

## **Music Education in Ontario: Snapshots on a Long and Winding Road**

Lee Willingham<sup>1</sup>

Wilfred Laurier University

with Jane Cutler

York Region District School Board

In order to understand the current state of music education in Ontario, it is first necessary to briefly look back at the development of education as a whole, and music education in particular. This chapter explores the roots and recent developments in the Ontario school system, and addresses the current state of affairs, the policies, and the challenges that have distinct implications for past and present music education policy and practice in Ontario education.

### **Egerton Ryerson and the Founding of the Ontario Education System**

Ontario's education became "public" under the School Act of 1871, which gave universal compulsory schooling to the children of Ontario. Important benchmarks of this new legislation included compulsory attendance for all children aged 8 through to 14 with parents subject to fines if refusing to abide by the rules, guaranteed instruction for each child for four months of the year including religious training, standardized curriculum and textbooks, properly qualified teachers assisted by free Normal School training, and properly regulated inspections of all

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<sup>1</sup>The source of much of this paper was gleaned from the personal files and experiences of the author, who served as a secondary music teacher and department head for 15 years, a Curriculum Coordinator for Music for 6, an instructor for elementary and secondary music in a faculty of education for 6, Principal and instructor for Additional Qualifications Courses in music for 20, and currently as an Associate Professor of Music specializing in music education. The author is also indebted to Jane Cutler, Coordinator of Arts, York Region District School Board who contributed freely to the content of this paper.

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properties. This legislation provided the framework for education and remained virtually unchanged until the Hall-Dennis report in 1968.

Egerton Ryerson, a Methodist clergyman and a man with many diverse interests, skills, and passions, is considered to be the chief architect of the Ontario School system. After investigating the education programs in Continental Europe and throughout the United States, Ryerson established the premise that a full education system in Upper Canada must be one with high standards for the curriculum; with supervised training, inspection, and examination of teachers; and that used current, locally developed textbooks and teaching resources.

Additionally, Ryerson established the need for a library in every school, a Journal of Education to keep teachers informed about educational developments, and two annual professional conference days. Ryerson was also a proponent of the arts, and under his leadership formed the nucleus of the first publicly-funded art collection in all of Canada and the initial holdings of Canada's first art gallery, Toronto's Educational Museum, the forerunner of today's Royal Ontario Museum. An art school, in cooperation with the Ontario Society of Artists, soon followed. (This was the predecessor to the Ontario College of Art and Design.) Ryerson's philosophy of education centred on the need "to learn in order to practice." In 1848, Egerton Ryerson declared that music was worthy of inclusion in the public school curriculum (retrieved from <http://instruct.uwo.ca/edu/500-001/music/a/>).

What was the underlying purpose behind a publicly funded education system for Ontario in the late nineteenth century? According to author and historian John Ralston Saul (2000), it was to equip the general populous to fully participate in a democratic society. "Education is a public good, ignorance is a public evil" and "if the parent or guardian cannot provide him with such an education, the State is bound to do so" (Ryerson's Report, 1847.) Ryerson's constituents

were the farmers, fishers, woodsmen, factory workers, and general trades people of Upper Canada and it was his vision that the uneducated classes needed to learn to read and write, and should be familiar with classic literature, history, mathematics, science, and the arts. Understanding these disciplines was fundamental to the development of a truly participatory community where information and knowledge led to best practices in government and industry.

### ***The Robarts Plan, 1962, and the Hall-Dennis Report: Living and Learning, 1968***

The 1960s were a period of great change and the government of the day addressed the need for a more comprehensive and accessible education system in order for more students to succeed. *The Robarts Plan* of 1962 changed Ontario Secondary Schools forever with the introduction of streaming the process of allowing a certain amount of academic choice in order to keep vast numbers of students who would otherwise have dropped out of school before completing their high school diploma. During this period, music *or* art became an elective for academically-streamed students. In 1965 a Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives began its work on further changing the system. Headed by Justice E.M. Hall and Lloyd A. Dennis, the committee released *Living and Learning* in 1968. Uncharacteristically for an official government report, the short, 200-page document contained pictures, drawings, and children's artwork. *Living and Learning* espoused "self realization" and rejected earlier notions that education was about fitting individuals for pre-determined economic or social roles. In this respect, Hall and Dennis reflected the anti-technocratic, anti-traditionalist romantic impulses of the 1960s.

*Living and Learning* (1968) boldly attacked some of the teaching methods of the past: the notion that school's learning experiences are imposed, involuntary, and structured and that students were a "captive audience" were criticized, and the pedagogy of repetition and rote was

replaced with a focus on learning how to learn. Conventional drills, meaningless exercises, memory work, and repetitive learning were to be avoided. Flexibility in timelines, more options for students with different interests, vocational, commercial, and academic subjects were open to all without restriction. Drama, visual arts, and music were offered, and frequently students who were inclined towards the arts opted for all three. Teachers became “guides” and “facilitators” and the terminology of discovery, group work, individual research, and joint teacher–student planning were in the order of the day. The credit system approach grew out of this child-centred approach, and it became mandatory for secondary schools in 1972. As long as students obtained 27 credits—selected from the array offered by the school—then a diploma was conferred.

The main criticism of this era was that students could graduate without taking even one English or mathematics course. In 1974, the government implemented a compulsory core for students consisting of four credits in English and two in Canadian Studies. In general, music fared fairly well during this period. Performance-based programs flourished and school music dynasties of great orchestras, choirs, and bands became widely known, even outside of Ontario.

A variety of curriculum documents continued to be developed, and the credit system was further fine-tuned. By the early 1980s the high school program had become more defined and structured. The most prescriptive of the documents was *Ontario Schools: Intermediate Senior* (OS:IS) which, for the first time, outlined a high school music program based on the three strands of *listening*, *creating*, and *performing*. As universities began to demand entrance standards that reflected the often unpredictable grading and un-standardized high school transcripts, debate continued as to whether music should be counted as an entrance subject for prospective music majors.

### ***Royal Commission on Learning: For the Love of Learning, 1995***

*The Royal Commission on Learning*, the first major commission of education since *Living and Learning* (1968), suggested, among other things, that Grade 13 be abolished—to put Ontario in line with the other Canadian provinces that had already made this change—and that teacher training take two years instead of the present one year. It also called for the creation of a “College of Teachers” to maintain professional standards, for the creation and use of standardized report cards, and for pre-kindergarten programs to offer schooling for children as young as three years of age. Gerry Caplan, Co-chair of the Commission, is quoted as saying:

Our bottom line is that we want the vast majority of Ontario students to complete high school as literate, knowledgeable, creative, and committed young men and women. Our recommendations are geared to ensuring they know how to solve problems, and think logically and critically. They will be able to communicate articulately, work cooperatively, and most importantly, will have learned how to learn. (Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/abcs/rcom/news.html>)

The 167 recommendations to produce sweeping change in the education system were based on four fundamental “educational engines”:

1. Teacher Professionalization and Development
2. Community Alliances
3. Early Childhood Education
4. Information Technology

Music education was not specifically named within any of the recommendations, but the arts received some spotlight in the report narrative. The description of what a fully educated Ontario graduate should be included strong statements such as,

The arts are unique as a way of taking in information and as a vehicle for communication and self-expression. The point is that what is best understood or expressed in music, in movement, or in a drawing cannot be paraphrased in words. Students denied access to the arts are denied literacies and are impoverished as learners;

Any school system that fails to open up the spirit of the arts to its students is unworthy of public support; and

The arts are an integral part of any complete education (*The Royal Commission on Learning: For the Love of Learning*, 1995).

### **The Common Sense Revolution: Accountability in Education**

A new provincial government came into power later that year. Many of the Royal Commission's recommendations were shelved, but not all were forgotten. With unprecedented haste, the newly-elected Conservative government made sweeping changes to the way Ontario schools operated. They established the Ontario College of Teachers, school-parent councils, and they reduced the length of a secondary school to four years instead of five. Not one facet of the system seemed untouched by this government and music education suffered. Long standing

traditional programs in music and arts education disappeared, school boards amalgamated, central offices closed, and resource consultants and administrators for programs such as music were discontinued. Professional development and curriculum implementation were both curtailed. Outcomes-based education was imposed and focus centred on standardized testing and measurable, publishable results. These changes alienated the arts by placing them outside of the core of teaching and learning. While a policy in the arts (curriculum) was developed, it had a two-fold effect: (1) it guaranteed some sort of arts program, but there was no implementation policy and there were no resources to support the curriculum, and (2) the students actually accomplished less in terms of musical understanding as a result of a faulty, under-serviced curriculum. A rigidity of the funding model template was applied universally, regardless of special needs or unique community values. The outcomes, measured by the Parents' Coalition, saw 32% fewer music teachers in elementary schools and an increased reliance on school-based fundraising to support music and the arts in both elementary and secondary schools. Overall, loss has been noted in the availability of music camps, itinerant music instructors and curriculum developers, artists in the classrooms, and music festivals. Music instruction and music experiences for Ontario students have been reduced. Rural programs experienced an even greater loss because of a lack of critical population base; many schools can only offer "basics" in some jurisdictions. Magnet schools<sup>2</sup> seemed to be a solution to some of these problems, but in actuality they created a two-tiered system of arts education.

The Ontario government's changes made it clear that Ontario would now embrace the "business model" for education, and the bottom line had to support the investments. Testing was

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<sup>2</sup> "Magnet schools" are schools that offer a particular focus, such as arts, languages, or sciences, and that draw their student body from a broader geographical area than individual school districts. Magnet schools became popular as a remedy for segregated or unequal schooling opportunities in the United States. They are most common in the US, but are also found in Canada and the UK.

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used as a measure of quality, and the results of the tests acted as the key justification for spending public money. Accountability demanded results, and to manage the accountability for Ontario's teaching and learning, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was established. Grade 3 and Grade 6 students were given comprehensive tests in language, reading, and math, and test results were published in local newspapers. These tests were to provide evidence that the rigorous new curriculum was a move in the right direction. More tests have followed, including a Grade 9 mathematics test and a high-stakes Grade 10 literacy test, which is a requisite for high school graduation.<sup>3</sup>

The Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, and Visual Arts) were never included in the EQAO testing plans, and while most arts teachers rejoiced at this exclusion, there is a public perception that if the discipline is not part of the provincial testing then it is not an essential subject. As a result, arts teachers—along with geography and history teachers—have keenly felt the marginalization that the testing culture has created.

### **The Present Ontario Curriculum in the Arts**

New curriculum for the subject disciplines was written, published, and implemented at breakneck pace in the late 1990s and initially there was considerable uncertainty whether there would be a music curriculum, or even a policy document for the arts. Lobbying was loud and strong on behalf of the arts, and finally *The Ontario Curriculum: The Arts, Grades 1–8* was hurriedly written and released in 1998. The response was mixed. While it was a positive step forward that the arts were now officially included in the educational policy framework, many felt that lumping Dance, Drama, Music, and Visual Arts into one document was too much of a

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<sup>3</sup> Even preservice teacher tests were developed (ironically by a testing agency in United States). After two pilot tests, in 2003 and 2004, the testing proved to be so disastrous that the next government scrapped it.

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compromise. The curriculum content was confusing and, at times, absurd. It lacked both scope and sequence, and many felt that an opportunity to improve music teaching and learning in the general classroom had been lost. Moreover, the implementation process afforded to all disciplines, even language arts, mathematics, and the new science curriculum was conspicuously feeble for the arts.

In 2000, the Grade 9–10 Arts curriculum was released, followed by Grade 11–12 in 2001. There are some viable expectations in all of these documents, but innovative teachers were not slaves to the curriculum. In order for teachers to maintain their own values and beliefs about what is important for music students to study, outcomes have been clustered, layered, and linked, or even ignored. In order to maintain balance in programs where hours and dollars are scarce, and students are faced with only a few elective choices, music teachers have sought ways to keep programs alive, such as giving credit for ensemble work and continuing to seek creative ways of timetabling. The Toronto District School Board—Canada’s largest school district—unanimously approved the recommendations of their own Music Advisory Committee, which identified 72 music specialists who want to teach music full time and are not. The recommendation reads as follows:

That the TDSB work actively towards using its existing music specialists, who are willing to teach music, to teach it, as well as using any new music specialists, who are provided from the Ministry’s commitment to expand the availability of such specialists, to teach music with the goal of broadening the availability of rich, sequential, multi-faceted music programs to the students of our Board (Letter from Heather Ioannou, Board Member of the Coalition for Music Education in Canada, 2005).

## Teacher Preservice and Inservice Programs

### Preservice

Faculties of Education are licensed by the Ontario College of Teachers to certify qualified candidates for teaching in public and Catholic schools. Candidates may enroll in a concurrent program or a consecutive program, which offers a Bachelor of Education after an undergraduate degree. Within the 13 faculties of education in Ontario (not all certify music teachers, and some only certify for elementary teaching) there are a variety of entrance requirements and programs. For example, it is possible to become a certified “music specialist” with only two undergrad credits in music in some faculties whereas others demand a much more rigorous undergraduate program. Divisions of certification are Primary–Junior (PJ: Kindergarten–Grade 6), Junior–Intermediate (JI: Grade 4–10), and Intermediate–Senior (IS: Grade 7–12). Interestingly, most Ontario schools, with the exception of the largest urban areas, are principally organized by K–8 and 9–12 grade groupings.

The complexities of certification and hiring are abundantly evident. PJ preservice candidates may receive very little instructional time in music, and in some programs, as little as one workshop. JI’s may major in music (usually the equivalent of a half course), and IS music candidates are given a full course in the discipline. Preservice programs also include a sizable practicum component.<sup>4</sup>

### Inservice

The loss of many central resource staff has resulted in a number of boards of education

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<sup>4</sup> Arts education instructors and professors from the faculties of education across Ontario have begun to meet twice per year to share best practices, compare common ground, and to find leverage in lobbying Deans of Education and the Ministry for more and better arts programs in the initial teacher education process.

not offering regular professional development opportunities for music teachers. The Ontario Music Educators' Association, with its annual conference and regional "Toolkit" workshop days, seems to be emerging as the essential inservice provider for teachers. There are other music subject groups that provide some workshops, such as the Kodály Society of Ontario and Carl Orff Ontario.

The Ontario College of Teachers provides a post-certification program for teachers, known as the Additional Qualifications Program (AQ)/Additional Basic Qualifications Program (ABQ) that are provided through various faculties of education. Teachers without any music training may take a three-session course that gives them a specialist equivalent. Bachelor of Music graduates are expected to upgrade to Honours Specialist after two years of successful teaching; this also provides a jump to "maximum" level on the pay grid and puts them in the promotion track. Teachers also use the AQ/ABQ sessions to certify in another division, or to simply add music to their teaching qualifications. For example, a JI teacher can become qualified to teach senior high school by taking a 120-hour course called Music, Senior, ABQ. There are also some professionally-based MA programs in music education in Ontario; the enrolment in each is low, however.

Across Canada, under-qualified teachers are responsible for the music instruction in their school or are teaching a section or two to complete a full timetable at the secondary school level. Teachers can be successful and effective in teaching music without all of the formal training, but this is not often the case. Instead, the students fail to reach their creative and artistic potential in a learning situation where the teacher is unable to fully deliver a properly developed and delivered music program. On the other hand, simply having full specialist qualifications does not ensure success in teaching. Teachers are needed who bring a balance of *competence, confidence, and*

*courage*, all supported by a strong *calling* to teach children and young people, in order to have healthy and vibrant music in our schools.

### **Voices from the Schools**

Any investigation of the current state of music education in Ontario would be incomplete without hearing what the teachers have to say. After all, they are best equipped to describe the current situation. Time and resources did not permit an exhaustive survey, but an informal questionnaire was circulated provincially in preparation for this paper. The following questions were asked:

1. How would you rate the overall quality of music education in your area (board/school/region)? You may wish to describe the variety of programs, percentage of students participating, level of teacher qualifications, budgets, parental involvement, or anything else that would clarify your response.
2. What changes have you noticed in music education in the last five years? Are these changes improvements?
3. If you could snap your fingers and make something miraculous happen in the structure and delivery of school music, what would that something be?
4. Are there partnerships connected to music education in your area? Do business, community, Canadian Music Industry Education Committee (CMIEC), or other parties work together with schools? If so, please describe.
5. Please comment on undergraduate and preservice teacher training programs. Do you think Ontario Universities are doing a good job? What about inservice support?

6. Finally, comment on the role of OMEA and its effect on music in Ontario classrooms. Is the association meeting its goals? If so, describe briefly. If not, what is the reason for the shortfall?

We received responses from most regions of the province. Many of the anonymous comments are listed below.

On the elementary side of things, our board is in sad shape. I remember a time in the early 1990s there were full time music teachers in many schools. I practice taught with 2 teachers that taught all or mostly full time music. I also remember a time when we had music consultants and a music department at the Education Centre and our board was considered “the top” as teachers and advocates of the Kodály Method.

Elementary Instrumental music really does not exist in my area. If it does it is due to a staff member taking the initiative to start it and then the parents will have to fund it. Any instrumental music programs occur outside of the regular classroom time (mornings, lunches and after school) and therefore are voluntary

Teacher qualification at the elementary area varies—since for most schools the classroom teacher is responsible for delivering the music program—there are more often than not—NOT music specialists. Those that do provide music in an extra-curricular manner it is often due to their love of music and strong belief of its importance—not that they are specialists in this area.

It always amazes me to talk to qualified music teachers, only to find out that they are

teaching little or no music. Or, that teachers with limited skill are struggling to do their best. Sadly, with all of the extra workshops that regular classroom teachers are expected to attend, there is little time or energy to search out extra music workshops.

I have a real problem with the number of music courses teacher candidates need in order to be qualified to teach music. While some people are innately musical yet perhaps choose to do an undergraduate degree in another area (i.e., science), not all people are like this. I believe in some schools, only TWO courses are needed in order to teach music! This is unbelievable to me I'm not sure what the solution is to this problem. But something does need to be done.

It has taken 5 years to for the ministry to provide materials and guidance to support the curriculum. (There is much more to be done in this area!) I find that administration in our board is very supportive of having a quality music program taught by specialists.

Sadly, for non-music specialist teachers, they are overwhelmed with the many other (and mostly considered "more important" teaching subjects in literacy and numeracy). It is very difficult to ask them to try to devote more time to learning more on a subject that for most is considered "less important". As a result it is difficult to reach these people and let them know that OMEA is there to be a resource and inspiration. In my school, I try to connect with the classroom music teachers after I have been to a conference and give them some new ideas that I think they would like.

We have Arts Leaders—no longer Music Department Heads and therefore we potentially

have non-music people attending Arts meetings (making decisions on behalf of the school programs) who are also in charge of the school-based budget.

Since instrumental music really doesn't begin for us until grade 9, I find that the curriculum is a bit difficult to meet all the requirements as I am dealing with beginners. Music educators and music programs over the years have proven to be flexible and adaptable to change. Despite such challenges as the cancellation of late bussing, the changing of school hours, the introduction of semestering, cancellation of repair and maintenance budgets, and politically driven curriculum philosophies, music programs have survived and continue to be relevant to our students and the community. . . .

New political, economic and philosophical realities will continue to challenge music and arts educators. It is the individual and collective passion, creativity, and determination of music educators that must and will ensure that current and future generations of students will continue to have access to a relevant music and arts education of the highest quality.

These comments represent only a few of the comments received. Although there is not space in this chapter for a full, analytic study of the survey results the comments above provide us with a miniature snapshot of Ontario's music teaching reality.

### **Challenges for Today and the Future**

Many questions arise from examining our history and in listening to the practitioners' responses: What can we learn from these experiences? Are we fighting for the right kind of

music learning experience? What is the best way to use music specialists in the elementary schools? Should they be working with other classroom teachers, or simply teaching students? Are there other models of hiring that should be considered?

Will our efforts continue to reward only the 10–12% of high school students who currently take music? Is there room for alternative types of programs to co-exist with the traditional performance based ensemble programs? Are the traditional programs still worth fighting for? What should a full teacher education program consist of for music instruction? Who should teach music? Whose music should be taught? Are the voices and faces of our diverse population represented in our music in schools?

These are but a few of the questions that Ontario music educators face daily. The answers are as complex as the questions, and when viewing Ontario as a multi-regional province, with rural and urban schools, we find more than 100 different first languages represented in our communities. With a widening gap between the wealthy and poor, the musical education canvas takes on new proportions of complexity.

To generalize is always dangerous, but it is important to conclude this chapter by addressing some of the larger and overarching ideas that might advance the cause of music education at this juncture in the history of Ontario education. Elliot Eisner argues that education in general can learn from the arts. He reminds us that at the turn of the last century, there was considerable debate about what type of schools America would establish. The learning-as-a-science concept, based upon the emergence of the science of psychology (Edward Thorndike, et al.), would enable us to become masters of our learning, as “we are now masters of heat and light” (Thorndike, 1919, pp. 6–8). Not everyone shared Thorndike’s optimistic view, and John Dewey, for example, wondered what science could provide to so artful an enterprise as teaching.

By the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century however, schools had become effective and efficient manufacturing plants. In the vision of the social efficiency movement, students were raw material to be processed according to specifications prescribed by supervisors and trained in time and motion study (Eisner, 2002, p. 3). Among the results of the influence of science upon education was an estrangement between science and the arts. The process of science was considered to be dependable; the arts process was not. Science was cognitive, the arts emotional. Science was teachable, the arts required talent. Perhaps most importantly, science was testable, and the arts were matters of preference. In sum, science was useful, the arts ornamental.

Today's educational landscape is not altogether different from the early twentieth century. Our educational system is *results-based* and puts a premium on the measurement of outcomes, the ability to predict the outcomes, and the need to have an absolutely clear vision on what we want to accomplish. As Eisner says, "we like our data hard and our methods stiff—we call it rigour" (Eisner, 2002, p. 4). It does not require much insight to realize that the vision and values that drove education in America more than 100 years ago came back to Ontario with a vengeance in the 1990s. Yet, our culture has identified distinct ways of thinking and knowing that are deemed desirable, if not essential to succeed in today's world. How does the "training" in schools—based on a testing model—connect with the so-called outcomes of intelligence? How does our penchant for quantifying educational outcomes line up with the notion of the "creative class" that plays such a dominant role in both the economic and cultural sectors in Ontario and beyond? (Florida, 2002; Wyman, 2004). Today's thinkers and society builders are suggesting that it is from the arts processes themselves that we learn educational strategies for the development of fully developed citizens. This is much like the vision that Egerton Ryerson

proclaimed in 1871.

So, in a concluding gesture, we turn again to Eisner for some notions of artistically rooted forms of intelligence that pertain to our study of music in the schools. The question that frames this is, “How would this approach or practice look in my music room?” or, “How would these concepts inform my thinking and planning about teaching and learning in music?” First, creative work requires the ability to make judgments about qualitative relationships. Making decisions about how qualities are to be organized does not depend on faithfulness to a formula. We learn in the arts that attention to details matter, and that revision and re-forming are part of our process. To “measure” this outcome is to experience and to respond with our own sense of discernment and understanding, not to quantify, grade, and make it a matter of public comparisons to other learning accomplishments in our community. Second, we learn from the arts that music teaching can be a process of flexible targets and goals. In performance, we may have the exemplar of perfection in our mind, but as we head towards that target, new and other possibilities emerge. Targets are redirected, and goals adjusted. In composing, improvising, and other forms of creating, the goal comes into focus as the process unfolds.

Finally, we suggest that there is intrinsic motivation for doing good work, and that there are musical satisfactions that the work we do makes possible. The balance of challenge, resistance from the materials themselves, sense of timelessness, and the aesthetic rewards of creative accomplishment are the results that matter most since, in the long run, these are what will last and be pursued voluntarily long after our students have forgotten our classroom efforts.

In a time when the public’s perception of education supports the current paradigm, and certainly may not include music, we are challenged once more to elevate our work to that of quality, creativity, inclusivity, and imagination. No Ontario student should be deprived of a

music education; no Ontario student should be forced to suffer a mediocre one; no Ontario student should fail to find herself or himself in the sounds and voices of our music education. As an overview of our education history shows, Ontario's music education path has been long, winding, and interesting, and no doubt there will be many more twists and turns ahead. We work toward a well-travelled road that accommodates all of the young citizens of Ontario.

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