

Multiculturalism in Ontario's Schools

There are nearly two million students in Ontario from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some students have just arrived from foreign nations or different provinces, while others were born here. Some families travelled thousands of miles to be part of the Ontario experience, while others have lived on the land for thousands of years.

Ontario's Ministry of Education is committed to promoting multiculturalism in every school in the publicly funded education system. All students - including Asian Canadians - should feel accepted and reflected in their schools.

For example, the Ministry is helping parents who do not speak English or French to access important information in their own language. This is because the Ministry recognizes they need to be supported and involved in their child's education.

The ministry has launched the ABC123 website (www.ontario.ca/abc123) that provides parents with handy tips on a variety of ways to help their child at home, while a brochure on bullying (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/bullying.html>) explains what they should watch for and where they can get help. This information is available in more than a dozen languages including Chinese, Korean, Punjabi and Tamil.

In addition, the Ministry encourages teachers to develop classroom lessons that reflect the province's diversity. This includes asking teachers to discuss anti-discrimination issues, to recognize the diversity of student backgrounds, interests and experiences, and to incorporate a variety of viewpoints in teaching activities.

The Ministry is also taking a number of steps to bring more global perspectives into classroom lessons and encourage schools and school boards to support a more equitable and inclusive learning environment.

There are several new high school courses being created focusing on gender studies, equity studies and world cultures. These courses will give students the opportunity to learn more about perspectives beyond their immediate family, friends and communities. In the equity studies course, for example, students will have the chance to expand their understanding of the challenges facing newcomers to Canada and the opportunity to study the contributions of various cultural groups to Canadian life.

These new efforts to reflect and celebrate diversity in our schools build on a culturally rich curriculum already used by teachers. For example, Grade 8 students taking geography investigate why families emigrate to Canada. Grade 9 dance students learn about the cultural significance of world dance forms including examples from South Asia. Grade 12 students taking social sciences and humanities learn about the social institutions of at least three diverse cultures. The Tamil community is one of the examples suggested to teachers.

The Ministry also intends to release an equity and inclusive education strategy for Ontario's publicly funded schools in 2009. All students, teachers, parents, principals and other educators should feel welcomed and included in their school community. This can happen when everyone values diversity, respect and caring.

The strategy will support these goals by setting out a vision for an equitable and inclusive education system and outlining an action plan for realizing this vision. It will also highlight successful school board programs and set provincial expectations for schools, school boards and the ministry.

All students in Ontario's schools deserve an education free from bias and discrimination, and filled with diversity and culture. The Ministry will continue to improve the publicly-funded education system to reflect this vision. Equitable, inclusive education not only helps students today, but also builds a cohesive society and a strong economy that will secure Ontario's future prosperity.