

The Second National Consultation on Education

This issue of *Liaison* is devoted to a report on CMEC's Second National Consultation on Education, held May 9 to 12, 1996, in Edmonton, Alberta. Three hundred people, representing a broad cross-section of education stakeholders, participated in the consultation. The theme was "Accountability in education in Canada: Are we getting what we value?"

A Review of Past Events

The First National Consultation on Education, which was held in Montreal in 1994, focussed on quality of education. After that meeting, ministers responsible for education in Canada undertook to develop proposals in the areas of consensus that had emerged: activities to ensure greater accountability; the dissemination of information on education research and development; the removal of barriers to postsecondary education; ongoing consultation; and information-sharing and networking.

Ministers also made a commitment to hold a second national consultation, which they hoped would identify priorities for common action and the collaborative activities that would achieve those priorities.

Second National Consultation on Education

Participants

- educators and other education providers (such as administrators and trustees) from both the elementary-secondary sector and the postsecondary sector
- learners: parent groups representing elementary-secondary students, and postsecondary student groups, including representatives of students with special needs
- community groups, including representatives of first nations
- business people and representatives of employer organizations
- representatives of labour and other employee organizations

Listeners

- ministers and deputy ministers responsible for education in Canada
- government officials from education departments and ministries
- staff of the CMEC Secretariat

Format of the Second National Consultation on Education

The second national consultation, like the first, involved both plenary sessions and small group discussions. Plenary sessions featured keynote speakers and panel presentations on aspects of the consultation's theme. The panels, composed of stakeholder representatives, were moderated by education ministers. After every panel presentation, participants broke into 15 small work groups, each with its own facilitator and reporter, to debate questions arising from the presentation topic. At the closing plenary session, the work groups summarized their discussions by attempting to answer the question "Where do we go from here?"

Thursday, May 9: The Opening Session

Greetings and Welcome

Participants were welcomed to the consultation by the Honourable Jack Ady, Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development, Alberta. They were also greeted by the host of the consultation venue, Dr. Gerry Kelly, president of Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton, and by the Honourable Gordon MacInnis, then chair of CMEC and Minister of Education, Prince Edward Island.

To ensure that all views were represented and to stimulate discussion, CMEC invited two keynote speakers who have quite different opinions on public education to lead off the consultation.

Keynote Speaker: William Thorsell, Editor-in-Chief, *The Globe and Mail*



*William Thorsell, editor-in-chief, The Globe and Mail:
"Standards in literacy, numeracy, and academic subjects have declined over the last 30 years."*

Mr. Thorsell warned his audience that his opinions about education were strong and possibly misinformed, but he felt they represented public opinion.



He began by expressing his belief that standards in literacy, numeracy, and academic subjects in general have declined over the last 30 years, a decline he attributes to changes in curriculum and pedagogy. He noted that this decline has occurred despite increased spending on education and lower pupil-teacher ratios. He also expressed the view that the financial, bureaucratic, and pedagogical structures supporting education are “inimical to reform.” In short, he feels the education system is not honouring its promise to educate students.

To address these problems, Mr. Thorsell proposed some changes: one public authority responsible for defining standards; system-wide competency tests; hiring, compensation, and promotion of teachers based on merit; funding to come from governments’ general revenues, not from property taxes; and equal per-pupil funding for any school that commits to the core curriculum and system-wide tests.

Keynote Speaker: Janyne M. Hodder, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Bishop’s University, Lennoxville, Quebec



Janyne M. Hodder, principal and vice-chancellor, Bishop’s University: “Education is under siege from the increase in demands on it.”

Ms. Hodder noted that education is “under siege” from the increase in demands on it—in fact, on all social services—and the simultaneous decline in funding. While she supports accountability in education because it can act as a balance against pressure from interest groups in the shaping of policy and because it is a way of engaging citizens in public debate about education, she has reservations about it.

These reservations centre on her doubts about whether it is possible to measure, in a scientific sense, what we value in education. She reminded her listeners of the diversity of student populations and concluded that this diversity made system-wide performance indicators unrealistic. She expressed concern that such indicators could, therefore, be a waste of public funds, and also that they could lead to uniformity and mediocrity.

Instead she argued for “a model of accountability that links the purposes of education to the long-term well-being of a society.” She acknowledged the important contribution of education to economic well-being, but observed that it also

contributes to quality of life and the maintenance of democracy. She concluded by warning her audience to avoid, in their discussions about accountability, considering only “material” goals.

Friday, May 10: Down to Business

Presentation 1: A Progress Report on National Initiatives

The Honourable Gordon MacInnis, then chair of CMEC, outlined CMEC’s national agenda and noted that cooperative endeavours are the best, and sometimes the only, way to achieve these goals. He reviewed CMEC’s accomplishments since the first national consultation, many of which have been achieved in partnership with stakeholders. In particular, he pointed out the accountability initiatives under way: the School Achievement Indicators Program, the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program, and the *Report on Education in Canada*.

Mr. MacInnis concluded by urging participants to use the consultation as a forum to provide feedback on the ministers’ initiatives to date and advice on future national priorities.

Participants dispersed into their small groups to discuss Mr. MacInnis’s report.

Discussion Topic 1: Review the outcomes of the First National Consultation on Education, and outline the objectives and expected outcomes of the second national consultation

- *Do current CMEC projects address the concerns identified in the 1994 priorities? If not, why?*
- *How are partners involved in current CMEC projects or other projects that complement CMEC’s action plan? How can partners be more involved?*
- *What preliminary thoughts does the group have on potential outcomes from this consultation?*

Many of the participants felt CMEC had not done a good job of communicating its vision and information about its activities. Several felt that partners should be asked to collaborate at all levels: in the setting of goals and the establishment of a national vision; in determining appropriate activities; and in setting standards. Consultation should be open, with no hidden agenda or preconceived conclusions, and it should also be wide-ranging, reaching out to a broad spectrum of partners, including other social service providers, the business community, and parents.

Future priorities should include a variety of issues related to accessibility: the accessibility of institutions and programs to students with disabilities; the financial accessibility of postsecondary education; and prior learning assessment and the transferability of credits between postsecondary institutions across Canada.



Presentation 2: Values, Expectations, and Needs

The Honourable Pat Atkinson, Minister of Education, Saskatchewan, moderated a panel discussion on values, expectations, and needs. The five panelists were:

- Elizabeth Dobrovolsky of the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation, who urged educators to acknowledge that schools are a part of community life; recognize and take advantage of the valuable contribution parents can make; and formally include parents in decisions about their children's education
- Ovide Mercredi, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, who argued that education in Canada has failed to protect the culture of the first nations, and that quick action is needed to ensure aboriginal people's access to an education that is equivalent to that of other Canadians yet allows them to preserve their distinct culture



Ovide Mercredi, national chief, Assembly of First Nations

- Jacques Proulx, president of the education subcommission of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, who emphasized that people around the world face similar challenges in education, and who outlined the four "pillars" of education set out in the recent Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (*Learning: The Treasure Within*): learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together
- David Stewart-Patterson, senior associate of the Business Council on National Issues, who noted the high level of skills and knowledge required by the jobs of today and business's feeling that it is not getting value for its education dollars, but who also expressed the view that business should contribute to the outcomes it values through mentoring, apprenticeships, and human resources policies that support family life
- Alex Usher, national director of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, who listed five key values for postsecondary students: education should be learner-centred, of high quality, coherent (have stated goals and allow for smooth transitions between levels), cost-effective, and accessible to all (based on merit)

Discussion Topic 2: What do Canadians want from Canadian education?

- *What are the shared values, expectations, and needs of education in Canada?*
- *Given these shared values, expectations, and needs, on which key priorities should CMEC focus its efforts?*
- *What could education partners and CMEC do to achieve these priorities?*

Participants agreed that education is valued by Canadians, but struggled to list "shared" values. Some groups noted the dilemma of establishing shared values that accommodate diverse needs. Most participants, however, wanted education to have goals and values beyond simple employability.

The wide range of goals included accessibility, basic literacy and numeracy, an appreciation of culture and diversity, and the development of a pattern of lifelong learning. Other goals mentioned were a national vision developed in partnership with stakeholders, adequate resources, inclusivity (an aspect of accessibility), and the clarification of financial responsibilities (students, government, corporations).

The overriding value was partnership: consultation and collaboration in establishing values, priorities, and standards. Consultation should reach beyond the education community to include parents, learners, the business community, and social service providers, and should involve people at the grassroots level as well as leaders.

Keynote Speaker: Jean-Pierre Boisclair, President, CCAF Inc., Ottawa

Mr. Boisclair began by providing a definition of accountability: telling your performance story to the people who gave you the resources to do the job—in this case, the public. To be accountable, Mr. Boisclair declared, governments must agree on four things:

1. effective governance—that is, what their responsibilities are
2. suitable reporting frameworks that focus on results and that do not measure performance only in terms of dollars
3. the basic qualities of the information being assessed, to ensure clear, measurable results
4. the solutions and resources required to create a climate of success

Presentation 3: Responsiveness of Education in Canada to the Values, Expectations, and Needs of Canadians

The Honourable Jeannie Lea, then Minister responsible for Higher Education, Training and Adult Learning, Prince Edward Island, moderated the panel discussion. Panelists were:



- Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States, who noted that the U.S. shares many of Canada’s education goals, approaches, and challenges, and who offered the opinion that, while educators and institutions are beginning to respond to the concerns of business and the public, they could do much better by leading and managing change, rather than responding to it
- Victoria Smallman of the Canadian Federation of Students, who questioned the increasing responsiveness of universities to business and the marketplace, and who urged educators to look to their responsibilities to society as a whole, not just the interests of business
- Alain Pélissier, secretary-treasurer of the *Centrale de l’enseignement du Québec*, who outlined the many changes in education in Quebec since the 1960s, the importance Quebec society gives to education, and some of the values and expectations of education in Quebec, including accessibility, adequate support for students, a collaborative relationship between students and teachers, the fostering of Quebec culture, and the preparation of students for life in a global society



Alain Pélissier, secretary-treasurer, Centrale de l’enseignement du Québec

- Norman Wagner, president of the Corporate-Higher Education Forum, who discussed some of the changes facing educators: technology, which is making education accessible outside of schools; the difficulty of measuring whether education is making a difference; and the varying expectations of education, from the transmission of culture and values, to employability, to “babysitting and maintaining law and order”

Discussion Topic 3: Are Canadians getting what they value, expect, and need from education in Canada?

- Are learners and education partners satisfied with what they get from education in Canada? If yes, what are the strengths of education in Canada? If no, what are the issues and challenges that face education?
- What about future needs?
- What could education partners and CMEC do to improve the responsiveness of education systems to the values, expectations, and needs of Canadians? What should be the key functions of education in Canada?

Topic 3 engendered the most discussion and the most recommendations. Participants acknowledged that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with education in Canada, although many believe that improved communications might dispel some misconceptions.

CMEC was urged to lead the effort to identify what Canadians fundamentally value in education. Several groups saw a need for all Canadians to recognize their responsibility to education and urged putting students first when establishing priorities, allocating resources, and measuring performance. Once again, participants strongly emphasized accessibility for all, including aboriginal people and students with special needs, and the importance of all the reasons for education, not just the creation of employable workers. Some groups also wanted Canadians to recognize the limitations of the education system; for example, that it cannot solve all social problems.

Participants did not agree on all issues. Some were concerned that high standards would limit accessibility, particularly at the postsecondary level, while others worried that standards would undermine excellence and lead to mediocrity. But all participants wanted more stakeholders, including parents and learners, involved in decision making, and more collaboration among sectors and across the country to harmonize standards and maximize the transferability of credits.

As noted above, the need for good communication was also emphasized, both among stakeholders (teachers, local education authorities, institutions, parents, and business), and between CMEC and its partners, including the public at large. Participants felt that by understanding one another’s goals and values and by working more closely together, government and education partners could raise the level of public satisfaction with education.

Saturday, May 11: The Debate Continues

Presentation 4: Current Best Practices and Approaches to Quality in Education Systems

The Honourable Charles Dent, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, Northwest Territories, moderated a panel made up of:

- Daniel James Cornish, representing the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, who described the principles behind, and the purposes of, the key productivity indicators being developed by colleges, and who suggested that the changes that result from the information provided by indicators be introduced gradually, after people have had an opportunity to understand the information and its implications
- Janet Halliwell, chair of the Nova Scotia Council on Higher Education, who emphasized three key points about accountability: the importance of everyone’s understanding what is being assessed; the importance of understanding the impact of indicators on the roles of and relationships among



all stakeholders in education; and the importance of taking care in assessing performance, so that these relationships continue

- Rodrigue Landry, president of the *Association canadienne francophone des doyennes et doyens, des directrices et directeurs d'éducation*, who also stressed that accountability must be collective, making all stakeholders responsible and requiring them to work as a team, and who urged governments to take the lead in ensuring partnership and collective action
- Maureen Morris, president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, who warned of the limitations of the concept of "best practices," particularly the difficulty of agreeing on what is right, and who encouraged the development, implementation, and maintenance of policies that support teachers' work in the classroom



*Maureen Morris, president,
Canadian Teachers'
Federation*

- Tom Rich, president of the Canadian Education Association, who outlined the key findings of the Exemplary Schools Project, a research study involving 21 Canadian schools—that different approaches work in different situations, and that the most crucial element in a school's success appears to be the quality of its relationship with its community—and who urged that all stakeholders, including the community, be involved in deciding what is right for a particular school

Discussion Topic 4: What are the lessons to be learned from best practices?

- *What are some quality indicators? What factors act as enablers of excellent practice?*
- *How can quality indicators be applied across jurisdictions and across sectors?*
- *How do you ensure quality? What methods can modify areas where education is falling short?*

Most groups had difficulty naming specific indicators. Only a few made the attempt, and they included the following in their lists: the learner is motivated, the learning is portable, the learning meets the learner's expectations; the learner has the ability and confidence to participate fully in the community; the learner has problem-solving skills; the labour market is satisfied with the learner; the system is accessible.

There was widespread agreement that the goals and values of education in Canada need to be established before quality indicators and best practices can be determined, and that both of these tasks must be done in partnership with all stakeholders. Many participants expressed concern that indicators be flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of individual students and individual institutions. Many felt that indicators were only one way to assess students and the system, and mentioned other, equally useful sources of information such as teachers' classroom assessments and research into social factors influencing students' academic progress.

Some participants expressed concern that indicators be used to inform policy, not to reward or punish. Most participants did not want funding tied to indicators. Others wanted assurance that adequate resources would be provided to measure performance, and that the communication to the public of information from indicators would be carefully managed.

Keynote Speaker: Lorna Earl, Director of Assessment, Education Quality and Accountability Office, Ontario

Dr. Earl first noted the lack of agreement among educators about what accountability means. She suggested that accountability has two components: responsibility and entitlement. Citing her own unease, even as a statistician, with the current "obsession" with quantifying, she urged policymakers and all education partners to take responsibility for the communication and interpretation of indicators, to debate their meaning publicly and without bias, and to decide together how the information provided by indicators should be used to improve learning.

Dr. Earl also discussed the relationship of assessment and evaluation to accountability. She noted that a variety of assessments are needed to measure different aspects of education, and she described assessment as an ongoing learning process, not a judging process. She said that evaluation, which she described as judging "how good is good enough," is also an ongoing process—a plan for action that is constantly changing to reflect what has been learned.

Presentation 5: Accountability for Quality Education for All

The final panel of the consultation was moderated by the Honourable Linda G. McIntosh, Minister of Education and Training, Manitoba. The four panelists were:

- Jean-Yves Desjardins, president of the *Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français*, who warned against using accountability to place blame, and who urged rather that all



Canadians—governments, communities, families, teachers, and learners themselves—use accountability to assume their responsibility to all students for a high-quality education

- Eric Jonasson, president of the Canadian School Boards Association, who emphasized the need to redefine the mandate of education, basing it on the needs of learners and in line with the following principles: equitable access for all, choice, relevance, accountability to the community, and collaboration among, and shared responsibility by, all education partners
- Stephanie Pollock, president of the National Educational Association of Disabled Students, who outlined three areas of concern to all students, but particularly students with disabilities: that postsecondary education be affordable; that the learning environment be positive and open to diversity; and that there be some hope of employment after graduation



Stephanie Pollock, president, National Educational Association of Disabled Students

- Howard Tennant, chair of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, who expressed concern about the effect of the changing economic, social, and political climates in Canada on higher education and the resulting need for care in making decisions and allocating resources, flexibility in responding to student needs, and support for teachers

Discussion Topic 5: How can we achieve quality education for all?

- *What are the barriers to quality education for all?*
- *How can these barriers be removed? How can quality be ensured for all learners?*
- *What could education partners and CMEC do together to achieve quality education for all?*

Participants listed several barriers to accessibility: inadequate financial support (including low income levels and student debt loads); cultural, linguistic, and social barriers; inadequate prior learning assessment and transferability of credits; lack of flexibility in programming. While some participants felt there is a

need to develop indicators on accessibility, others felt that such indicators were unnecessary because learners know if their needs have been met.

Many groups cited the importance of CMEC, governments, and business supporting public education with sound policies and adequate funding. They also cited a need for innovative approaches to resolving problems. Also mentioned yet again was the need for ongoing, formal consultation and collaboration, including the involvement of the federal government in policy making and funding.

Sunday, May 12: The Closing Session

Presentation 6: Identifying Priorities

George Molloy, then acting director general of CMEC, introduced the final topic and culmination of the weekend’s consultation—the identification of priorities for ministers. He asked participants to return to their work groups and summarize their advice to ministers, answering the question “Where do we go from here?” He also urged them to come back to the plenary session with a limited set of realistic, “do-able” recommendations.

Discussion Topic 6: Where do we go from here?

- *What is your advice to ministers regarding the main priorities and general themes for CMEC in the next two years?*
- *What are some potential actions that can be taken collaboratively by learners, partners, and government?*
- *What can your sector do to enable these priorities to be met and ensure collaborative action occurs?*

Each group made a brief presentation outlining its priorities. A few priorities emerged as themes, with wide-ranging support from all participants.

Many groups called on CMEC to provide leadership by establishing a climate for collaboration and by initiating the development of a shared, pan-Canadian vision of education goals and values, and an accountability framework linked to that vision. Participants also asked CMEC to become more visible, to actively defend public education (to move from being ministers “of” education to being ministers “for” education), and to better communicate its own initiatives. They also felt that CMEC should act as a conduit for the sharing of information on best practices. Most of all, they emphasized the need for CMEC to involve all partners in establishing goals and standards, and to consult with stakeholders formally and regularly, not just at biennial events. Several groups recommended the establishment of a national advisory committee of stakeholders to work with CMEC.

Another theme that emerged was the need for education to be accessible to all. As some of the earlier summaries indicate, accessibility was used by participants as a broad term covering many issues: affordability for students; adequate resources for teachers; openness to cultural and linguistic diversity; accommodation of the needs of those with disabilities and exceptionalities; appropriate assessment of prior learning and



transferability of credits; an environment of, and resources for, lifelong learning. Ministers were also urged to be open and “transparent” in their dealings with other education governing bodies and the public, and to lead the way in clarifying the roles of all jurisdictions.

Beyond these central themes, many other priorities were suggested. Several groups emphasized the importance of literacy and early childhood education. Many emphasized the need to keep postsecondary education affordable, to ensure an adequate investment in both research and training, and to develop links between public and private institutions.

A number of groups pointed out the need for flexibility and the accommodation of diversity within broad education goals, and a way to allow local institutions, parents, and learners to have input into local decisions about education. The relationship of the world of business and work to education was a focal point of many recommendations, with some groups urging a more active role for the business community in education—as partners in establishing education goals, in training students, and in funding.

Ministers were urged by some groups to ensure that teacher education and training included sensitivity to diverse cultures and experience in working with parents and business. They were urged to establish funding priorities that recognized education as “an investment, not a cost,” and to work with the federal government and other partners to ensure adequate funding for postsecondary education.

Ministers were also encouraged to develop performance indicators in concert with partners at all levels, to use them with caution and not in isolation from other influences, and to communicate the information gleaned from such indicators clearly and in context.

In addition to requesting that they be consulted regularly, many participants offered to work within their own organizations and their own communities to encourage all members of society to place a high value on public education and to participate in the development of a shared vision for education. They also suggested that they could develop, at the local level, indicators and other evaluation mechanisms that would measure local and institution-specific aspects of education performance and quality.

Closing Address: The Honourable Halvar Jonson, then Minister of Education, Alberta

Mr. Jonson thanked the participants and reiterated some of the key themes that ministers had heard coming out of the consultation:

- the need to defend public education and its mission, and to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to be educated
- the need for CMEC to consult its partners on an ongoing basis, to include *all* partners in its consultations, and to develop the goals of education with input from all partners
- the need to enhance communications and to use communications to provide an accurate picture of education in Canada



Hon. Halvar Jonson, then Minister of Education, Alberta

- the need to provide teachers with respect, adequate resources, and adequate training
- the importance of early childhood, and of committing adequate resources to early childhood health, education, and welfare
- the need to consult and include parents in decisions about their children’s education
- the need to consider education an investment, to identify education priorities, and to fund them adequately

Mr. Jonson noted that “ministers were extremely pleased with the sense of commitment from partners.” He promised that, in the coming weeks, ministers would review the participants’ comments and proposals and announce initiatives to address them.

Participants’ Evaluation of the Consultation

At the conclusion of the consultation, participants were invited to complete a two-page questionnaire, providing their evaluation of the event. Of the 300 people who attended the consultation, 46 (15 per cent) responded to the questionnaire. Twenty-six of the responders were from the elementary-secondary sector, 10 were from the postsecondary sector, and the other 10 were from school administration, business, labour, and community groups. Among the responders were two learners from the elementary-secondary sector and two from the postsecondary sector.

The overall evaluation of the consultation was positive, with an average score of four on a five-point scale. Responders appreciated the opportunity to exchange ideas and information with others from across Canada. Three responders noted that the value of the consultation will depend on CMEC’s response to the issues raised.

Most responders were pleased with the quality of the speakers and panelists, although some felt that the lunchtime keynote speakers had to compete, unfairly, with lunch. Several people thought the agenda was too full and the last day, when small groups brought their recommendations back to the plenary session, too rushed. Some felt there were too many discussion topics, and that they were repetitive. Some responders wanted more time for give-and-take with ministers; others wanted more time for networking and brainstorming among partners. Perceptions about the small groups varied, depending on the group, its makeup, and its facilitator. Although some responders felt groups were dominated by traditional-provider or special-interest speakers, overall the response to the experience was positive.



In their general comments, responders to the questionnaire repeated the appeal for ongoing consultation, information sharing, and shared responsibility in addressing the issues.

Next Steps: The Ministers' Response

At their meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland, September 30 to October 1, 1996, ministers reviewed the themes that had emerged from the consultation and approved follow-up initiatives. These initiatives reflect the consensus that emerged from the consultation, and they are consistent with the themes CMEC has been pursuing in recent years—quality of education, accountability, accessibility, and mobility. The initiatives were also selected because they are realistic and can achieve results.

Developing a shared vision for education

Ministers reaffirmed CMEC's *Joint Declaration: Future Directions for The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada*, the historic statement of shared values and beliefs issued at the Council's meeting in Victoria in September 1993, and they issued an updated list of their current priorities: the *Report on Education in Canada*, technology in education, the Pan-Canadian Science Project, ongoing consultation with education partners, the School Achievement Indicators Program, the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Project, and the mobility of postsecondary students. Recognizing that priorities change in response to emerging needs, ministers resolved to consult broadly and regularly to ensure the widest possible input into the development of future priorities. Consultation and other initiatives are described in detail in the points that follow.

Enhancing the flow of information on education initiatives

CMEC will make a concerted effort to better inform education partners and the general public about its activities and education initiatives in general, with a particular emphasis on disseminating information about best practices and strategic planning. Specifically:

- CMEC will add an interactive capacity to its Web site (<http://www.cmec.ca/>) to allow for on-line discussions about its initiatives and education issues in general.
- It will continue to organize a national education forum every two years, and documentation prepared for the event will include information on best practices and innovative measures.
- CMEC will publish its *Report on Education in Canada* every two years. In future, the report will have the same theme as the national forum, as well as "snapshot" information about education in the provinces and territories.
- The CMEC Secretariat will increase its efforts to liaise with the major media, and the chair, director general, and senior staff will meet regularly with the federal government and major nongovernmental organizations to exchange information about education and obtain input from these groups.
- CMEC will increase its efforts to exchange information on postsecondary issues and promote joint activities and partnerships in this sector, in addition to continuing its work on the development of indicators for the sector.

Promoting equitable and affordable access to all levels of education

- CMEC has publicly stated its support for prior learning assessment as an important means of ensuring that education and training resources are used to full advantage and that individuals receive maximum recognition for their acquired knowledge.
- CMEC will discuss with deans of education, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, and the *Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec* the development of a common approach to pre-service and in-service training for teachers in the use of information technology.
- The database on education research, which CMEC, along with the Canadian Education Association and Industry Canada (SchoolNet), has been instrumental in establishing, is now available to education policymakers.
- CMEC will revise its *Student Transfer Guide*, which provides information on course content in schools across Canada, and make it available on its Web site.
- CMEC will continue to promote and encourage the recognition of undergraduate credits to facilitate the mobility of postsecondary students.
- It will also expand its collaboration with organizations representing students with special needs.

Increasing opportunities for dialogue and consultation between biennial national forums

In addition to organizing a national education forum every two years and undertaking efforts to improve communications as described above:

- The CMEC chair and director general will meet once a year with the Canadian Education Association Forum to hear the views of partner groups on national priorities and to brief them on CMEC's activities. They will also meet from time to time with the presidents and chief executive officers (CEOs) of major education partners to explore priorities in more detail. The director general and senior Secretariat staff will meet regularly with the CEOs of major organizations to discuss CMEC activities, solicit input, and learn about the activities of these groups. In addition, ministers will represent CMEC at important meetings of major national organizations that are held in their jurisdictions and provide these groups with updates on CMEC's activities. Consultations will include nontraditional organizations, to ensure CMEC receives all points of view.
- As noted above, CMEC's interactive Web site will allow for dialogue and discussion of education issues.

In an open letter to participants of the Second National Consultation on Education, the Honourable J. Chester Gillan, chair of CMEC and Minister of Education, Prince Edward Island, outlined the initiatives described above and thanked participants for "contributing to this important endeavour."