



June 30, 2005

The Hon. Gerard Kennedy  
Minister of Education  
900 Bay St, 22nd Floor, Mowat Block  
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

*Kids who come to Canada need a better future...*

--- Youth participant, Atkinson forum on education and  
new immigrant students (April 13, 2005)

Dear Minister:

On April 13, 2005, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation invited leading thinkers, educators and change agents in the field of education and settlement in Ontario to a forum on education and new immigrant students. The starting point for the forum was Andrew Duffy's recent series on the unmet needs of Canada's new immigrant students. Many good ideas emerged from this discussion along with a clear sense of readiness and commitment to work with you to address this challenge.

Duffy's *Class Struggles: Public Education and the New Canadian* was the result of a year-long project funded by the Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy. The study, originally published in the Toronto Star as a week-long series in September 2004, shows that at a time when immigration is recognized as a lynchpin of our country's strategy for future growth and prosperity, public schools are being sapped of their ability to support young new Canadians in getting a good start.

The series questions decisions to cut ESL programs in the face of rising demands, and despite evidence that mastery of English is key to higher learning. It also asks why good opportunities and economic security are denied to too many new immigrant parents and why funding for settlement services falls short of the support that is required to provide new Canadian families with the stability that they need.

Public awareness about the seriousness of this issue is growing rapidly. Recent reports by People for Education and the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto once again focused media attention on the challenges facing new immigrant students.

Minister, we know that you are just as concerned as we are about this issue. Like you, the forum participants posed tough questions about what is to be done to ensure that all young people get off to the best possible start in our schools.

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We know that making the right kind of change happen will require taking collective responsibility and committing to a joint response among and between departments at all levels of government.

At our forum, journalists, advocates, educators and their representatives, principals, parents, young people, academics, experts, politicians, school board representatives and foundations, joined forces to strategize on how we can build an education system that works for new immigrant students and their families. Kathleen Wynne was a very valuable participant in this process. Please see the attached list of participants.

*It's good that people care about us...*

--- Youth participant, Atkinson forum on education and new immigrant students (April 13, 2005)

What emerged out of our lively conversation was a commitment to work together to get new immigrant students on the right track. Based on these discussions, the forum generated the following ***10-point agenda for the inclusion of new immigrant students***. While not officially endorsed by all the roundtable participants, it captures the spirit of our discussions and provides a roadmap for the kind of changes that we believe are required.

## **A 10-point agenda for the inclusion of new immigrant students**

### ***1. Adequate resources and accountability***

As our school system continues to struggle to meet many priorities, often it is vulnerable young people who end up on the losing side of the balance sheet. Schools need adequate, equitable funding to ensure that the diverse circumstances of students are met. This includes funding ESL programs adequately and ensuring that resources for these programs are not redirected to meeting shortfalls in other areas of the system.

### ***2. Measuring what counts***

To improve our school system, we have to ask the right questions about how students are really doing and what kinds of resources and supports they need to succeed. Investing in research efforts that are coherent, sustained, and move beyond one-time snapshots of what is happening in our schools, is one way to measure what counts. Once we have the best possible measures in place, evidence-based action (i.e. policies and programs) needs to follow.

### ***3. An innovative and inclusive curriculum***

To be relevant to all young people, our educational policies and practices, from the highest levels of policy-making and continuing right into the classroom, must be responsive and reflective of the diverse realities in our schools. This means taking active steps to ensure that staffing and hiring policies, curriculum design, decisions about funding and supports, and strategies for community engagement, are driven by our objectives for a more diverse and inclusive education system.

We also need to get to a place where innovation, new technologies, and programs beyond the classroom - physical activity, sports, and creative arts like music, etc. - are seen as integral to the development of *all* of our young people.

### ***4. Building the capacity of educators***

We need to do a better job of preparing and supporting educators to work in multilingual, multicultural, multi-racial, and multi-faith environments with the right training, tools, and resources. And we need to engage not just those teachers who are directly responsible for delivering ESL programs, but all educators across the curriculum at all levels of our system. You are probably aware of the anti-racism, access, and equity initiatives that were started by your ministry in the early 1990's and cancelled in 1996.

### ***5. Engaging families***

Building the capacity of parents and families in becoming active partners in education is vital to the success of new immigrant students. Schools require resources and expertise to do outreach work that will link them with new immigrant families. Also key is the availability of resources and tools to facilitate the involvement and participation of new immigrant families in shaping the education process. Developing a strategy to recruit new Canadians to school councils, for example, would be a positive move.

### ***6. Investing in community capacity***

Community programs are crucial in achieving the education system's goals of supporting young people. The good news is that there are many programs in our communities that are already doing the important work of connecting families and young people with each other and with a whole range of local initiatives. We should nurture these programs, find out more about their successes, and ensure that they become an integrated piece of the learning continuum. For this kind of innovation to work, inter-ministerial collaboration will be key.

## ***7. Providing quality early learning and child care experiences***

Making the early years a priority of our education system is crucial to an agenda of inclusive education and early identification and is the best investment we can make in the future of our people and our communities. We note, with interest, your government's promising Best Start initiative.

## ***8. Learning about education across jurisdictions***

There are plenty of examples across Canada of what works when it comes to supporting the needs of new immigrant students. Federal and provincial levels of government should work together on strategies for more coherent benchmarking, data collection, and sharing best practices, about how to ensure the success of new immigrant students.

*Let's help our parents settle down in Canada...*

--- Youth participant, Atkinson forum on education and new immigrant students (April 13, 2005)

## ***9. Looking beyond our classrooms***

What we do at a macro level to tackle the sources of exclusion based on factors such as poverty, ethno-racial and immigration status, gender, and sexual orientation is an important companion to school-based initiatives.

The success of our young people is ultimately grounded in the wellbeing of our families and communities. That means ensuring access to quality health and social services, affordable housing, and other community programs, including settlement supports. It means access to adequate income security programs and good job opportunities. A key step in putting this in place is to connect the dots between federal and provincial policy spheres, and have all levels of government play their part in the settlement process.

## ***10. Showing the political will***

There is a broad consensus that the areas outlined in this action plan are key to meeting the needs and promoting the inclusion of new immigrant students. Although these ideas are not new, what has stood in the way of an integrated and holistic approach to change has been a lack of political will.

In this regard, we know that you are committed to making a difference.

We hope that you will share this 10-point plan with your Ministry, cabinet colleagues and your federal and provincial counterparts as a way to begin a constructive discussion about how we will safeguard this most essential building block of Canada's future.

*Use Andrew's book [Class Struggles] to let others know what's happening in our school...*

--- Youth participant, Atkinson forum on education and new immigrant students  
(April 13, 2005)

For our part, we would be pleased to provide additional copies of Andrew Duffy's series *Class Struggles: Public Education and the New Canadian* for broad distribution. We hope that you will agree that it is essential reading for anyone who cares about Ontario's education system specifically, and the future of Canada, more generally.

We would also be pleased to reconvene the participants who came together in April so that you can discuss the ideas contained in this 10-point plan directly with them. They would look forward to an opportunity for an open and constructive dialogue about the next steps in meeting this challenge.

At the core of this challenge is the kind of Canada we wish to build. We can do better. We need to do better. Your deep understanding of, and commitment to, these issues is a strength we wish to support. We are pleased to offer our assistance in working with you to build the best possible education system in Ontario that meets the needs of *all* our young people.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Pascal

Att: Andrew Duffy's *Class Struggles: Public Education and the New Canadian*  
List of Participants: Atkinson Forum on Education and New Immigrant Students

CC. Hon. Dalton McGuinty  
Premier of Ontario

Kathleen O. Wynne  
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education

David Oraziotti  
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education

Hon. Mary Anne Chambers  
Minister of Children and Youth Services

Hon. Sandra Pupatello  
Minister of Community and Social Services

Hon. Christopher Bentley  
Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni  
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

John Tory  
Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario

Howard Hampton  
Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario

Frank Klees  
Conservative Critic, Education

Rosario Marchese  
NDP Critic, Education

**Atkinson Forum on Education and New Immigrant Students  
List of Participants**

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Jehad Aliwiewi<br><i>Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office</i>                    | Joan Green<br><i>Joan Green and Associates</i>             | Varsha Naik<br><i>Peel District School Board</i>   |
| Peter Armstrong<br><i>Atkinson Charitable Foundation</i>                     | Beth Gunding<br><i>Peel District School Board</i>          | Fiona Nelson   |
| Ruth Baumann<br><i>Ontario Teachers' Federation</i>                          | Sheryl Hoshizaki<br><i>Cedarwood Public School</i>         | Charles Pascal, Elizabeth Chan,<br>Christine Nunez & Pedro Barata<br><i>Atkinson Charitable Foundation</i> |
| Mike Benson<br><i>Ontario Principals' Council</i>                            | MacArthur Hunter<br><i>Ministry of Education</i>           | Ellen Kachuck Rosenbluth<br><i>The Learning Partnership</i>  |
| Jane Bertrand<br><i>OISE/UT</i>  | Morteza Jafarpour<br><i>SISO</i>                           | Norman Rowen<br><i>The Pathways to Education<br/>Program, Regent Park Community<br/>Health Centre</i>      |
| Sahib Bedi<br><i>Student, Cedarwood Public School</i>                        | Masood Ali Khan<br><i>Student, Cedarwood Public School</i> | Dinesh Satkunayajah<br><i>Student, Cedarwood Public School</i>   |
| Vicki Bismilla<br><i>York Region District School Board</i>                   | Annie Kidder<br><i>People for Education</i>                | Thakshanniya Selvaranjan<br><i>Student, Cedarwood Public School</i>  |
| Harold Braithwaite<br><i>Retired Teachers' of Ontario</i>                    | Rhonda Kimberley-Young<br><i>OSSTF</i>                     | Anita Srinivasin<br><i>Maytree Foundation</i>  |
| Elizabeth Coelho<br><i>OISE/UT</i>   | Taivi Lobu<br><i>Ontario Justice Education Network</i>     | Mary Tangelder<br><i>Understanding the Early Years</i>   |
| Cathy Dandy<br><i>Toronto Parent Network</i>                                 | Paula Markus<br><i>TDSB</i>                                | Rummana Virji<br><i>York Region District School Board</i>  |
| Peter Dorfman<br><i>Settlement Workers in Schools</i>                        | Mary Marrone<br><i>Ontario Justice Education Network</i>   | May Wong<br><i>Toronto Community Foundation</i>  |
| Andrew Duffy<br><i>Winner, 2003 Atkinson Fellowship<br/>in Public Policy</i> | Heather MacTaggart<br><i>Classroom Connections</i>         | Mary Wong<br><i>Pickering High School</i>  |
| Nathan Gilbert<br><i>Laidlaw Foundation</i>                                  | Lloyd McKell<br><i>TDSB</i>                                | Moira Wong<br><i>Equity Dep't, TDSB</i>  |
| Michael Goldbloom<br><i>Toronto Star</i>                                     | Valerie McDonald<br><i>People for Education</i>            | Kathleen Wynne<br><i>MPP Don Valley West</i>   |
| Mary Gordon<br><i>Roots of Empathy</i>                                       | Penny Milton<br><i>Canadian Education Association</i>      |  |