

Realizing Potential: Our Children, Our Youth, Our Future

Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Strategic Framework 2008-12

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Table of Contents

Realizing Potential: Our Children, Our Youth, Our Future

Introduction	2
Realizing Potential	3
Strategic Goals	6
<i>Every Child and Youth Has a Voice</i>	8
<i>Every Child and Youth Receives Personalized Services</i>	9
<i>Everyone Involved In Service Delivery Contributes To Achieving Common Outcomes</i>	10
<i>Every Child and Youth Is Resilient</i>	11
<i>Every Young Person Graduates From Secondary School</i>	12
Moving Forward	13



Introduction

Ministry Vision

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services envisions an Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential.

Ontario is home to over 2.8 million children and youth aged 0 to 18 and approximately 135,000 children are born in the province each year. This highly diverse and talented group of young people hold the key to our future success and prosperity. They all deserve the best opportunity to realize their full potential and become active and productive members of their communities.

In 2003, the government created the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) by bringing together programs for children and youth from across the Ministries of Community and Social Services, Health and Long-Term Care, and Community Safety and Correctional Services. MCYS funds or provides:

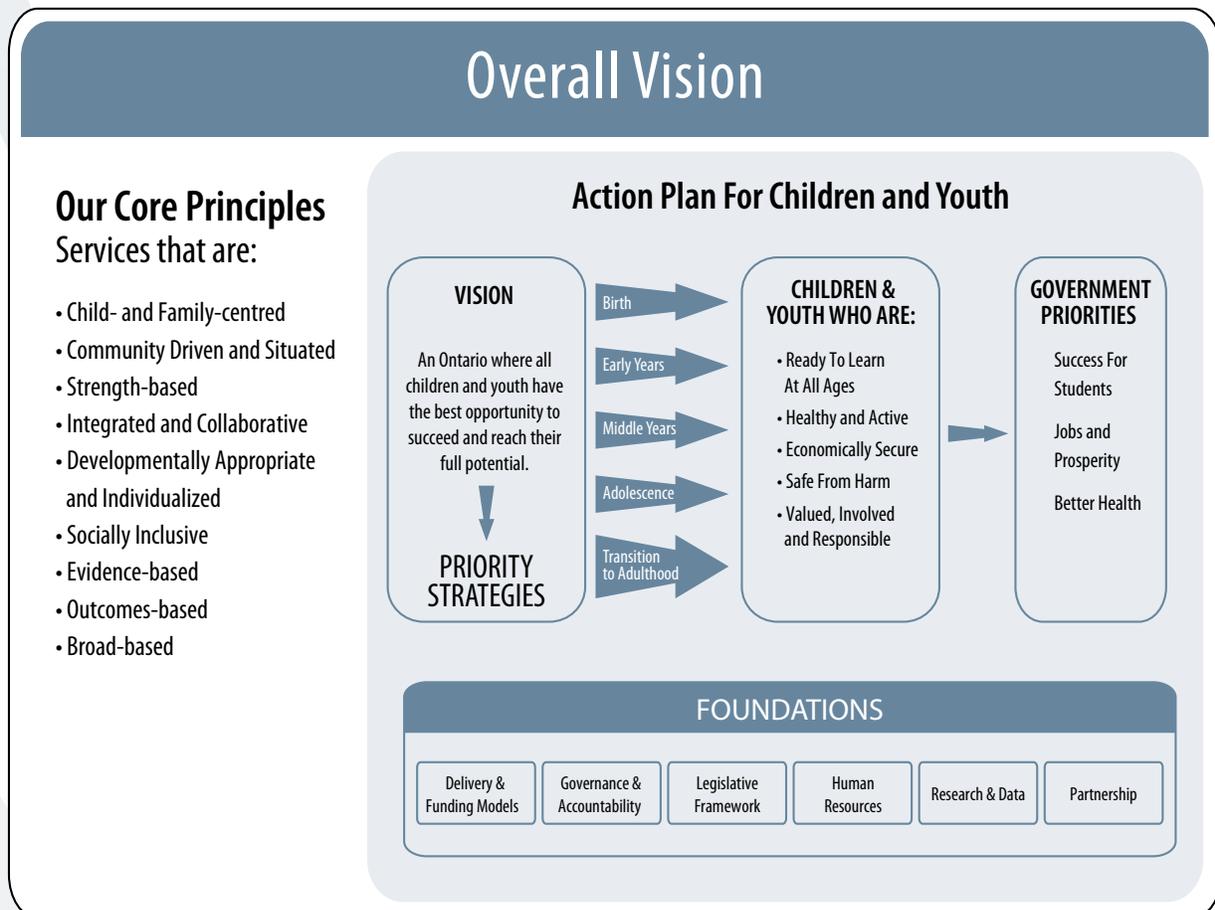
- Early identification and intervention services for young children and their families;
- Licensed child care;
- Financial support through the Ontario Child Benefit;
- Intensive Behavioural Intervention, respite, residential and rehabilitative supports to children with special needs including autism;
- Child and youth mental health supports;
- Opportunities and supports such as summer job programs and youth outreach workers for youth in high needs communities to help them make positive choices;
- Protection services for children who are, or are at risk of, being abused; and
- Community and custodial programs for youth aged 12 to 18 in, or at risk of, conflict with the law.

In establishing the ministry, the government committed to improving how we provide services to Ontario's young people and their families. This document presents the ministry's strategic framework for meeting that commitment and working with our partners to improve outcomes for children and youth.

Realizing Potential: Our Children, Our Youth, Our Future provides a common foundation for working with our partners to build on achievements, respond to new challenges and maximize opportunities. It recognizes that in order to support children and youth in reaching their full potential, we must also realize our own.

Realizing Potential

Driven by the objectives of fostering better outcomes and enhancing the experiences of young people and their families in receiving services, *Realizing Potential: Our Children, Our Youth, Our Future* will guide the ministry and its partners in delivering on our shared commitment to an Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential. The five goals at the centre of the framework are designed to both enhance the impact of our ongoing work and provide a foundation for future reforms. The framework reflects the lessons we have learned over the ministry's formative years and builds on our overall vision, established in 2003.



The framework is intended to further galvanize us towards a shared purpose and the achievement of common aims for all children and youth. Accordingly, the strategic goals articulate an agenda for continuous improvement that encompasses the entire children and youth services system from policy development and program design through to program management and frontline service delivery. The goals necessitate that we strengthen our partnerships and provide greater leadership in fostering collaboration and supporting capacity building.

The framework is a living document that will evolve through a process of ongoing learning and reassessment. It provides guidance and direction in identifying and capitalizing on opportunities. It should not limit or narrow our possibilities.

Better Outcomes

Guided by the commitment that every young person should be better off as a result of the services we provide, since 2003 we have worked to shift our focus away from outputs and towards the achievement of better *outcomes*. In order to build on this progress, we need to take the next steps in maximizing our resources to support outcomes that will place children and youth on pathways for lifelong success.

Fundamentally, this compels us to ask, “What are we working to achieve?” It also means considering whether our programs are fully aligned towards influencing key outcomes either individually or as a part of a broader continuum of support.

Through this framework we begin to address these questions by detailing our priority outcomes for all children and youth and how we will work together to help young people achieve them.

A Better Service Experience

Current research demonstrates that in addition to outcomes, what also matters to children, youth and families are their experiences in interacting with our services. It is therefore crucial that our clients:

- Are supported with respect and dignity;
- Have opportunities to shape services;
- Are empowered to understand and where possible make choices about the services available to them;
- Only have to tell their story once;
- Are able to easily and seamlessly navigate between services and providers; and
- Have means for resolving concerns and complaints.

There is an important link between our commitments to foster better outcomes and enhance the service experience of clients. The services we provide depend on the participation and motivation of children, youth and families. Without their active and sustained involvement, it is impossible to achieve better outcomes.

The implications of this objective extend beyond frontline service interactions to the ways that services are designed, implemented and delivered. Our challenge is to find new and creative approaches to strengthen our relationships with clients so they feel valued and involved.



Strategic Goals

Key Principles

The following principles shaped the development of the strategic goals:

- **Aspirational and achievable** – goals should strive for excellence in service (*aspirational*) but also be grounded in what we can influence and measure (*achievable*), bridging our overall vision with our daily work;
- **Child- and youth-focused** – goals should be client-centred;
- **Cross-cutting** – goals should not be expressed in terms of specific programs and should generally apply to the entire sector;
- **Strengthen the value chain** – goals should encompass and enhance all of our daily activities from policy development to frontline service delivery;
- **Build on current transformations** – goals should enhance continuing commitments; and
- **Demonstrate progress** – measurable progress on the goals can be accomplished in three to five years.

Strategic Goals

To improve outcomes and the service delivery experience, the following five strategic goals were identified as key drivers for service improvements:

1. EVERY CHILD AND YOUTH HAS A VOICE

2. EVERY CHILD AND YOUTH RECEIVES PERSONALIZED SERVICES

3. EVERYONE INVOLVED IN SERVICE DELIVERY CONTRIBUTES TO ACHIEVING COMMON OUTCOMES

4. EVERY CHILD AND YOUTH IS RESILIENT

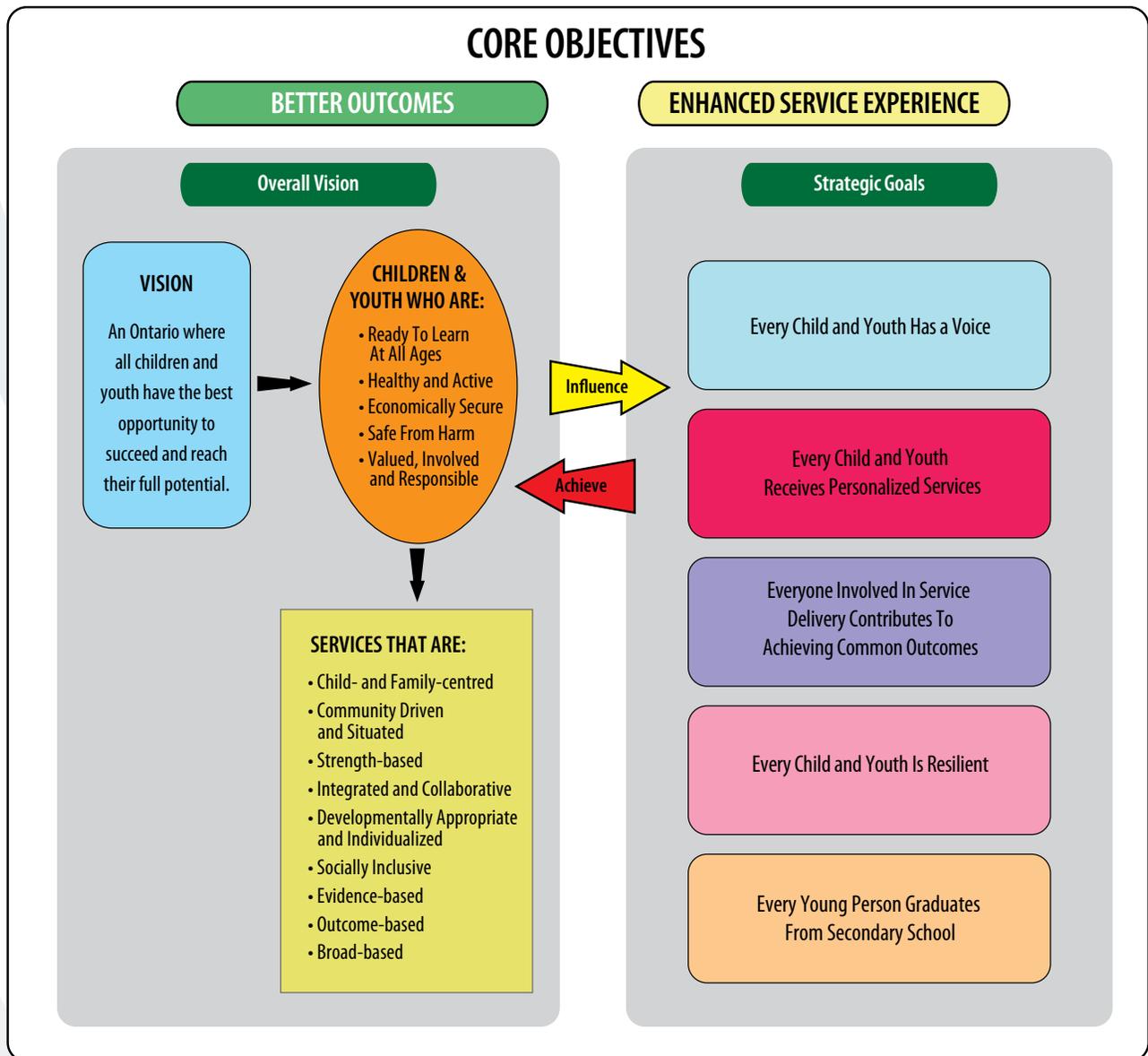
5. EVERY YOUNG PERSON GRADUATES FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL

These strategic goals are intentionally aspirational and will not be achieved easily or quickly. However, they provide a clear sense of where we are headed.

The strategic goals are mutually reinforcing. For example, in order to achieve success in school (*Every Young Person Graduates From Secondary School*) many children require additional social services tailored to their needs and personalized through their input (*Every Child and Youth Receives Personalized Services*) that help to foster key behavioural and adaptive living skills (*Every Child and Youth Is Resilient*) and are delivered through a mix of providers working together (*Everyone Involved In Service Delivery Contributes To Achieving Common Outcomes*).



Finally, the framework builds on our current vision and provides greater guidance and clarity to help focus our efforts and resources.



The following section provides an overview of the five strategic goals identified above. Each strategic goal is organized into three main elements:

1. **Strategic Goal** – the aspirational statement of our aims for children and youth as well as our partnerships. Strategic goals can be thought of as a destination we are driving towards by delivering on key service improvements.
2. **Priority Reforms** – these fall below the strategic goals and represent a further level of specificity. Priority reforms focus our service improvements on key areas and strategic levers.
3. **Strategic Directions** – it is at this level where the strategic goals and proposed reforms connect with our program, policy and operational work to inform more specific service improvements.

Strategic Goal #1 EVERY CHILD AND YOUTH HAS A VOICE

To ensure that the experience of receiving services is positive and leads to improved outcomes, it is important that all children, youth and families feel as though their needs, concerns, preferences and priorities matter. As users of services, they provide a valuable perspective and can play a key role in identifying and supporting service improvements. This is why it is important to find new approaches to providing clients with opportunities to influence how the services they receive are designed and delivered.

Developing a Voice by Fostering Leadership

To meaningfully participate in discussions related to policy development and program design, clients must have key competencies. Accordingly, as an element of increasing client engagement in decision making, we will work with children and youth to help develop and enhance their leadership skills.

EVERY CHILD AND YOUTH HAS A VOICE		
PRIORITY REFORM	DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
INCREASE ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING	Clients are participants in making decisions about the way services are designed and delivered at all levels of the sector.	Create opportunities to involve clients in program design, implementation, delivery and assessment on an ongoing basis.
		Establish safe forums and activities for clients to have their requests and concerns with services heard and responded to.
FOSTER YOUTH LEADERSHIP	Support young people involved in services to develop and exemplify leadership both within the context of the services they receive and as active members of their communities.	Promote opportunities for children and youth involved in services to participate in community activities.
		Establish opportunities within services for young people to build leadership skills.



Strategic Goal #2

EVERY CHILD AND YOUTH RECEIVES PERSONALIZED SERVICES

Ontario’s children, youth and families lead busy lives. Their needs, expectations and preferences evolve over time and they often require services that are delivered through multiple sectors and service agencies. Add to this Ontario’s incredible diversity, and the provision of services to young people can be extremely complex. While daunting, this complexity presents a number of opportunities for innovation and a move towards greater responsiveness, empowerment and ultimately, *personalization* of services.

Placing Children and Youth at the Heart of Services

As we see in other jurisdictions, personalization involves tailoring services around clients’ needs, potential and evolving lives – wrapping services around clients as opposed to clients wrapping their lives around programs.

This requires that we move away from our program silos towards more collaborative and agile multidisciplinary models of working together.

Personalization Through Participation

By placing clients at the centre of services, personalization closely resembles our existing principles of individualization and the need to be client-centred. However, personalization moves beyond these concepts by providing clients with a more direct and ongoing influence in shaping the services they receive. Clients not only receive supports tailored to their needs, but also have a say in what those services look like and are working to achieve.

Where Strategic Goal #1 – *Every Child and Youth Has a Voice* – is about involving clients in decision-making that is related to policy development and program design, this goal focuses on enabling children, youth and their families to influence service delivery at the individual level within the context of the services they are personally receiving.

Providing a Client-Friendly Experience

In order to deliver personalized services, it is important to focus on the experiential aspects of service delivery and those attributes that contribute to a good client experience. This means seeing the world as our clients do and better fitting our services into their daily lives.

EVERY CHILD AND YOUTH RECEIVES PERSONALIZED SERVICES		
PRIORITY REFORM	DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
STRENGTHEN SERVICE INTERCONNECTIVITY	Design, manage and deliver supports based on collaborative multidisciplinary models of service delivery that respond to the evolving needs and strengths of children and their families.	Build towards a single multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral plan of care for each child.
		Address key barriers to working together: culture, planning, processes, funding models, contract systems, etc.
DESIGN AND DELIVER SERVICES BASED ON A CONTINUUM	Recognize that young people’s situations are complex and constantly changing, and ensure that services are oriented towards helping to address the range of their needs as they develop, their circumstances evolve and they make key transitions.	Assess current programs against key outcomes for children and youth and address gaps.
		Give service providers greater flexibility to respond to individual circumstances and improve outcomes.
IMPROVE INTERACTIONS WITH SERVICES	Provide young people and their families with the information, tools and supports needed to improve their experience in shaping, accessing and receiving services. Treat clients with respect and dignity.	Facilitate and maximize clients’ access to information.
		Provide opportunities for clients to develop the knowledge and skills required to shape service delivery.
		Design seamless services for children, youth and families.
		Clearly define client service standards.
		Reduce administrative burdens for clients.

Strategic Goal #3

EVERYONE INVOLVED IN SERVICE DELIVERY CONTRIBUTES TO ACHIEVING COMMON OUTCOMES

The governance of children and youth services is exceedingly complex, frequently resulting in confusion with respect to accountabilities and limiting our capacity to deliver on improved outcomes for children and youth.

Successful collaborative relationships are based on a sense of shared purpose, high levels of commitment, trust, clarity of objectives and a common understanding of roles and responsibilities. A way of overcoming our challenges related to governance involves identifying those outcomes that research tells us are most important to lifelong success and aligning our relationships to best support the achievement of these outcomes.

Together we will identify specific outcomes that will focus our efforts. The framework begins this discussion by identifying two priority outcomes for children and youth – graduation from secondary school and resilience.

Building Capacity

Recognizing that everyone involved in our sector has a distinct yet complementary role in driving change, we must be equipped with the knowledge and skills required to introduce service improvements. This means building capacity through a focus on continuous learning and development.

EVERYONE INVOLVED IN SERVICE DELIVERY CONTRIBUTES TO ACHIEVING COMMON OUTCOMES		
PRIORITY REFORM	DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
ESTABLISH TRANSPARENT ACCOUNTABILITY	Ensure that ministry, agency and stakeholder roles, responsibilities and expectations are mutually understood and transparent to clients and partners.	Reach agreement on outcomes for services.
		Link funding to commonly agreed outcomes.
		Improve administrative processes and reduce paper burden for partners.
FOSTER OPEN AND INFORMED DIALOGUE	Develop stronger, more collaborative relationships based on the mutual appreciation of the need to work together to achieve improved outcomes for children and youth.	Build a shared understanding of partners' roles and responsibilities.
		Establish forums for ongoing feedback.
SUPPORT SKILLS AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ACROSS WORKFORCE	Ensure that all individuals involved in the design and delivery of services have the skills and competencies required to help achieve improved outcomes for children and youth.	Develop a competency framework for the children and youth services workforce.
		Provide opportunities for continuous learning.
		Implement strategies to strengthen governance capacity.



Strategic Goal #4

EVERY CHILD AND YOUTH IS RESILIENT

Resilience is the capacity that allows people to adapt and persevere in the face of adversity. It is a prerequisite for making successful transitions through life because it enables young people to overcome challenges, manage difficult issues and reach out to new opportunities. Resilient individuals have better schooling, health and social outcomes.

Although early childhood is a crucial window of opportunity, research situates the building of resilience along a continuum that applies to all ages and stages of development. Because it equips young people to respond to challenges in a positive way, resilience is particularly important to young people in our child protection and youth justice services systems.

Opportunities exist to assist children and youth to develop resilience by enhancing protective factors and helping to mitigate risk factors. Research in this area underscores the importance of three interrelated domains:

- **Individual** – a young person’s adaptive living skills support resilience (e.g., emotional- and self-regulation, motivation, behavioural, relationship building, empathy, etc.).
- **Family** – positive relationships, family attachment and bonding, nurturing and parenting skills are key protective factors.
- **Community/School** – opportunities for social involvement, social inclusion and neighbourhood social organization help in fostering resilience.

In adopting resilience as a priority outcome for all children and youth, we will move beyond addressing issues in young people’s lives only after they arise to providing prevention-focused services so that children, youth and families develop the strengths and assets needed to:

- Succeed in life and avoid the requirement for more intensive services; or
- Break cycles of behaviour that led to a need for intensive services in the first place.

EVERY CHILD AND YOUTH IS RESILIENT		
PRIORITY REFORM	DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
FOSTER ADAPTIVE LIVING SKILLS	Ensure that building adaptive living skills is a core element of all our services.	Build and enhance adaptive living skills opportunities.
		Introduce mentorship opportunities for youth at risk.
BUILD FAMILY CAPACITY TO FOSTER BETTER OUTCOMES	Parents and families play a central role in helping children and youth to build resilience. It is important that they build skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide nurturing, developmentally optimal environments; and • Successfully respond to key challenges. 	Include skills building to families as an element of service planning and delivery for children and youth.
STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES	Encourage and enable communities to play a leading role in supporting the success of children and youth.	Provide children, youth and families with information on local opportunities.
		Provide opportunities for communities and community leaders, including children and youth, to shape and develop local solutions for improving outcomes.

Strategic Goal #5
EVERY YOUNG PERSON GRADUATES FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL

Research shows that an individual’s educational attainment is a key determinant of further schooling, employment, health and social outcomes. From the perspective of social inclusion, school represents a young person’s primary community.

Children and youth services play a key role in supporting school success:

- Quality early learning and child development services provide children with the skills, capabilities and knowledge required for success in school.
- In making the transition to school and throughout their educational pathways, many children require more than just academic supports to succeed. Services such as mental health and specialized supports are crucial in helping many young people achieve success in the classroom.
- As a result of their circumstances, children and youth involved in our youth justice services and child protection systems can face significant challenges in school and often require additional supports that lie beyond the scope of the education system and fall within our areas of responsibility.

Stronger, more effective relationships with our partners in education will be fundamental in achieving this goal. However, our work must move beyond these partnerships to also focus on those areas where our services are oriented towards supporting success in school.

Given its importance to their long-term outcomes, the success of children and youth in school is everyone’s business.

EVERY YOUNG PERSON GRADUATES FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL		
PRIORITY REFORM	DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
EMBED EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN SECTOR MANDATE	Design and assess services from the perspective of ensuring that all children and youth have the skills and supports required to succeed in school.	Track and report on educational outcomes of children and youth receiving services.
		Align program outcomes towards supporting school success.
ACTIVELY PROMOTE SCHOOL ATTACHMENT	Support children and youth receiving services so they remain connected to school by enhancing continuity, transitions and the interfaces between our services and the education system.	Support young people in establishing and maintaining a connection to school.
		Equip frontline workers to support the educational needs of children and youth.
		Design services with the school day and school year in mind so young people remain engaged in their education (e.g., programs that “wrap around” the school day).
PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT SCHOOL SUCCESS	Work more closely with our partners at all levels of the education system to help ensure that all young people have access to the supports needed to succeed in the classroom.	Increase availability of services within school settings.
		Include an educational plan within a multidisciplinary plan of care for all young people involved in our services.
		Strengthen relationships between education and children and youth services to improve educational outcomes for children and youth.

Moving Forward

Starting the Conversation

Realizing Potential: Our Children, Our Youth, Our Future is intended to provide a foundation for all that we do to support young people every day. It should not sit alongside our work as an “add-on.”

We look forward to engaging those invested in the success of young people on what the framework means for our daily activities and what it will take for us to deliver on the goals.

Infusing Current Commitments

Since 2003, the ministry and its partners have worked to achieve significant progress on a number of key commitments across the sector. This framework presents a lens for determining how we can further enhance and maximize this work. In this way, the framework will help to energize our efforts in implementing our continuing commitments.

Foundations for Success

There are a number of areas where transformational changes are required in order to fully achieve the strategic goals. In order to establish these foundations for success, the ministry is committed to:

- Reducing the administrative burden for our partners so that they can focus their time and resources on supporting young people;
- Delivering on a multifaceted approach to better link and use data from across sources and sectors to capture the real experiences of clients and enable better care, service management and reporting to clients and communities;
- Introducing a comprehensive plan to foster meaningful child and youth engagement in the evolution of our services;
- Implementing measures to improve clients’ interactions with services; and
- Working with partners to introduce outcome measures for programs and find better ways to report on results.

A Living Document

We are committed to ensuring that this framework remains a living document that will evolve based on research, our experiences and discussions with our partners. As an element of bringing the framework to life, we would appreciate your feedback.

To provide comments on the framework, please e-mail us at RealizingPotential.mcys@ontario.ca.

The framework is available on the MCYS website at:

<http://www.gov.on.ca/children/english/ministry/strategic/index.html> (English)

<http://www.gov.on.ca/children/french/ministry/strategic/index.html> (French)

