual or group wishing to comment upon the subject of the inquiry. A case in point is the Commission of Inquiry regarding Small Secondary Schools in Northern Ontario.

You may recall that in May 1982 we appointed Mr. Rodger G. Allan as a one-person commission to inquire into the financing of small secondary schools, the governance of education and the support services available to secondary schools in northern Ontario. As a result of the input he received from school boards, groups and individuals, Mr. Allan submitted a report to me on February 15, 1983. Following a further round of extensive consultation, we responded to Mr. Allan's report on March 23, 1984, in a memorandum to chairmen of school boards.

I am pleased to say that as of September 1984, 17 small secondary schools in remote areas of northern Ontario began receiving additional funding in excess of $1 million annually. In addition, the Ministry of Education will second up to nine resource persons to provide direct services in selected subject areas to assist in the effective implementation of curriculum policies in the north and to enhance the range of course offerings there. The Ontario Education Communications Authority will also be involved in the delivery of courses to small secondary schools in the north.

Three other commissions were announced in 1984 following one of the most historic developments in the history of education in this province: the extension of public funding to a complete Roman Catholic secondary school system beginning September 1, 1985.

The Commission for Planning and Implementing Change in the Governance and Administration of Secondary Education in Ontario, chaired by Mr. William T. Newnham, former president of Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology, will prepare the planning and implementation of the expansion of the separate school system.

Since this expansion legitimately raises questions about the place of independent schools in our province, a second commission, chaired by Dr. Bernard Shapiro, has been established. It will document and comment on the role of independent schools, assess whether public funding would be desirable or could be compatible with the nature of their independence, identify possible alternative forms of governance for these schools and make recommendations for change where appropriate.

Dr. H. Ian Macdonald, former president of York University, chairs the third commission, the Commission on the Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education in Ontario. It will examine the present methods of meeting the costs of elementary and secondary education at the provincial and local levels and make recommendations concerning the equitable distribution of financial resources in future years. Efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the use of public funds for education will be a major focus of this commission.

Amidst all these developments, we have been careful to sustain our relationships with other provincial ministries of education. The Ministry of Education has continued to exchange ideas with educational decision-makers in other provinces through its membership in the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. These exchanges promise to enrich Ontario's curriculum and facilitate student mobility across the country.

I should like to conclude by reiterating this government's commitment to the pursuit of excellence in education. We are engaged in many new and challenging activities in education today, which make considerable demands on our energy and our resources. We have established mechanisms to ensure that we meet these challenges openly, effectively and as efficiently as possible.

This province has a proud tradition in education that both enables and requires us to seek improvements in all aspects of our school system. It is our hope that by focusing on excellence in education and providing the resources required by such a goal that we shall more than ever stimulate parents, teachers, education officials and trustees to strive for equality of educational opportunity for all our children so they can realize their full potential in life in this province.