

**TO:** Office of the Premier of Ontario; Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity;  
Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism

**FROM:** Jamil Jivani

**DATE:** June 9, 2022

**RE:** Exit Memo

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The decisive re-election of Premier Doug Ford on June 2, 2022 should inspire each of us to build on our efforts to empower youth in Ontario's working class communities. As the government goes through the process of transition and agenda renewal, achieving equality of opportunity for youth of all backgrounds ought to be seen as a core mission. Premier Ford is well-positioned to make Ontario home to the most fertile environment for Canadians to fully realize their potential.

I write this exit memo to help assist with the transition and agenda renewal, as I resign from the roles of Government of Ontario's Advocate for Community Opportunities (ACO) and Chair of the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity (PCEO). This memo contains:

- my formal resignation
- an overview of key ACO and PCEO activities that the Government of Ontario can build on
- recommendations for how the Government of Ontario and PCEO can make a bigger difference for Ontario youth

## A. Resignation

As of today's date, June 9, 2022, I resign from the roles of ACO and Chair of the PCEO. It was an honour to serve in these roles, and to be appointed and re-appointed over 2.5 years.

Thank you to each of the community groups, council members, political staff, and civil servants who taught me valuable lessons and inspired me to be a better advocate.

I'm grateful to Premier Ford and his chief of staff Jamie Wallace for taking action to create opportunities for youth in Ontario's working class communities, and MPPs Todd Smith and Parm Gill who led numerous initiatives that I participated in.

I thank current and former MPPs Monte McNaughton, Michael Tibollo, Rod Phillips, Peter Bethlenfalvey, Lindsay Park, Prabmeet Sarkaria, Doug Downey, Caroline Mulroney, Jill Dunlop, and their respective offices for encouraging my work.

Special acknowledgement is also owed to the Advocate for Community Opportunities secretariat for supporting me.

The PCEO is made up of high quality leaders, and I recommend appointing a new chair from the current group of council members.

## B. Overview of Key ACO and PCEO Activities

From December 2019 to April 2022, ACO and PCEO activities brought community voices into decision-making processes that provided over \$400M in new government funding for charities, service providers, and grassroots organizations. The following is a list of key milestones that can provide a foundation for future reforms and initiatives.

### ***Milestones***

- [December 11, 2019](#): Advocate for Community Opportunities position is created
- [March 13, 2020](#): Ministry of Education's drives change and combats racism at the Peel District School Board
- [March 23, 2020](#): Premier Ford announces \$200M social services relief fund
- [June 4, 2020](#): Premier Ford announces pandemic relief for black communities and the creation of Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity
- [July 9, 2020](#): Ministry of Education ends the practice of streaming for Grade 9 students, ending discriminatory suspensions for students, and increasing disciplinary action on teachers who engage in racism.
- [July 14, 2020](#): Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services eliminates the practice of birth alerts
- [August 28, 2020](#): Premier Ford announces the launch of the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity and funding for youth employment programs
- [September 8, 2020](#): Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services funds services for black youth in the child welfare system
- [December 16, 2020](#): Government of Ontario releases new poverty reduction strategy
- [December 18, 2020](#): Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services doubles funding for Black Youth Action Plan
- [March 1, 2021](#): Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services launches Student and Family Advocates initiative to support black students and families
- [July 27, 2021](#): Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services funds eleven community-based programs to prevent youth violence and human trafficking

- [February 3, 2022](#): Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism investing \$25M to combat hate
- [February 17, 2022](#): Government of Ontario launches tutoring support program
- [March 17, 2022](#): Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism expanding opportunity for entrepreneurs
- 2022 Budget: Government of Ontario has promised new dollars directly to community organizations in support of community-based learning recovery initiatives

Of these activities, one of the most significant is the inclusion of economic empowerment for black communities in Ontario's [2020 budget](#). This commitment to economic empowerment provided the basis for doubling the annual funding of the Black Youth Action Plan from \$14M to \$28M in 2021 and beyond. To achieve this outcome, MPP Todd Smith and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services facilitated a truly engaging community consultations process in partnership with members of the PCEO.

Other significant activities involved supporting the establishment of the new Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism under the leadership of MPP Parm Gill. In summer 2021, the Government of Ontario created the new ministry to engage and serve diverse communities across Ontario, among other responsibilities. PCEO members and the ACO were consulted by political staff and civil servants on multiple occasions and offered advice on a series of priority items that were announced in February - April 2022.

### ***Challenging Government Decisions***

In summer 2021, the Government of Ontario made two pandemic management decisions that had a negative impact on Ontario's marginalized youth and their parents. As ACO, I was compelled to publicly challenge these decisions, in part because reasonable harm mitigation efforts were not taken to protect marginalized youth from severe consequences.

First, from 2020 to 2022, Ontario's Education Minister Stephen Lecce closed schools for longer than any other education minister in Canada. Despite [warnings](#) about the impact of school closures, Ontario students began the 2021-2022 academic year [without meaningful supports](#) for learning recovery provided by the Ministry of Education.

Second, in fall 2021, the Government of Ontario introduced vaccine passports and mandates, which disproportionately impacted [black Canadians](#), and [Indigenous, immigrant, and working class communities](#). To help people inside and outside of government take measure of the impact of vaccine passports and mandates, I [partnered with](#) black community leader and writer Samuel Sey of SlowToWrite.com to capture [personal testimonies](#).

## ***Learning Recovery and Mental Health***

In January 2022, I advocated [in support of a four-point plan](#) that the Government of Ontario could adopt to help students harmed by school closures: (1) Set measurable goals to help kids recover from the last two years; (2) Conduct a province-wide needs assessment, (3) Fund supplemental learning programs, (4) Remember all kids matter. Through consultations with the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, elements of this plan were included in the Ministry of Education's five-point Learning Recovery Action Plan released on February 17, 2022.

On February 25, 2022, the PCEO shared a series of recommendations with the Premier's Office on the issue of learning recovery for Ontario students, resulting in improvements to the Learning Recovery Action Plan. Some of the PCEO recommendations are reflected in the government's 2022 budget promise to provide new dollars directly to community organizations in support of community-based learning recovery initiatives.

## **C. How the Government of Ontario and PCEO Can Make a Bigger Difference**

PCEO members have incredible hearts for the communities they serve. The council was purposely created by Premier Ford to bring together intergenerational perspectives. As the above milestones indicate, government ministries have significantly benefited from seeking the advice of council members who represent diverse communities in Ontario.

Moving forward, the Government of Ontario and PCEO can make a bigger difference by addressing three C's: communication, collaboration, and commitment.

### ***Communication***

The Government of Ontario should dedicate communications resources to the PCEO. Aside from the occasional email blast from government officials to community contact lists, there is no communications strategy to ensure that the PCEO's responsibilities and activities are known and understood by Ontarians.

New resources could include adding a communications professional to the team supporting the PCEO chair within the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, and empowering this professional to independently build relationships with relevant community groups. Alternatively, a budget could be provided to the PCEO chair to hire an expert directly from the communities that the PCEO serves.

Without a communications strategy for the PCEO, the Government of Ontario will continue to rely on corporate mainstream media outlets to disseminate information about the province's efforts to empower youth in working class communities. This is a mistake because corporate mainstream media outlets have their own partisan narratives and agendas, which often lead to journalists providing unfair or dishonest news coverage of conservatives.

For example, in summer 2020, *The Globe and Mail* published a racist attack against me written by an unethical reporter, Dakshana Bascaramurty. *The Globe and Mail*, which has a history of attacking black men in public leadership roles, sought to undermine the work of the PCEO before it even got started. There were no communications resources available to push back against Bascaramurty's smears. The responsibility to respond to this racist attack fell on me individually, with no institutional support.

If the PCEO had dedicated communications resources, the council would also be better positioned to capture feedback from valued community groups and stakeholders. Currently, PCEO members bring forward the feedback obtained from individual networks. A dedicated expert would improve the quality of this feedback and expand the council's networks beyond the sum of its parts.

### ***Collaboration***

Over the course of my time as ACO and Chair of the PCEO, I observed many examples of effective collaboration between community members and government officials, such as: the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services working with the PCEO to organize community consultations concerning the Black Youth Action Plan in fall 2020; the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development seeking feedback for its youth advisors' report in 2021; the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism developing its approach to supporting entrepreneurs from diverse communities. MPP Monte McNaughton and his office were effective in connecting with various faith-based organizations and faith leaders throughout Ontario, and I encourage them to continue their important efforts.

I also observed examples of significant resistance to collaboration. Specifically, the Ministry of the Solicitor General refused to seriously consider reasonable police reform ideas recommended by community members and experts in [a 2018 report](#) from Ontario Court of Appeal judge Michael Tulloch. Additionally, the Ministry of Education refused to adequately consider ideas that would prioritize the rights of parents and students over the power of school boards.

What made for successful collaboration between certain ministries and the PCEO was a recognition that people outside of government offer intrinsic value to decision-making processes. When collaboration was difficult with other ministries, political staff and civil servants exhibited a paternalistic attitude toward citizens outside of government.

The Government of Ontario should discourage bureaucratic paternalism. To achieve this, the government ought to reconsider its approach to diversity and inclusion. Rather than focus on the physical characteristics of political staff and civil servants, the province would benefit from an approach that encourages substantive diversity and inclusion in the form of experiential, educational, religious, and geographic differences. Diversity and inclusion needs to also encourage internal debate and dialogue within and between government offices, motivated by a humble recognition that closed-mindedness is unlikely to produce the best decisions.

### ***Commitment***

The Government of Ontario must follow through on ideas that promise to make a substantive difference in the lives of Ontario youth. This is far easier said than done, as our ever-changing world frequently pulls us in different directions. Thankfully, PCEO members have already developed recommendations that can be practically implemented by government officials. These recommendations were shared with the Office of the Premier on February 25, 2022 and, taken together, can serve as a guidepost for a path forward.

I have enclosed the PCEO's recommendations for your reference. As a first step, I encourage the government to answer calls to reduce wait times for students seeking to access psychological services. An immediate second step would be to provide additional resources directly to community organizations that have relationships with youth in working class neighbourhoods. These particular recommendations would address the greatest needs created by pandemic lockdowns and school closures, and therefore will provide the biggest bang for the buck when it comes to providing all Ontario youth with equality of opportunity.

Sincerely,



Jamil Jivani

*Note: The following recommendations were developed by the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity and shared with the Office of the Premier of Ontario on February 25, 2022.*

## **Learning Recovery and Mental Health for Ontario's Most Marginalized Youth**

### *Ministry of Education's Learning Recovery Action Plan*

1. Recognizing that Ontario school boards infrequently have relationships with the most marginalized youth in their districts, the Learning Recovery Action Plan should not hand over all learning recovery dollars to school boards. If the Government of Ontario is set on partnering with school boards to distribute funds, then specific program design considerations must be made to ensure resources go to the most marginalized youth.
2. Because the \$176M pledged for tutoring support is not provided through the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding formula, this portion of the learning recovery dollars has higher flexibility. A specific requirement should be introduced to ensure a defined percentage of the tutoring support dollars goes to third-party community organizations and does not stay within the school system. The PCEO should be informed of this defined percentage so the council can share this information with community groups.
3. Remaining funds in the Learning Recovery Action Plan, such as \$10M in new funding for student mental health and \$304M for staffing support, are in fact provided through the GSN funding formula. According to a 2017 Auditor General's report, the Ministry of Education does not have a requirement for school boards to report on how GSN funds are used, "except for restricted funding ... even if those grants were provided for a specific purpose." The PCEO recommends that, where possible, restrictions be introduced to ensure funding meant for student mental health and learning recovery are used for those purposes in accordance with the ultimate goal of helping the most marginalized members of our communities. The PCEO also recommends that the Government of Ontario introduces school board reporting requirements for all GSN funds.
4. The Learning Recovery Action Plan should recognize the need for additional support to complement and strengthen tutoring. Students who have become detached from the school system during school closures and remote learning need connections to their communities through social workers and youth workers. Moreover, tutoring support will be augmented if coordinated with mental health services. The most marginalized youth in Ontario often need individualized strategies that address a number of challenges at once.
5. As the plan's measurement and assessment component will surely attest to, learning needs differ across the province. For example, some students will be focused on

obtaining credits to graduate while others need to catch up after falling behind multiple grade levels in math and reading. A comprehensive plan to address these diverse needs will target different segments of Ontario's student population with appropriate support at critical moments.

6. For First Nations communities, learning recovery should include a requirement that school boards report aggregate data on the success of students covered via a Tuition Agreement. Learning recovery plans should also be shared with First Nations who send children to provincial schools.

#### *Direct Community Resources for Learning Recovery*

7. The PCEO recommends the Government of Ontario provide resources directly to community organizations to assist with learning recovery. These direct community resources would be in addition to the dollars provided to the community via school boards. The council believes a comparable amount should go to school boards and community organizations over the same time period. For instance, if school boards provide 25% of their \$176M for tutoring to community groups, it would be fair for the Government of Ontario to pledge an additional \$88M in learning recovery dollars to community organizations. That would ensure an equal amount of \$132M goes to the school system and the broader community.
8. Direct community resources for learning recovery should be used to build bridges between Ontario's most marginalized youth and the school system. This includes investing in social workers and youth workers who can establish relationships with students who have become detached from schools due to school closures and remote learning. Programs that address the social and emotional competencies of traumatized children must also be funded.
9. To expand tutoring support, the Government of Ontario ought to consider a plan to reimburse private and non-profit tutoring services that are willing to tutor working and middle class children at discounted rates. Such reimbursements will allow for community-based tutoring services to reach out to parents and students who cannot currently afford or access community-based tutoring.
10. The Government of Ontario ought to consider how tax credits might also expand the availability of tutoring support to a more diverse range of families. In 2020, the Government of Canada introduced a \$300 expansion to the Canada Child Benefit to empower parents to provide tutoring services to children. A similar provincial tax credit expansion could be helpful.

11. Direct community resources should be used to improve relationships between community organizations and school boards. Currently, a number of barriers exist that make partnering with school boards difficult or impossible for organizations that serve the most marginalized youth in Ontario. Specific barriers include inadequate community resources to meet a school board's insurance and reporting standards.
12. Direct community resources can be used to engage parents who may feel intimidated by school curricula and need encouragement to be more involved and vocal in their child's education.
13. Per previous recommendations made to the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, the PCEO urges the Government of Ontario to design its grant programs and funding streams in a way that will incentivize collaboration, and not competition, among community organizations.
14. Measuring success should include not just academic indicators (e.g. obtaining credits, achieving grade level performance in math and reading) but also the broader participation of marginalized youth in Ontario's economy and society (e.g. learning opportunities outside of the classroom, co-op placements, employment, organizing community activities).

#### *Mental Health Must Be a Priority*

15. The PCEO recognizes that our current observations and experiences point to a cross-section of challenges: mental health, vulnerability, and access to services. It is recommended that all efforts to address Ontario's most marginalized youth consider the potential role of established community-based mental health agencies, which have some of the expertise required for Government of Ontario programs and policies to achieve their desired outcome.
16. The PCEO is troubled that Ontario students continue to experience lengthy wait times to access mental health services. In 2017, Ontario's Auditor General observed that at certain school boards "24% or more of the students on the psychological services wait lists had been waiting for more than a year" and students can wait "more than a year for speech and language assessments." The Auditor General's observations echo what PCEO members have seen in their own communities. Wait times continue to be high.
17. The Ministries of Health and Education have recognized the need to invest more money into youth mental health programs; however, it's important to also recognize that this problem has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures, and remote learning. The \$10M increase to mental health funding provided in the

Learning Recovery Action Plan is an inadequate measure given the scale of the problem, and the fact that the Ministry of Education provides this funding through the opaque GSN funding formula.

18. The PCEO is willing and able to play a role in empowering Ontario youth to advocate for their own mental health needs.