News Release
Communiqué

Ministry of Education **Ministère de l'Éducation**

For Immediate Release
July 12, 2007

MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT DELIVERING MORE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF

Teachers Can Use American Sign Language In Ontario's Schools

TORONTO — The McGuinty government is improving the learning environment for students who are deaf or hard of hearing by permitting American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) to be used in Ontario schools, Education Minister Kathleen Wynne announced today.

"We are committed to ensuring that students who are deaf receive an education that helps them reach their full potential," said Wynne. "I'm proud of the partnerships we have built with the deaf community to take this important step forward together."

Publicly funded school boards are encouraged to offer ASL and LSQ to students in the classroom if it will benefit their education. These sign languages can also be used for discipline or school management.

A number of initiatives are also underway to help school boards and provincial schools for students who are deaf and hard of hearing hire qualified staff. These initiatives include:

- Developing a sign language curriculum
- Increasing the number of colleges and universities that offer ASL and LSQ courses to teachers and interpreters
- Helping staff in provincial schools improve their ASL and English communication skills
- Working with the Ontario College of Teachers to offer a new qualification program requiring teachers to have some ASL or LSQ training before teaching students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

In addition, the government is currently working with VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children to find ways to enhance the education of students who use an auditory-verbal approach to learning and communicating.

"Thank you to the government for working with us to find solutions that will help more students succeed," said Wayne Nicholson, president of the Ontario Association of the Deaf. "More teachers using sign languages in schools means more students who are deaf receiving a top-quality education."

"We are moving in the right direction to ensure all children who are deaf succeed – linguistically and academically," said Chris Kenopic, chair of the American Sign Language

Services for Deaf Children in Ontario, a parent support group. “This announcement will build a promising future for students in their education and employment opportunities, and most importantly, provide students with greater self-esteem and confidence as deaf individuals in achieving goals to succeed in life.”

“These new initiatives are a positive first step in making a real difference in the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing,” said Gary Malkowski, special advisor to the president, public affairs for The Canadian Hearing Society. “We look forward to working with the Ontario government to establish policies and standards that will continue to assist students who are deaf in overcoming their challenges and barriers.”

The McGuinty government has also successfully worked with education and community partners over the past three-and-a-half years to:

- Reduce class sizes in kindergarten to Grade 3 — resulting in 93 per cent of primary classes with 23 or fewer students and 65 per cent with just 20 or fewer students
- Help more students establish a solid foundation in reading, writing and math — boosting the percentage of elementary students meeting the provincial standard up 10 percentage points to 64 per cent
- Provide more learning choices and individual attention to high school students to keep them more focused on graduation — causing the graduation rate to climb five percentage points to 73 per cent and remain on target for 85 per cent by 2010-11.

“By allowing the use of ASL and LSQ in our schools, we are removing yet another barrier to full accessibility for children who are deaf,” said Minister Responsible for Ontarians with Disabilities Madeleine Meilleur. “A more accessible Ontario is a stronger Ontario. Providing more opportunities for children who are deaf to fully participate in their education will ensure a more prosperous future for them and for the province.”

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