

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ENSURING ENGAGEMENT

Report of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association –
Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de
l'Ontario

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

February 2006

Minister of Education
The Honourable Gerard Kennedy

On behalf of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association – l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario, I am pleased to present you with our report entitled, "Engaging Student Achievement". This report offers a student perspective to the Student Success Strategies: Phase Three, including the Learning to 18 Initiative.

Too few of today's secondary school students are achieving an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. This grave concern of the education community must be addressed thoroughly and completely so that all students have the opportunity to fulfill their potential. OSTA-AÉCO applauds the efforts and dedication of the Ministry and countless groups and organizations that have dedicated time, energy and resources to increasing Ontario's graduation rates. The direction that has been established must be continued with great enthusiasm to ensure its success.

This report outlines current views and opinions on proposed initiatives, an analysis of potential areas of concern surrounding the implementation of these programs and proposed recommendations to ensure equal opportunity across the province. The report has been divided into two sections: initiatives and implementation. The initiatives section provides a brief background, current proposed programs and recommendations. The implementation section addresses various concerns accompanied with recommendations for the integration of the proposed initiatives into the education system.

Every student of Ontario deserves full opportunities to succeed. The education community must work together to ensure the increased achievement of our students and leaders of tomorrow.

Pursuing Excellence in Education,



Nathan Lachowsky
2005-2006 President

PREFACE

Completion of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma is an important step for adolescents. It allows for many post secondary options and is a good start to ensuring a successful future. However, too many students are not receiving their diploma. In fact, 33% of students are dropping out. This is a grave concern for the education system and society as a whole. In order to address this problem, Ministry ambitions have been focused on increasing the number of students who graduate. The 'Student Success Phase 3' and 'Learning to 18 Initiative' present a different approach to graduating more students and aims to increase the relevance of education to post-secondary options and the lives of students. The Ministry of Education is taking an important step towards improving graduation rates. This initiative is proof that the Ministry of Education has recognized that changes need to be made in order to better meet students' needs.

It is in the spirit of improved opportunity that the Ministry is striving to see more students receive their OSSD. The Student Success Strategies challenge the traditional classroom setting: there is a focus on learning opportunities in the workplace. The programs create improved course selections in co-operative education, a High Skills Major Ontario Secondary School Diploma option and Dual Credit programs. There is a unanimous desire to see a 66% graduation rate improve to reach 85% by 2010.

The common goal of student success has provided an outline of ambitious changes to our education system. Seeing improved graduation rates is at the forefront of educational politics. The three phases of Student Success presents a concrete plan to implement improvements.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent initiatives of the Ministry of Education to increase the number of students receiving their Ontario Secondary School Diploma by providing more options and greater flexibility to students are to be applauded. This represents a strong commitment on the part of the government to an education system that creates successful students. This is a commitment that the Ontario Student Trustees' Association – l'Association des élèves conseiller et conseillère de l'Ontario shares with Ontario's Ministry of Education.

The Ministry has developed a number of programs to provide students with greater choice as part of the Third Phase of Student Success including the Learning to 18 Initiatives. These include dual credit programs with universities and colleges, expansion of co-operative education programs, and the creation of a High Skills Major OSSD. As well, school attendance will become a requirement for students under the age of 18 to obtain and maintain drivers' license.

This report provides a student perspective on the Student Success: Phase Three strategies along with the Learning to 18 Initiative, and brings up specific challenges that will need to be addressed to ensure that this program is effective and accessible to all students of Ontario. The recommendations contained within the report are intended to guide the Ministry in ensuring that all students are provided with equal opportunities to achieve their potential for success with Ontario's public education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that extra effort is given to promote and foster the individuality of OYAP and Co-operative education programs.
2. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that further support is pursued from the private sector for the advantages of Co-operative Education and OYAP.
3. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that a specific funding model is created for OYAP which is separate from Co-operative Education and specific to the needs of OYAP.
4. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education clearly outline their definition of a learning environment, and focus of providing access to those opportunities, instead of administrating punishment for drop out from the current and proposed programs.
5. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the Government, along with Ontario's education community, agrees that the education setting for students provides relevance and opportunities for all students prior to the implementation of any punitive measures taken against the students.
6. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that students who would benefit from Dual Credit Program are not disadvantaged or neglected due to the administration and operating costs. Support must be sought out and provided to all students who require it.
7. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that all students of the province must be provided with an opportunity to the benefits accompanied with a High Skills Major OSSD.
8. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education ensure the original OSSD is not overshadowed, or discriminated against, when compared to a High Skills Major OSSD when students apply to post secondary places of learning or careers.
9. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that accessibility to all the proposed programs are available and operate in French.
10. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the funding model for these initiatives is based per pupil and takes into consideration geographic and demographic statistics and information.

11. OSTA–AÉCO recommends that additional resources be provided to Student Services and Guidance Counsellors to ensure the opportunities available reach all students interested, and that they are given sufficient guidance and mentorship to succeed in these environments.
12. OSTA–AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education use this time of progress to more clearly define the role and responsibilities of the Student Success teachers to aid in the administration and application of these programs to students who would most benefit from them.
13. OSTA–AÉCO recommends that school and schools boards are provided with sufficient resources to assist in the education of parents surrounding the opportunities and necessities to accessing and succeeding within the education system.
14. OSTA–AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education value and protect the time that teachers spend in their own classrooms, yet that professional development is conducted thoroughly, effectively and efficiently to all necessary groups involved.
15. OSTA–AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education ensures alternative measures are taken if necessary to administer each of the initiatives for every student.

“EQUAL OPPORTUNITY: ENSURING ENGAGEMENT”

All phases of the Student Success initiative have brought support and programming to the areas of education that required assistance. The goal of our report is to identify and propose recommendations to the Phase Three initiatives from the student perspective. The body of this report has been divided into two sections: Initiatives and Implementation.

The Initiatives section will comment upon the High Skills Major OSSD, Co-op Programs, Learning to 18 Initiative and Dual Credit Programs. Each of these sections discusses the following three areas: history, current initiative and recommendations.

INITIATIVES

This first section of the report will focus on four proposed initiatives: Co-op programs, drivers' license, dual credits and high skills major OSSD. Each section details from a student perspective a brief history, the current proposed initiative and recommendations of each of the aforementioned topics.

Co-op Programs

History

Reintroduced in Ontario in 1980, cooperative education was used as a link between in-class learning and hands-on work experience. This particular approach towards education was adopted with the goal to encourage and to facilitate the diversity of classes and learning opportunities offered by secondary schools.

Current Initiative

Recently, the co-op program has been added to the Grade 10 curriculum. This is a welcome addition to the programs existing for Grades 11 and 12. Not only are high school students with learning difficulties offered the chance to learn in a different environment, but they are also presented with good and reliable post-secondary job opportunities. The Ministry of Education has reported that there is no limit to the number of co-op credits a student can earn. This being said, the government can allow a student from grade 10 up to grade 12 to earn a total of 6 elective credits in a co-op placement. This allows students who have difficulty in a classroom environment to get hands on experience while learning in an interactive situation.

Creating an environment where students are exposed to practical work experience encourages students to consider a broader range of co-op programs and post-secondary options. The Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) offers useful alternatives to the co-op program. While the co-op program offers a placement and hands-on experience in the workforce, OYAP allows learning and apprenticeship programs as well as interactive professional development.

Recently, the McGuinty government invested 1.25 million dollars in OYAP. This funding was targeted to assist school boards to provide the resources needed for the growing number of students using the OYAP programs and to improve the development and continued elaboration of measures for academic success. Not only is there a consistent availability and accessibility to the wide range of co-op and OYAP placements, but students who have previous work experience are more likely to be subsequently employed.

The OYAP and co-op programs allow students to successfully complete their high school diploma while effectively taking advantage of student success initiatives.

Recommendations

1. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that extra effort is given to promote and foster the individuality of OYAP and Co-operative education programs.

This action will allow students from across the province to understand the difference between the two programs and allow them to gain from the specific differences of each.

2. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that further support is pursued from the private sector for the advantages of Co-operative Education and OYAP.

This will allow for each of the programs to gain the necessary support from the private sector, and without this encouragement, Co-operative Education in the province of Ontario will not be able to fulfill its mandate to the students.

3. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that a specific funding model is created for OYAP which is separate from Co-operative Education and specific to the needs of OYAP.

Drivers' Licenses

History

Several of the US States have implemented initiatives connecting driving privileges of students and their academic enrolment and success. The results of these programs vary and are highly dependent on the attention, diligence and determination applied by the governing education system.

Current Initiative:

In the 'Learning to 18 Initiatives', the Ministry of Education proposes repercussions for students who are not attending school. The Ministry presented two possible disciplinary actions with legal implications. The first is the notion of holding a student liable, by means of a lawsuit, for not attending school. The second proposal is the making attendance at school a mandatory requirement for those under 18 to receive and maintain their drivers' license.

There would have been many implications to holding a student responsible in a legal context that would have a dramatic impact on our legal and court systems. This implies that a student is responsible to utilize government funded education provided for them. The notion of bringing 'drop outs' to court or holding them liable in relation to their driving privileges raises concern for the responsibility of the education system.

The legal process has certain timelines associated with bringing a party to court. In many cases, the process of finding, prosecuting and instituting punishment of an individual would prove too lengthy for the punishment to take effect. If, for example a student drops out at the age of 17, and instituting the removal of their driver's license could take a year, the party would be eligible for a license regardless of his or her attendance at school. Once an individual turns 18, he or she does not have to meet the school attendance requirement.

The Learning to 18 Initiative is a great step towards advancing a common goal: connection with students. The Ministry has found something that is highly valued by youth. A driver's license is a symbol of freedom, responsibility and maturity on the journey to adulthood. The threat of removing this privilege is a strong deterrent.

The aforementioned concept of removal of a driver's license will sway many students from discontinuing their education. Despite this fact, the many implications of this decision must be considered.

It is inappropriate to force a student, by indirect restraints, to remain in school against their will. Many students do not feel as though a classroom setting is relevant to lives. Each student, if they are to be held responsible to attend school, deserves to feel as if their time spent learning proves beneficial in their lives. Improved curriculum and course opportunities will spark a desire in students to remain in school. A student deserves and desires to have their education benefit potential career opportunities. The government should not punish a student for not becoming engaged in their own education system.

The Learning to 18 Initiative is a positive step by the Ministry of Education. The outlined changes to co-op and workplace programs improve opportunity for students. The Minister of Education should focus attention and resources on these areas, instead of pursuing punitive measures for dropping out of school.

Recommendations

If compulsory school attendance is to become a requirement for receiving a driver's license, it needs to be implemented alongside corresponding improvements. With increased educational opportunities outside of the classroom, potential dropouts are more likely to remain engaged in the system. Many students will find more relevance for

their studies and a resulting desire to proceed as a result of improved co-op and course selections.

4. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education clearly outline their definition of a learning environment, and focus of providing access to those opportunities, instead of administrating punishment for drop out from the current and proposed programs.

The new programs outlined in this initiative are promising. When these initiatives fully implemented, they will have large impacts on both drop out rates and student success. Only upon effective and successful implementation of the outlined initiatives could compulsory school attendance be a fair requirement for a driver's license. Before mandating a student to remain in a classroom, it is essential to provide an education that is relevant to their lives.

5. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the Government, along with Ontario's education community, agrees that the education setting for students provides relevance and opportunities for all students prior to the implementation of any punitive measures taken against the students.

Dual Credit Programs with Colleges and Universities

History

The dual credit options being delivered in collaboration with post-secondary institutions have been highly effective in the regions where they have been run as pilot projects. Over the past few years, this program has benefited students in Canadian provinces and forty-seven states in the United States of America.

The Brandon Adult Learning Center in Manitoba conducted a survey for students who had completed the dual credit program in 2001. The results indicated that forty-seven percent of students desired to move forward to the next level of education. Of those students surveyed, thirty-eight percent moved towards post secondary institutions and thirty-seven percent pursued other learning initiatives and programs.

Current Initiative

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities have formed a partnership to provide specialized courses for students. In this proposed program, students will earn credits outside of the typical high school setting to put towards their high school diploma as well as post secondary degree or diploma or certificate. This provides students with the necessary experience to succeed in future

workplace endeavours or post secondary institutions. Students will utilize beneficial resources available from both education sectors.

The Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board and the Grand Erie District School Board have joined in partnership with Mohawk College to provide students with the opportunity to explore the skill trades. Through this program, students receive training in various skilled trades from secondary school teachers and college professors.

It is predicted that in 2012, Canada's skill trade industry will suffer from a shortage of workers. By exposing students to a wide range of apprenticeships, careers and post secondary options, Ontario will begin to see an increased interest in these areas. Providing opportunities to explore skill trades before students leave high school not only increases student interest, but will help meet the demand for skilled tradespersons.

Recommendations

The goal of this initiative is to allow students an opportunity to take applicable courses that will help them succeed in their future. It is crucial that all students receive the same benefits and resources of these programs, despite geographical location. It is a concern that students not within close proximity to post-secondary institutions will not be able to fully benefit from this program. It is essential that alternative programs are available to these students so as to ensure equality of opportunity.

6. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that students who would benefit from Dual Credit Program are not disadvantaged or neglected due to the administration and operating costs. Support must be sought out and provided to all students who require it.

High Skills Major OSSD

History

The option of an Ontario Secondary School Certificate has not been widely acknowledged or beneficial for students unable to complete the 30 required credits for the OSSD. While there have been continual curriculum developments that have introduced new classes and flexibility to course selections, no accreditation has been given to students who have demonstrated dedication to study in a particular field of interest.

Current Initiative

The newly proposed Specialist High-Skills Major is intended to enrich the academic opportunities available to students in Ontario. The High Skills OSSD is one of the many components of Phrase Three of Student Success. This innovative program is intended to engage students in their education and renew the purpose and drive to pursue learning. The prospects of enhanced opportunities for post secondary education must justify taking the required six to twelve credits in the same field.

Recommendations

Education in secondary school provides students with the opportunity to take a diverse range of courses to help focus their preferences and interests in specific fields. If implemented, students may sacrifice a wide range of electives to ensure they have sufficient courses to warrant a specialized diploma. Upon implementation, the Ministry of Education, District School Boards and high schools must ensure that every student has sufficient time and knowledge to make an informed decision regarding their desire to pursue a specific High Skills Diploma.

7. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that all students of the province must be provided with an opportunity to the benefits accompanied with a High Skills Major OSSD.
8. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education ensure the original OSSD is not overshadowed, or discriminated against, when compared to a High Skills Major OSSD when students apply to post secondary places of learning or careers.

There is concern that student who graduate with an original OSSD will be at a disadvantage as compared to their peers with a High-Skills Major OSSD. As the implementation of this program will not be universally possible for all Ontario schools, students that graduate from schools that do not have the capacity to provide all High-Skills OSSDs must not be disadvantaged. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the OSTA-AÉCO that the Ministry of Education ensure all students receive equal opportunities regardless of the diploma with which they graduate.

IMPLEMENTATION

One of the greatest challenges in implementing these programs across the province will be ensuring that every student is given equal accessibility and opportunity to succeed. There are several areas and aspects of implementing the Third Phase Programs that will be discussed. The areas of concern that will be addressed include: Funding & Capacity, Rural Schools, French Schools, Professional Development and Student Services.

French Schools

The concerns of Rural Schools are echoed in many French schools in Ontario. With limited enrolment and the wide areas served by School Boards, the French Schools will face more obstacles. Many French School boards, while in city centres, serve several rural areas. The concerns and difficulties with implementation will become an issue for all of these School Boards requiring further attention and deliberation. A specific concern of French Schools is the lack of French Post-Secondary Schools to implement the Dual Credit program. Similarly, finding specialized co-op placements in a French-language setting will prove challenging. Other procedures for administering these programs must be pursued and implemented.

9. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that accessibility to all the proposed programs are available and operate in French.

Funding & Capacity

The programs and initiatives involved with the Third Phase of Student Success will require major funding. The dropout rates are not consistent through the varying geographic and demographic areas in Ontario. As such, the need and gross effect these initiatives will have is also variable upon a number of circumstances. When the funding for these programs is distributed, it is important that the students who need these programs are not neglected because the capacity of their school would require a larger amount of money than other better equipped facilities and areas. The Ministry of Education must be vigilant when providing funding for these programs, ensuring that all students in Ontario receive the assistance they require to graduate.

10. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the funding model for these initiatives is based per pupil and takes into consideration geographic and demographic statistics and information.

Guidance Counsellors and Parents

The relationship between students and education is intervened by their guidance counsellors, and their corresponding understanding of programs.

It is a credible initiative to implement such beneficial programs, but students need to be aware of, and have access to these opportunities. The ambition of a student to be involved in workplace education is only as powerful as their means to achieve this. It is the responsibility of the Ministry to insure Guidance Counsellors are aware, and prepared to promote these programs for these students. Students must be aware of these new programs in order for them to be utilized.

The capacity for a student to have knowledge of their course opportunities starts with the Student Services Department. More resources need to be provided to Student Services to ensure there are sufficient Guidance Counsellors and resources available to students. This will ensure they can make the best choice and receive the best education available to them. A student should not be prevented from accessing these new programs due to a lack of information, resources and guidance available.

11. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that additional resources be provided to Student Services and Guidance Counsellors to ensure the opportunities available reach all students interested, and that they are given sufficient guidance and mentorship to succeed in these environments.

Student Success teachers will also have a major role to play in this initiative. The implementation of these programs should facilitate a clearer definition of their roles and responsibilities. These programs will directly benefit a large group of the students that work with Student Success teachers.

12. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education use this time of progress to more clearly define the role and responsibilities of the Student Success teachers to aid in the administration and application of these programs to students who would most benefit from them.

The role that parents play will be a significant determinant for the success and effectiveness of these programs. Parents play an unparalleled role in the guidance and progression of their children's education. If parents are made aware of the proposed programs, and the benefits they will provide, the success of these initiatives will be largely increased.

13. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that school and schools boards are provided with sufficient resources to assist in the education of parents surrounding the opportunities and necessities to accessing and succeeding within the education system.

Professional Development

As with any of the newly implemented program, professional development will be required to ensure the success of Student Success Phase Three. The use of technology will be extensive in some cases and will require meticulous training and assistance. Students should have access to their regular teachers for the majority of the year. The quality of education suffers when teachers are removed from their classrooms. The Ministry of Education must determine a way to run effective professional development without detracting from class time.

14. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education value and protect the time that teachers spend in their own classrooms, yet that professional development is conducted thoroughly, effectively and efficiently to all necessary groups involved.

Rural Schools

The geographic and demographic characteristics of a Rural School, including limited enrolment, will be a considerable obstacle to overcome during the implementation of the Phase 3 Initiatives. Most of the difficulties arising from implementing these programs in rural schools arise from low enrolment.

Rural Schools have difficulty providing as the flexibility and range of courses provided by those in urban and city settings. Because of the lack of courses being offered, students may not be able to graduate with a High Skills Major OSSD regardless of their interest. This could lead to students leaving rural schools to attend larger urban schools, where more opportunities are available. This would further threaten rural schools that are the hearts of their communities. The students that remain in a rural school that cannot offer the High Skills Major OSSD because of course capacity must not be disadvantaged as a result.

Another battle for Rural Schools will be finding the variability and flexibility of co-op placements for those students who are interested in fields that are not commonly active in their school's area.

Many Rural Schools do not have access to post-secondary institutions through which a Dual Credit program can be established. Work must be done to find alternate measures to assisting those students achieve graduation.

15. OSTA-AÉCO recommends that the Ministry of Education ensures alternative measures are taken if necessary to administer each of the initiatives for every student.