

**Ministry of Education
Student Success Policy Branch**

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cwebb@sustainontario.ca

Dear Ms. Webb,

Thank you for your insightful feedback in support of the Ministry's *Community-Connected Experiential Learning Policy Framework*. On behalf of Minister Sandals, I am pleased to respond.

Your feedback has provided amazing examples of innovative experiential learning opportunities with connections to curriculum expectations as well as global competencies, such as critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity, with a wide array of community partners. We also recognize the challenges you've suggested such as transportation and the importance of a streamlined process for connecting with community partners. We are working with our community partners and educators to develop strategies to address these challenges.

As you've suggested, the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programs are powerful opportunities, which can include experiential learning for students to learn about food systems. For the 2016-17 school year, there are 216 SHSM programs related to food-based learning, including agriculture, food processing, horticulture and landscaping, and hospitality and tourism. For all SHSM programs next year, the Ministry has invested \$25.3M. We have invested \$1M to expand innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship training, which was developed in partnership with the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, for SHSM students. This training will encourage students to develop innovative and creative solutions to real industry or sector-related problems – a skill that is valued in today's economy.

To learn from organizations like yours, and educators, this year we have invested over \$450,000 to fund 78 experiential learning projects. These projects will help to inform the development of the final policy for community-connected experiential learning. Many of these projects are food-related. For example, in one instance students will research, design, create, plant, maintain and harvest an organic vegetable garden. They will work with a local eatery to learn how to use the fresh produce and herbs to create healthy

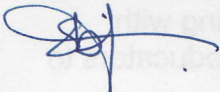
meals.

As you may know, in 2014 secondary schools and school boards were invited to apply for one-time funding for innovative projects that change the food culture in schools through the Healthy Eating in Secondary Schools Grants (HEG). Applicants were encouraged to partner with postsecondary institutions or non-profit organizations that promote healthy eating to strengthen their efforts. Ninety projects were awarded one-time grants of up to \$50,000 (\$3.2M in total ministry funding). Since April 2015, the ministry has been working with external researchers on the Promising Practices from the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity in Secondary Schools Grants Evaluation Project. Based on data analysis and school visits, the researchers will work to create project profiles that articulate challenges, actions taken/outputs, outcomes, lessons learned and project sustainability and transferability. We look forward to sharing the learnings from these projects with you in Fall 2016 as we anticipate that several of your suggestions will be reflected in the projects that were undertaken by HEG recipients.

Once again, thank you for your thoughtful response. Based on your feedback and an analysis of the feedback received from other community organizations, students, parents and educators, the final policy will be developed. Our plan is to release the final policy over the next couple of years.

I appreciate your feedback and wish you continued success in the important work you do.

Sincerely,



Sandra Bickford
Director