

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Public Consultations on Education

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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Here we are the end of summer. It is back to school for many families of Newmarket-Aurora and at Queen's Park is back to its regular hustle and bustle. There will be new legislation introduced this term that will continue to build Ontario up. Ontario is taking immediate steps to give students and parents more and improved information about their child's progress in school and is launching an ambitious multi-year initiative to modernize curriculum and assessment tools from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Premier Kathleen Wynne and Education Minister Mitzi Hunter announced the opening of public consultations for this new initiative and detail the new report cards, which will be introduced in schools for the 2018-19 academic year. Ontario's updated school curriculum will be developed through the public consultations with the goal of improving student achievement in core skills such as math and increasing emphasis on transferable life skills that can help students of all ages meet the changing demands of today and tomorrow. By consulting with students, parents, teachers and other partners, the province also aims to help students take full advantage of their education experience with a new curriculum that better engages every aspect of a young person's interests and potential. It will place an increased emphasis on equity and well-being, including the effects that physical activity, bullying and mental health can have on student success in and out of the classroom. Parents' access to information about how their children are doing in school will be enhanced through updated assessment and reporting practices, including EQAO, to make sure they are culturally relevant, measure a wider range of learning, and better reflect student well-being and equity.

NewMakeIt Tour

I had the absolute pleasure of touring NewMakeIt, Newmarket. NewMakeIt is a collaborative organization that enables members of the local community and across York Region to start innovative, creative, entrepreneurial or learning businesses. The space is used by do-it-yourself creators and inventors, through mentorship and collaboration members can see their ideas come alive. For a nominal membership, people can use office space, get help with business plans, and access tools like laser cutters, computer controlled routers and machining tools. In the past year alone, the centre has created \$1.08 million in economic development and helped create 48 new jobs. The centre aims to be self-funded, but currently relies on funding from York Region and Ontario. The Town of Newmarket also helped with the initial start-up.

Green Ontario Fund

Ontario is helping people across the province save money and fight climate change through the Green Ontario Fund ? a new not-for-profit provincial agency that will deliver programs and rebates to help reduce energy costs in homes and businesses. I was pleased to launch the Green Ontario Fund that is part of Ontario's Climate Change Action Plan and is funded by proceeds from the province's cap on carbon dioxide pollution market. (Carbon dioxide is a major contributor to climate change). You can visit www.greenon.ca to find out how small changes can help homes and businesses save money while reducing greenhouse gas pollution. Initiatives include the new GreenON Installations program, interested and eligible households can register to have a Green Ontario Fund-trained technician visit and install a smart thermostat at no cost. The technician will also provide advice and tips as well as personalized suggestions for additional energy-saving upgrades. I am excited by not only how the fund will help homeowners, but also how it has the potential to give a substantial boost in business to local renovators and contractors ? those folks who install insulation, upgrade windows and doors, replace inefficient heating and cooling systems, and other upgrades to help us all reduce our carbon dioxide output.

Ontario Making It Easier for Businesses to Buy Green Vehicles

Ontario is helping businesses buy fuel efficient vehicles and technologies that reduce carbon dioxide pollution and foster sustainable development ? and the province is seeking public input. This investment is part of Ontario's Climate Change Action Plan and is funded by proceeds from the province's carbon market. The new program will provide rebates towards the purchase of alternative-fuel vehicles and fuel-saving technologies, making it

more affordable for local businesses to own and operate greener vehicles.

Eligible vehicles and devices being considered under the program include electric and natural gas-powered trucks, aerodynamic devices, anti-idling devices and trailer refrigeration units. The program will encourage more businesses to make the switch to low pollution vehicles, leading to a healthier and more sustainable Ontario for everyone.

Province Balancing the Budget This Year, Helping Families Get Ahead

Last week, the province released the Public Accounts of Ontario, showing that Ontario's deficit for last year was \$991 million? \$3.3 billion lower than projected in the 2016 Budget and \$0.5 billion lower than the interim projection in the 2017 Budget.

This is a result of growth in revenue that exceeded growth in program expense, and lower than forecast interest on debt.

Ontario is on track to balance the budget this year, in 2017-18, while making investments in the programs and services people and families rely on most.