

## **The Empire Club Presents**



**THE HONOURABLE  
MITZIE HUNTER,  
ONTARIO'S MINISTER OF  
EDUCATION**

***WITH:* PREPARING ONTARIO STUDENTS  
FOR THE FUTURE**

**Welcome Address, by Barbara Jesson President of Jesson +  
Company Communications Inc. and President of the Empire  
Club of Canada**

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November 30, 2017

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. From the Royal York Hotel in downtown Toronto, welcome, to the Empire Club of Canada. For those of you just joining us through either our webcast or our podcast, welcome, to the meeting.

Before our distinguished speaker is introduced today, it gives me great pleasure to introduce our Head Table Guests.

I would ask each guest to rise for a brief moment and be seated as your name is called. I would ask the audience to refrain from applauding until all the Head Table Guests have been introduced.

## HEAD TABLE

### Distinguished Guest Speaker:

The Honourable Mitzie Hunter, Ontario's Minister of Education

### Guests:

Mr. Charles Achampong, Director, Academic Partnership Engagement, Scotiabank

Mr. Thomas Chanzy, Vice President, Public Affairs, Ontario Trillium Foundation; Director, Empire Club of Canada

Mr. Mary DePaoli, Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer, RBC

Mr. Andrew Hunter, MBA, Professional Athlete; Entrepreneur; Senior Account Manager, Real Estate and Construction Finance, RBC

Ms. Monica Masciantonio, Vice President, Government Affairs, Scotiabank  
Dr. Gordon McIvor, Past President, Empire Club of Canada

My name is Barbara Jesson. I am the President, of Jesson + Company Communications and the President of the Empire Club of Canada. Ladies and gentlemen, your Head Table Guests.

We are also pleased to welcome some students from the Minister's Advisory Student Council, WE Schools, Tecumseh Senior Public School and students from Trust 15, BBPA and YouthLink. Thank you to RBC for sponsoring our student tables today. Students, please, rise to be recognized.

For the most part, Ontario can claim with great pride and only a tinge of bias that we have one of the greatest education systems in the world.

In the latest OECD PISA test results, Ontario is outperforming the OECD in nearly every category. Our average student performance in reading is the second highest in the world, and we have one of the smallest performance gaps be-

tween immigrant and non-immigrant students despite having significantly more immigration than many other countries on the index.

It is fair to say, then, that our provincial and national education systems have been successful thus far in preparing our students for their futures. Yet, the demands on our education system are undergoing a paradigm shift unlike any we have seen before. The last great reform in education came about in response to the industrial economy of the 20th century. This seems to pale in scope to the exercise of preparing students for an increasingly automated and digitized society.

The very character of labour is shifting at warp speed, driven by increasing globalization and the no-longer nascent field of automation. As software supplants brain power, human jobs are reduced or elevated, depending on your perspective, to AI-driven algorithms, and the very format of learning is changing as attention spans shrink. Today, youth eyeballs tend to favour Wikipedia over textbooks. Many anticipate that education itself will, of necessity, have to be modular and a life process rather than the intense experience of youth.

Then there is the question of online classrooms. Can they match or even exceed the learning outcomes of the personal teaching experience? Our modern education systems must address all of these challenges while at the same time reconciling the lessons learned from failures and transgressions of the past most saliently represented by the age of the residential school. We have to do this while maintaining the commitment to diversity, safety and equity at school, which forms the

cornerstone of our educational philosophy.

It certainly will not be easy, but good education never is.

A good deal of the responsibility for navigating these challenges falls to our guest, today. The Honourable Mitzie Hunter is the Minister of Education, and the MPP for Scarborough–Guildwood.

As the former CEO of the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance, Ms. Hunter worked to solve some of the toughest social, economic and environmental challenges we have faced. She was also previously the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, Vice-President with Goodwill Industries and a regional director at Bell Canada.

A lifelong city-builder, she is passionate about unlocking the urban potential by ensuring fair and inclusive access to employment and prosperity. Part of Kathleen Wynne's team, Mitzie Hunter has worked tirelessly to bring together people to solve problems and to create jobs and opportunity in our community.

Please, join me in welcoming the Honourable Mitzie Hunter to our stage.

## **The Honourable Mitzie Hunter**

Bonjour. Good afternoon, everyone. It is wonderful to be here at the Empire Club of Canada. Thank you so much, Barbara, for that kind introduction.

Let me begin by recognizing that Toronto is located on the traditional territories of Indigenous people. I want to show respect for their contributions and recognize the role of treaties in what is now Ontario because hundreds of years after those treaties are signed, they are relevant to all of us today.

It is really great to be here at the Empire Club of Canada, and I am so thrilled to see all of

the students who have joined today because, students, really this is about you. Welcome.

*[Remarks in French] J'aimerais remercier a L'Empire Club of Canada pour sont accueil.*

The students who are here from my Minister's Student Advisory Council, the WE School, Trust, BBPA, SHAD and, of course, from my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, are two students from Tecumseh Senior Public School and their teacher, Mr. Morris. Welcome to you all.

I believe student voice is extremely important. I believe that students will learn inside and outside of the classroom from experiences as well as from textbooks. Having students here today will, I am sure, contribute to many ways to their learning, and, perhaps, to our learning as well. It is my pleasure to join you all today and to speak with you about our vision for preparing Ontario's students for the future.

Looking around the room, I know that while there are

many different fields, sectors and experiences here today, everyone shares a common goal: A strong economy, strong communities and a strong Ontario, one marked by strong growth that is shared widely. As we pursue this goal, all of us need to understand the challenges that exist in our constantly changing world, challenges that we only overcome if we equip our people, particularly our young people, with the tools and the attitude they need to succeed. That is the essential role that education plays. It is our strongest shield and our sharpest sword, our best guard against risk, our greatest hope for advancement.

Providing young people with access to education is good economic policy. It is good social policy. It is, plainly said, the surest way that we can advance the public good. For that reason, I can think of no greater responsibility that we have, as a government, or as a society, than to provide our young people with the finest education possible.

When you talk to young people—and I do that; I talk to young people and I try to listen to what they have to say—about how the world is changing, or when you look into the headlines, such as those that say “Lifelong learning is becoming an economic imperative” or “Teaching 21st century skills for 21st century success requires an ecosystem approach,” you can see how advancements and technologies have dramatically changed how our world is going.

Even just in the past decade, think of how the smartphone, tablets, social media have transformed our daily lives, how we conduct business, share information and connect with

each other. Think of the services and the companies that were once considered mainstream or essential that are now obsolete or are really on their way out. Even as our economy leads the North American economy in both jobs and growth, even as we attract talent and industry and world-wide interest from respected brands like Google and Reuters, we know that it remains an uncertain world. The pace of change is accelerating, and bringing with it a number of challenges, but also many opportunities.

In the last 12 months alone, there has been more data generated than in the previous 200 years. Ontario and Canada must be ready. Education is the remedy. It is the best way to unlock our future opportunities, to share them widely and to guard against these turbulent times.

What we know, without a doubt, is that a good education can prepare our students in the face of constant change and provide them with a lifetime of greater security and possibility. Simply said, education gives our young people choices. It affords them options. It offers them an added measure of control over their future in a world that is in constant flux. This is our task as a government. This is what we owe our young people. I want to assure you that it is a responsibility that we, in Ontario, and I, personally, as Minister of Education, take to heart.

Recently, I met with a few very inspiring and entrepreneurial young people from the Toronto District School Board. They stood tall and proud when they showed me a pair of sneakers that they had designed, and they were wearing them.

These students teamed up with the fashion industry professionals through a unique mentorship program at their school. They learned about design, marketing, social entrepreneurship, and these sneakers were designed, produced and sold at an event that they planned. In fact, you can even purchase the sneakers at a local fashion retailer in Toronto.

This is the result of what happens when students have hands-on learning opportunities. They develop skills that can transfer into real-world situations and foster career aspirations. November is Canada Career Month, a nationwide celebration of meaningful work. It is the perfect time to look at how we are preparing students at a time where we see new careers and pathways emerging, when we see technology disrupting traditional industries, and both young and older workers are having to make transitions and adapt.

Ontario's publicly funded education system is playing a pivotal role in the development of a strong and prosperous future. In fact, our public education system is rated by independent observers as one of the best in the world. I thank you, Barbara, for recognizing some of those statistics. It is a system that has been built and carefully nurtured over time, over the years, by our great educators, our administrators, and our parents and students. I want to say thank you to them.

Building on this success is key to making sure Ontario remains competitive and prosperous for the century ahead, and, even more importantly, places our people at the centre of that success, creating opportunities for everyone to do well and to get ahead. Let us start by recognizing that our publicly funded

education system has earned Ontario a world-wide reputation for innovation, equity and excellence. That puts us in an enviable position on building on a strong foundation.

The OECD has applauded Ontario and our programs that are graduating more students. In 2016, the high school graduation rate increased to 86.5%. That is the highest it has ever been in our province's history. I want to just pause on that for just a moment. We are graduating nine out of every ten students who enter high school, more than any other government in Ontario's history, something that has never been done before, something that will serve us well in the long term. While we are proud of our results, there is more work that we need to do to serve our students even better, to put our people even further ahead and offer them an even better chance at a brighter future. Learning in the 21st century requires a greater emphasis on useful and practical learning. We need to teach our students the transferable skills that they will need to succeed.

This brings me to the first part of our plan that I want to share with you, to have students learn skills, which include things like critical thinking, communications, collaboration, creativity, entrepreneurship. Let me give you an example.

I believe that Yang Lin is here. Yang Cheng Lin is here today, and she is a fellow in the SHAD program that our government supports. SHAD is a month-long program that includes STEM, leadership and entrepreneurship. Yang Lin's experience included creating a startup to address the theme of reducing Canada's energy footprint. Yang Lin and her fellow students pitched their business ideas to a panel of expert

judges. It required skills in teambuilding, business planning, product development, skills that they can use in any circumstance. These are the skills that students will need to succeed in the 21st century. We know this intuitively.

What makes a difference these days? It is the ability of our people to be creative, to see, to communicate and to connect where others cannot. Now, more than ever, the purpose of our education system, in practical terms, not just in abstract or in an academic sense, must be to teach students how to think, to learn to learn, and we must provide them with every opportunity to become successful, productive, compassionate and actively engaged citizens.

Of course—and let me assure you—the fundamentals of reading, writing and math remain essential to student learning. We have committed ourselves very much to those basics. At the same time, we have a focused plan that builds on our successes while embracing new ways of learning so that students are prepared to seize the opportunities which lie ahead in a world defined by new trends and new technologies. We have set the goal of broadband speeds to the global standard of 1MB per second, per student, so that they can succeed in the digital world. It is a priority of our government that all students in Ontario are provided with all the tools necessary to reach their full potential.

That is why we are modernizing Ontario's curriculum from full-day kindergarten through to grade 12. We are creating spaces for teachers to pursue deeper learning in the classroom. We are increasing our emphasis on transferable skills while

focusing on core skills, such as math.

We heard from employers that these skills are assets in the labour market. We also want to help students take full advantage of their education experience with a brand-new curriculum that better engages a young person's interest and potential. We are also taking steps to give students and parents better information about a child's progress through report cards and EQAO, which oversees education and quality. We have already begun to engage with our partners to do just that to make sure that our curriculum is culturally relevant, that it can measure a wide range of learning and that it can better reflect students' wellbeing and equity.

This leads me to the second part of our plan, which is to ensure that we are unleashing the potential of every student. To achieve this, we are strengthening wellbeing supports for students, educators as well as staff in order to make schools across the province more inclusive, safe and welcoming environments, and we are intentionally deepening the interconnectedness between achievement, wellbeing and equity.

We know that students are better able to learn when they feel supported, when they feel safe and welcomed at school. That is why we will continue to do what is necessary, so that every student can face the challenges of life with confidence and resiliency.

How hard is it for students to learn when they have not had breakfast or concentrate if they do not feel safe? We are investing in school programs that enhance student wellbeing by giving students access to more physical activity oppor-

tunities, increasing school breakfast programs, bullying prevention initiatives, recreational activities and mental health supports for schools.

When we talk about these times being uncertain, powered by change and defined by incredible, new technologies, we need to recognize and keep in mind that these same forces are affecting our young people.

Not all of those effects are positive. Anxiety for students is increasing. One in five students will encounter mental health issues. Nearly a third of children and youth are overweight or obese. Screen time is on the rise. Students are spending more time in front of televisions and smartphones and less time in unstructured play.

We need to strengthen the resources. We need to make them available to students. That is why we created the Education Equity Action Plan with a secretariat within the Ministry of Education to remove systemic barriers to the success and wellbeing of all students. For example, we are taking a bold step by introducing a new approach to grade nine, to allow students more opportunities to explore pathways to work, college, apprenticeship as well as university. We also want to make our education system fairer and more inclusive for all students.

***[Remarks in French] De plus, nous sommes déterminés à rendre notre système d'éducation plus juste et plus inclusive pour tous les élèves.***

And it does not matter where they live and it does not matter what their backgrounds or means are because students

in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood confront challenges that are different from those in our rural and remote communities. All students can achieve success in school.

***[Remarks in French] Tous les élèves peuvent réussir à l'école.***

My job, as Ontario's Minister of Education, is to make sure that all students have the tools and supports to reach their full potential and encourage these young people, these young minds, to think about life beyond graduation, whether it means attending a post-secondary institution or pursuing skilled training. That is why the third part of our plan will create more opportunities for hands-on learning outside of the classroom, also known as 'experiential learning'.

I am sure that we all agree that the jobs of today look very different than they did 20 years ago. As the labour market evolves, it is important for students to have the opportunity to test-drive their career options. That is why we are making new investments in community connected experiential learning, so schools can create more opportunities for all students. Now, every school board across the province will have a dedicated person to support these learning opportunities for students from kindergarten through to grade 12. Together with school boards, these coordinators will establish networks to better connect schools with their communities and with local business owners and services within the community, in placements such as the local bakery, the chocolate factory, the mechanic's shop or the design studio, so that students can think and see and experience what careers could be. These

investments will build on the work already underway to expand our renowned Specialist High Skills Major programs, or SHSMs as they are called.

One of the reasons that this particular program is so successful is that it allows students to customize their high school experience. It engages them to match their strengths, their interests, their career, and life goals with experiential opportunities in their local communities, ranging from agriculture and forestry to business, energy, arts and culture, as well as aviation and aerospace, health and wellness, amongst many others.

What is important to note is that when school boards develop their SHSM programs for their schools, they will work closely with local industry leaders on the skills and the knowledge that is essential to that sector, so programs like SHSMs and co-op education and Ontario's Youth Apprenticeship Program have twice the impact, both for students as well as their employers.

Ten years ago, we started with 6,000 students and 27 SHSM programs at 44 schools. Today, this year, more than 50,000 students have enrolled in almost 1,900 Specialist High Skills Major programs in nearly 700 schools. We have seen these programs succeed again and again across Ontario.

In Waterloo Region over the last several years, students in the Waterloo Catholic District School Board have had the opportunity to visit Communitech, a technology hub. They partnered with entrepreneurs in technology and startups to solve challenges. This year, our students developed a more engaging dining experience in new restaurants with holographic

menus and interactive display tabletops as part of their solutions. Just think about that, the impact that a program like this has had on thousands and thousands of students and their communities over the last decade. In fact, helping schools increase experiential learning opportunities for all students is one of the key recommendations of the premier's highly skilled workforce expert panel.

In response to this, we launched a series of 29 career studies pilots earlier this year and have now expanded those pilots even further across Ontario to 90 schools. The research that we generated from those projects include learning opportunities related to education and career life planning, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, financial literacy, and, if I can add, financial literacy, which among students remains a key priority for our government.

Thank you. In fact, I am very pleased to say—and thank you for applauding—that we are making financial literacy a mandatory component of the grade 10 career studies course starting this coming fall.

We know that students want and need to know how to manage money because, when they go to post-secondary education, they need to know how to do a budget and how to manage credit and/or their student loans. These are just the basics that they need to know. Programs like the new OSAP that offers free tuition are helping more than a quarter of a million students access post-secondary education this year. Students need to know how to manage their money before they get there.



As we make these strides in education, you will see how initiatives are paying strong dividends for Ontario. Moving forward and reaching new heights requires all of us to work together. Ontario's reputation as a leader in education has been hard earned, and we can lead by investing in what matters most, our students. We know there is still more work to do, and we will need to work with you to help us get there, but we are convinced that we are on the right track, that hard work will take us there and that our students will go even further.

On a personal note, nothing is more important to me—and I mean that literally—and nothing could be more important than providing our children with an excellent public education. Publicly funded education is the greatest single action that we can take to protect and uplift our children, and ourselves for that matter, in a world that is seized by change with an aging population and new technologies transforming what we do and how we do it. In the face of all of this, we know, we absolutely and emphatically know, that education will be the difference maker.

It is our commitment to education that will set us apart and above all others. We recognize exactly how high the stakes are. We know precisely how much rests on the choices that we make and the steps that we take. We are steadfastly and intently dedicated to strengthening our publicly funded education system by ensuring that all students will have every opportunity to thrive and to fulfil their potential with our renewed focus on achievement, wellbeing and equity.

I want to say thank you to all of you for your interest in public education.

*[Remarks in French] Alors, je tiens à vous remercier de votre intérêt envers l'éducation public.*

I want to ask you, if I may, to think about not only what government can do, but what we can all do to help create these critical learning opportunities for students. Connect with your local school boards. See how your business or company or organization can offer hands-on learning opportunities for students. Speak to educators, our teachers, our students to see what you can do. What opportunities can you unlock? What possibilities can you inspire? Help us to make education something that is living, that is real and that makes a tangible difference in young people's lives.

I want to say thank you to the Empire Club for having me here. Thank you to all the educators who are in the room today for the work that you do on behalf of our students each and every day, and thank you, everyone, for your commitment to public education in Ontario. Thank you. Merci. Miigwetch.

## Questions & Answers

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**Q: Minister Hunter, thank you for the speech. My name is Paymon Sani. I am a member of Professional Engineers in Ontario. I am also a part-time teacher at Sheridan College. I have been engaged with students. The only time I was not engaged with students was when I was at university. The question I have on the table today is what are the changes coming in the math curriculum, and are there any opportunities for Professional Engineers in Ontario to lend a hand to the Minister of Education in this field? Thank you.**

MH: Thank you for your question. I am going to start with your last question. Yes, we can certainly use the engagement of Professional Engineers of Ontario.

And I am very excited about the changes that we are making in math. I see math as something that is very important to our students because having math skills, numeracy skills, is very important to many jobs of the future. We want our students to have choices later on, so, to all the students, do not drop math. Stay with it and get the supports that you need. There are many supports. We have actually introduced a renewed math strategy in Ontario across all school boards, across all grades. Our focus is to increase our capability in math here in Ontario. We are providing supports to teachers as well as part of that renewed math strategy.

We are providing supports to students and even where it concerns the engagement of parents because sometimes even the public dialogue around math tends to be “I did not do well in math.”

We want to reduce that fear of numbers for students. We have a number of resources that are designed to support parents, students and their families, and we have a relentless commitment to math. We want to see Ontario’s students continue to do well. We still are holding our own on international standards, but there is much more we can do in that area. I thank you for the support you are offering.

**Q: Thank you, Minister Hunter for having MSAC students here today. My name is Breana Dudemaine.**

**I just had a question around student involvement in their education. What are examples of ways that our Ontario education system is changing so that as students become more innovative, they have opportunities to be innovative within their education and shape their learning so that they can reach their full potential and feel included in their education?**

MH: Thank you, Breana. This is why I have a Minister’s Student Advisory Council, so I get to hear directly from students across all 72 school boards—both English and French—in terms of how we can make improvements to our education system. Student voice is very important to me. In fact, with the financial literacy that we are making a mandatory part of our curriculum, we know

that we are already doing well in financial literacy; it is being delivered from grades 4 to grades 12, but we can do better. We can make a dedicated mandatory module as part of our curriculum, so every student going through our system will have that great opportunity.

In terms of your voice as students and as young people, one of the things that I say to students is that you are leaders now. Yes, you are going to be leaders in the future, but you are leaders now. You are leaders right now. Bringing your voice forward really matters in helping to shape your education.

I visit a school each week. I try to do that. That is my goal as Minister of Education. I see what is happening out there in our schools and the involvement that is happening in all schools. I was in Ottawa at De La Salle, and they introduced me to a gender-neutral washroom.

This was a concept that came forward because of student voice and because they wanted to have a greater sense of inclusion and belonging in their school. They actually changed the physical structure of their school to make sure that students felt that they belonged. Those educators gave students that space to make that decision and to carry it out. I would encourage students to make their voices heard. I know that educators are receptive to hearing that. There is a lot of variation in learning in our classrooms and in our schools and within our boards. It is never a one-size-fits-all, and it is important

that students are at the table, which is also why we have student trustees as well at the governance and leadership level in our system of education. Thank you so much, Breana, for your question.

**Q: Bonjour Madame la Ministre. Carole Beaulieu, and I am here with my colleagues from the TFO Board. I also work in an art and design university. I am very excited about the experiential component of your speech today. I think that we are all taking notes here at TFO, and we see ourselves as an innovator on multiple platforms and as doing that work on behalf of the system in Ontario. My question is: Will the experiential learning component be broad? Will it involve the creative sector? I am thinking of the music industry. I was happy to hear design. Even within our own portfolio here at TFO, we have innovation, and we have creators in our studios every day. What is your thinking about bridging the creative sector to that experiential learning piece for students?**

MH: It is such a great question. Merci beaucoup. It is going to be broad. It is also going to span K–12. I think it really fits into the work that we are doing on inquiry about putting students at the centre of their learning. Frankly, I see it as a contributor to our high school graduation rates. If students feel really engaged in what they are learning, and they are helping to co-design and shape that learning, they are having real experience and con-

nection to their community. And that is when what they are learning makes sense to them. I absolutely see it as being really broad. That is why my appeal to everyone in the room today is really think about those partnerships, so that it can open up how we can all work together in communities of all sizes in this province. To the chocolate factory example that I gave you earlier, there is an actual chocolate factory out in eastern Ontario that brings our students in for experiential learning, and so that is really tying that continuum of what is happening on the farm to what is happening in the food production and also there is a store and retail and distribution. Students are really getting a breadth of experiences, and they are very excited about that learning.

This summer, I visited a school in Windsor, Dr. David Suzuki School. I chatted with the students who were running the summer program about what they were learning. They said to me, educators, the best part of their high school experience is their SHSM program. They were actually demanding to add a new SHSM program in business at their school, which is wonderful. This is what we want. We want our students to be so excited and so engaged and to see themselves. So to TVO, TFO, our Ontario's education partners in the digital space, I really see you as integral to that work in experiential learning. Thank you so much for your work.

**Note of Appreciation, by Monica Masciantonio,  
Vice President, Government Affairs, Scotiabank**

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you all for being here.

I especially want to thank the Minister. Minister Hunter, your passion was clear today. I think your speech was fantastic. Your enthusiasm and dedication to young people and their future is inspiring.

Thank you for sharing that vision of preparing Ontario's students for the future. The skills you are working to equip these students with today will contribute to a competitive and prosperous Ontario, which is very important to all of us.

Scotiabank, as you heard, was especially happy to hear how you have incorporated financial literacy into the school curriculum. I hope that all the other provinces follow suit. That is a wonderful initiative.

I hope you all continue this conversation past this lunch. I think it is vital to our country's future. Again, thank you, Minister, and thank you all for being here.

### **Concluding Remarks, by Barbara Jesson**

I want to express a very sincere thank you to our generous sponsors, today. Without wonderful sponsors like you, these lunches that play such an important role in our public dialogue would just not be possible. To Scotiabank and to RBC, thank you, sincerely, and from the bottom of our hearts for your contribution to today's event.

We would like to thank mediaevents.ca, Canada's online event space for webcasting today's event for thousands of viewers around the world.

Although our club has been around since 1903, we have moved into the 21st century and are active on social media. Please, follow us on Twitter @Empire\_Club and visit us online at [www.empireclub.org](http://www.empireclub.org). You can also follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. Finally, please, join us again soon at our next event, December 4th with Andy Byford, the Chief Executive Officer of the Toronto Transit Commission, at One King West Hotel. Thank you for your attendance today.

This meeting is now adjourned.