



cmec

Council of
Ministers
of Education,
Canada

Conseil des
ministres
de l'Éducation
(Canada)

**18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers
(18CCEM)**

Pailles, Mauritius
August 28–31, 2012

Report of the Canadian delegation

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1. Introduction

The 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM) took place in Pailles, in the island nation of Mauritius, on August 28–31, 2012. The CCEM is a triennial event where the education ministers of all 54 countries of the Commonwealth meet to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest. Such meetings contribute to the Commonwealth goals of development, democracy, and human rights. The Secretariat is mandated by Commonwealth ministers of education and Commonwealth heads of government to continue focusing on the six Education for All action areas.¹

The theme of 18CCEM was “Education in the Commonwealth: Bridging the Gap as We Accelerate Towards Achieving Internationally Agreed Goals (IAGs).” The theme seeks to address both the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All targets. The conference covered a broad range of educational issues, including early childhood education, information and communication technology (ICT), skills development, technical and vocational education and training, and the overall quality of education throughout the Commonwealth. The conference examined progress made in the areas identified by ministers at 17CCEM (Kuala Lumpur, 2009) and explored trends and innovative practices in Commonwealth education. 18CCEM provided an opportunity for ministers to review the work of Commonwealth organizations working in education, including the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning.

In addition, a number of meetings for key groups of stakeholders in education were organized in parallel to the main conference, including: a Stakeholder Forum for civil society, academia, and the private sector; a Youth Forum; a Teachers’ Forum; and a Post-Secondary and Tertiary Leaders Forum (formerly the University Vice-Chancellors’ Forum).

2. Canadian delegation

- The Honourable Ramona Jennex, Minister of Education for Nova Scotia and CMEC Chair, as head of delegation;
- Shannon Delbridge, Acting Senior Executive Director, Public Schools, Department of Education, Nova Scotia;

¹ (1) Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children; (2) ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality; (3) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes; (4) achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults; (5) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality; (6) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

- Antonella Manca-Mangoff, Coordinator, International, CMEC, as CMEC representative;
- Paul Taillefer, President, Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF), as the Canadian representative to the Teachers' Forum;
- Nick MacGregor, Canadian representative to the Youth Forum, Nova Scotia.

3. Structure of the event

The Commonwealth Advisory Bureau's (CA/B) Policy Briefing

18CCEM was preceded by the Commonwealth Advisory Bureau's (CA/B) Policy Briefing. The CA/B is an accredited Commonwealth organization, a member of civil society and independent of the Commonwealth Secretariat. It is one of the world's largest provider of international education programs and qualifications for 5–19-year-olds and has a reputation for high-quality, cutting-edge publications and events and a successful track record for having policy recommendations adopted by decision makers.

Minister Jennex was invited to speak as part of a panel, alongside Dr. the Hon. Vasant K. Bunwaree, Minister of Education and Human Resources for Mauritius, and Ann Puntis, CEO of Cambridge International Examinations, on the topic of international student mobility in a highly competitive world.

The 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM)

18CCEM was hosted and chaired by Dr. the Hon. Vasant K. Bunwaree, Minister of Education and Human Resources of the Republic of Mauritius, on the theme of "Education in the Commonwealth: Bridging the Gap as We Accelerate Towards Achieving Internationally Agreed Goals." The conference was attended by delegations from 39 countries, 34 of which were led by ministers.

The ministerial program is available at

[http://www.gov.mu/portal/sites/18ccem/download/Ministerial%20Programme%20CCEM%20\(12\)2a%20\(3\)%20Final%2014%20August%202012.doc](http://www.gov.mu/portal/sites/18ccem/download/Ministerial%20Programme%20CCEM%20(12)2a%20(3)%20Final%2014%20August%202012.doc).

Note that the ministerial meeting was preceded by a Senior Officials Meeting (SOM). The SOM program is available at

[http://www.gov.mu/portal/sites/18ccem/download/SOM%20\(12\)\(O\)%20Final%2014%20August%202012.doc](http://www.gov.mu/portal/sites/18ccem/download/SOM%20(12)(O)%20Final%2014%20August%202012.doc).

The four forums for key groups of education stakeholders

Four forums for key groups of education stakeholders took place from August 27 to August 30 in parallel to the two main meetings:

- Teachers' Forum
- Stakeholders' Forum for civil society, academia, and the private sector
- Youth Forum

- Post-Secondary/Higher Education Leaders' Forum

The Teachers' Forum was attended by Paul Taillefer, President, Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) and the Youth Forum by Nick MacGregor, former President of the Nova Scotia Youth Advisory Council. No Canadian representatives attended the stakeholders' or the post-secondary forums.

These forums provided an opportunity to convey to ministers the views of these important players in education and enable them to interact with key groups and individuals who work to advance education across the Commonwealth. Outcomes of their discussions were presented to ministers for consideration during the CCEM's closing ceremony.

4. Main issues discussed that are relevant to CMEC

Internationally agreed goals (IAGs)

Ministers reviewed the progress of education in the Commonwealth in the context of the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) targets, together known as the internationally agreed goals (IAGs), and noted good progress toward the achievement of the IAGs, notably in the areas of universal primary education. Ministers received the report, *Education in the Commonwealth: Towards and Beyond the Internationally Agreed Goals*, and noted with concern that 23.3 million primary-age children remained out of school in Commonwealth countries and that 775 million adults — two-thirds of them women and 460 million of whom are in Commonwealth countries — still could not read and write.

The strategic plan being developed by the Commonwealth Secretary General will be critical to allowing the Commonwealth to focus on its areas of comparative advantage. In Canada's view, the next crucial phase will be the implementation of the reform process, within existing resources, in order to evaluate results. Ministers acknowledged the need for the Secretariat to conduct a streamlining exercise with an emphasis on value-for-money and capacity-building in the education sector.

The 2015 Global Conference on EFA will be held in Korea in spring 2015 to discuss the goals for 2015, take stock of what has taken place in the last 25 years, and establish the objectives for the future.

The UN Secretary General's Education First initiative to raise the profile of education will be officially launched in September 2012 at the General Assembly in New York. Education First seeks to mobilize all partners — traditional and new — to put education on top of the development agenda. The initiative will target three priorities: promoting more equity of access, improving the quality of learning, and promoting global citizenship.

Bridging the Quality Gap through School Leadership and Teacher Professional Standards

Ministers noted the need to focus on professional standards for teachers and on school leadership to achieve quality education. They signalled that many families, particularly in less-developed countries, are not equipped to prepare children for school. They also noted that the gender gap continues to be a challenge, as is ICT. Ministers cautioned that the inaccessibility of the Internet to so many children would increase this gap in the coming years. Retaining teachers, building proper infrastructure, and accessing the Internet remain huge challenges. Ministers reiterated the need for strong pedagogical leadership to improve quality in schools and for quality teachers supported by strong professional standards and in-service development. They recalled that the roles and traditional models of education no longer fit the 21st-century learner.

The role of language in bridging the inclusion gap

Countries shared their experiences and highlighted a number of policies that have been implemented to promote local languages. They spoke of the variance between language of instruction and of communication, and of the importance of local languages as the language of instruction in promoting cultural, social, and economic inclusion. They stressed the importance of the mother tongue as a language of instruction, while acknowledging that learning English is essential for today's globalized economies.

Future education cooperation in the Commonwealth

Ministers endorsed the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) three-year plan for 2012–2015, "Learning for Development." They emphasized the need to strengthen the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) and to develop and use open educational resources (OER) to provide quality teaching and training.

Professor Asha Kanwars, newly appointed President and CEO of COL, presented the plan's eight areas of collaboration based on the expansion of learning through the use of technology. She noted that COL's objective is to promote OER in schools, using a range of technologies (tablets and mobile phones) for e-learning, teacher education, higher education, and skills development. She emphasized that the use of OER will permeate all sectors of the COL program and noted the work done by Sir John Daniels, former COL President and CEO, and in particular, the OER UNESCO Congress in Paris in June 2012, which culminated in a declaration in support of OER.

Ministers commended the achievements of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) and recognized the success of the CSFP endowment fund. The Government of Mauritius announced that 54 scholarships would be awarded from the Open University of Mauritius. Ministers were encouraged to follow the example of Mauritius and contribute to the endowment fund.

5. Main messages conveyed by the CMEC representatives

The Commonwealth Advisory Bureau's (CA/B) Policy Briefing

Minister Jennex had the opportunity to showcase initiatives and practices implemented in Nova Scotia to prepare students for a competitive workplace, such as encouraging teacher-education institutions to adopt new approaches that prepare students in learning not only the foundational skills of reading and writing, math, and science, but also 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and innovation — skills that are needed in today's competitive environment. Minister Jennex also highlighted that Nova Scotia is actively supporting approaches to instructional leadership, professional learning communities, and the integration of technology into the education system through such things as project-based learning and assistive technology.

The 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM)

Ministers acknowledge the need for the Secretariat to conduct a streamlining exercise with an emphasis on value-for-money and capacity building in the education sector. They also stressed the necessity of maintaining the Secretariat's Education Section leading up to 2015 and beyond while avoiding any duplication of work.

6. Main outcomes of the conference

Ministers approved the establishment of a Commonwealth Ministerial Working Group to articulate recommendations on the UN high-level processes responsible for developing the post-MDG and post-EFA goals. The deadline for finalizing the recommendations is November 2012. Representatives from Bangladesh, Kenya, Barbados, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Uganda, Tanzania, India, and Cyprus were nominated and approved as members of this working group.

Ministers strongly advocated for education for sustainable development (ESD) to be included in the forthcoming IAGs for education. They also stressed the importance of ICT as a vital medium to access education at all levels and that technology should be driven by educational needs.

The minister for the Bahamas offered to host 19CCEM in 2015. He will receive a firm commitment from his government in November 2012.

At the conclusion of the meeting, ministers issued a communiqué². Canada, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, Kiribati, India, Nigeria, Mozambique, and Mauritius were invited to be part of the drafting committee. Ministers reaffirmed the importance of education as a fundamental human right that is critical to advancing the Commonwealth values of democracy, development, and respect for diversity.

² The Mauritius Communiqué is available in English only at :

<http://www.thecommonwealth.org/document/249627/18ccemcommuniqué.htm>

7. Follow-up for CMEC

It is important to note that the purpose and relevance of the Commonwealth have been questioned in recent years, mainly because its commitment to enforcing its values is becoming ambiguous in the eyes of many member states.

Many Commonwealth countries are struggling to provide the most basic needs, such as infrastructure, teachers, and instructional materials, and several member countries, e.g., Nigeria and Mozambique, have found it challenging to attain a number of their EFA goals.

On the other hand, like the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia, Canada is a developed country, well advanced in the implementation of initiatives and practices compared to most other Commonwealth countries. Canada has not only achieved the EFA goals but, in many instances, surpassed them.

Therefore, Canada's presence at Commonwealth meetings is important because we contribute to their objectives by sharing our initiatives, best practices, and expertise that can help support the development of curriculum and the training of teachers in many developing countries. We also benefit from learning about new initiatives as the Commonwealth strives to improve access to quality education and training.

Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers are held every three years and provide a key forum for sharing provincial/territorial initiatives and best practices. Canadian education ministers become acquainted with their counterparts from other countries and both enhance their understanding of international issues. It is an important forum in which to promote Canada's education priorities.