

# Curriculum Development and Implementation

Follow-up to VFM Section 3.05, *2003 Annual Report*

## Background

The *Education Act* gives the Minister of Education broad authority over the “courses of study that shall be taught” to the province’s 1.4 million elementary and 700,000 secondary students in its 4,000 elementary and 800 secondary schools.

Prior to 1996, school boards had considerable latitude regarding the curriculum that they taught. In 1996, the Ministry of Education undertook, for the first time, the development of a province-wide curriculum. The Ministry began introducing the new curriculum in September 1997 and completed its development work with the introduction of the grade 12 curriculum in September 2002. The Ministry estimated that the costs of developing and implementing the new curriculum between 1996 and January 31, 2003, were about \$488 million.

We concluded that the process by which the Ministry developed the new curriculum was appropriate, and according to most of the educators we interviewed, it resulted in a good-quality product that was an improvement over what they had before.

However, the educators we interviewed expressed concerns regarding the way the curriculum was implemented. Their major concern

was that the Ministry rushed the implementation, with the result that a new curriculum and changes in student assessment practices were introduced before appropriate training, textbooks, and other materials were readily available. This made the initial years of implementation extremely difficult for students and teachers.

Educators also expressed concerns about the suitability of the new curriculum for weaker students. Recent studies and test results had indicated that many students were still not succeeding under the new curriculum and that many students were entering secondary school without the educational foundation required to graduate.

We also concluded that the Ministry and the school boards we visited did not have sufficient and reliable information to, for example:

- measure and report on the extent to which students have learned the new curriculum in grades and subjects other than those that have been tested province-wide;
- measure the extent to which consistency in student assessment has been achieved among the province’s schools; and
- identify and prioritize the problems underlying poor student achievement; develop viable improvement plans; and track and report results.

We made recommendations for improving curriculum implementation processes, and the Ministry committed to taking corrective action.

## Current Status of Recommendations

Based on information obtained from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry has made progress on all of the recommendations we made in our *2003 Annual Report*, with significant progress being made on some. The current status of action taken on each of our recommendations is as follows.

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULUM

#### Recommendation

*To help ensure that future revisions to the curriculum are implemented more effectively, the Ministry should ensure that:*

- *teachers receive appropriate training prior to implementation; and*
- *educational publishers have sufficient lead time to develop appropriate textbooks and classroom materials.*

*To help improve the implementation of the current curriculum, the Ministry should work with school boards to ensure that teachers receive more specific implementation training, including training on the use of tools such as the course profiles and unit planner.*

#### Current Status

The Ministry advised us that revisions to the curriculum have been and will continue to be made under the Sustaining Quality Curriculum Initiative, an ongoing cycle of curriculum review, to ensure that the curriculum remains current and relevant. For example, the curriculum documents for Social Studies, History, and Geography—grades 1 to 8, for Canadian and World Studies—grades 9 to 12,

and for Mathematics—grades 1 to 10 were revised, approved, and released in 2004 and 2005.

The Ministry indicated that it has taken the following actions regarding our recommendation:

- Training support on curriculum revisions is being provided to teachers well in advance of mandatory implementation dates. For example, training sessions took place in June 2004 for the September 2005 implementation of revisions to the grades 1 to 8 Social Studies curriculum.
- Educational publishers are being provided with the lead time they need to develop textbooks and classroom materials for curriculum revisions through semi-annual meetings of the Trillium List Advisory Committee and information sessions on specific curriculum initiatives.
- School boards were given \$7.7 million in 2004 to provide local school training to teachers on the electronic curriculum unit planner, student evaluation and assessment, the revised achievement charts, and the revised curriculum policy documents released in 2004 and in 2005. The boards had reported back to the Ministry on the use of the funds. The Ministry has reviewed the board reports and confirmed that the funds were used on the priority areas outlined above.

### ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

#### Recommendation

*To help ensure that the curriculum serves the needs of all students, the Ministry should:*

- *develop policy guidance governing the promotion of at-risk students, including ways to increase participation in remedial programs such as summer school, to help ensure that all students acquire the knowledge, skills, and work habits required to succeed in subsequent grades and ultimately to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma; and*
- *require boards to track the participation of at-risk students in remedial programs and to assess the*

*effectiveness of the programs in improving student performance.*

### Current Status

The Ministry advised us that policy guidance has not yet been developed regarding the promotion of at-risk students or for increasing the participation of at-risk students in remedial programs. However, the Ministry indicated that addressing the learning requirements of students at risk of not succeeding continues to be a ministry priority. The Ministry also indicated that it has conducted research on the approaches to promoting at-risk students used in other jurisdictions and has reviewed relevant studies, the results of which are to be summarized in a research paper. The Ministry advised us that it has completed a series of consultations with representatives from the three provincial principals' associations. A survey was conducted to gather broader input, and the findings are under analysis. In addition, the Ministry is in the process of contracting with provincial principals' organizations to develop principals' resource materials to support promotional decisions and remediation practices for struggling students.

The Ministry advised us that tracking the participation of at-risk students in, and assessing the effectiveness of, remedial programs, is dependent on the further development of its information-management infrastructure. The introduction of the Ontario Education Number in September 2004 (a unique student identification number assigned by the Ministry to elementary and secondary students across the province to make it easier to keep reliable records on them) and the implementation of a new data collection system over the next two years are intended to:

- allow for reporting on student achievement at the classroom, school, board, and provincial levels; and
- greatly facilitate the collection and analysis of accurate and timely data about education

in Ontario, including the education of at-risk students.

The Ministry also indicated that school boards are now required to track students who have been unsuccessful in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, and therefore must complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy course before they can graduate.

## MONITORING CURRICULUM QUALITY AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Recommendation

*To help determine whether the Ministry's expectations for curriculum reform are being met, and to enhance the public accountability of school boards, the Ministry should:*

- *implement procedures to monitor and report on consistency in teachers' student assessment practices throughout the province;*
- *assess the benefits of developing common province-wide exams;*
- *establish a process for strengthening school board implementation processes, the scope of which includes evaluating the adequacy of key curriculum delivery, student assessment, improvement planning, and results reporting procedures of school boards; and*
- *develop and report on outcome-oriented measures of effectiveness for elementary and secondary education.*

### Current Status

The Ministry advised us that, to encourage and increase consistency in teachers' student assessment practices, it has provided teachers with training, exemplars, and achievement charts and has researched actions taken in other jurisdictions. The Ministry also advised us that it has consulted with supervisory officers' organizations (including the Ontario Public Supervisory Officers' Association and the Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association) to gather information on the feasibility

of developing and implementing procedures for monitoring and reporting on consistency in teachers' student assessment practices throughout the province. In addition, a survey was conducted in the French-language system to gather information on consistency in student assessment. The Ministry indicated that it is in the process of contracting for a resource document to help promote consistency in student assessments.

The Ministry has not yet assessed the benefits of developing common province-wide exams. The Ministry advised us that it was providing support to district steering committees to monitor the implementation of the curriculum and that the development of outcome-oriented measures of effectiveness for elementary and secondary education would be addressed when the new data collection system is implemented. The Ministry also indicated that it was exploring models to be used to monitor curriculum implementation in a selected discipline.

## STRENGTHENING IMPROVEMENT PLANNING AND RESEARCH

### Recommendation

*To help ensure that decisions regarding curriculum delivery are based upon sufficient and reliable information, and to enhance the effectiveness of the improvement planning process, the Ministry should:*

- *establish standards regarding the capability of student information systems that school boards use and the information that is recorded on them;*
- *co-ordinate and support training for school and board personnel in implementing effective improvement planning processes;*
- *implement, either through the Education Quality and Accountability Office or otherwise, a review function for school board and school improvement planning processes that includes on-site examination; and*
- *co-ordinate and support research on key curriculum delivery issues.*

### Current Status

The Ministry stated that, while it had not established standards for student information systems, it did develop in May 2004 common data definitions for the information that is shared between the Ministry, school boards, and schools. The Ministry also advised us that the new data collection system would enable it to generate more accurate, reliable, and complete statistics and would provide a better basis for assessing needs and for developing policies to meet them.

The Ministry indicated that training for the implementation of improvement planning, as well as the establishment of a review function to assess improvement planning processes, would be deferred until the mandate and priorities of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat have been established. We were advised that beginning in the 2005 school year, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat would work collaboratively with boards to strengthen the school improvement planning process for kindergarten to grade 6.

With respect to co-ordinating and supporting research on key curriculum delivery issues, the Ministry noted that it had established a number of expert panels, such as the Early Reading, Literacy, and Early Math panels, to consider specific issues. Panel reports resulted in a number of additional support materials and resources, and examples of best practices and instructional strategies have been distributed to schools. The Ministry indicated that it also researched and developed a resource relating to improving boys' literacy skills, which was introduced at a provincial symposium and distributed to all boards and schools in the province. A multi-year formal evaluation of the Early Reading and Early Math strategies was being undertaken to provide empirical evidence of progress achieved and guidance on areas needing improvement. We were advised that a pilot project to support remediation for Mathematics in grades 7 to 9 is being initiated. The project is specifically designed to measure the

effectiveness of materials, training, and implementation in this area.

## **EVALUATING THE ANNUAL EDUCATION PLAN/TEACHER ADVISER PROGRAM**

### **Recommendation**

*In order to help ensure that appropriate benefits are realized from the Annual Education Plan/Teacher Adviser Program, the Ministry should, in conjunction with school boards and principals, formally assess the success of the program in meeting the needs of the students. If the assessment is positive, measurable objectives for the program should be established.*

### **Current Status**

The Ministry indicated that, from August to November 2004, it undertook a review of the implementation of the Annual Education Plan and the Teacher Adviser Program in Ontario schools. As a result of this review, effective June 27, 2005, schools are no longer required to establish a Teacher Adviser Program. The Annual Education Plan continues to be a requirement for students in grades 7 to 12.