OUSA
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

POLICY PAPER

A Comprehensive Access Strategy

Fall 2020

Prepared by:

Nathan R.G. Barnett, Vice President University Affairs
Trent Durham Student Association

Anthony Coulter, Policy Analyst
Trent Durham Student Association

Matthew Gerrits, Associate Vice President, Academic Affairs
Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association

Matthew Mellon, Commissioner of External Affairs
Alma Mater Society, Queen's University

Megan Town, Vice President Education
Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association

Tiffany Yung, Deputy Commissioner, External Affairs
Alma Mater Society, Queen's University

With files from:

Ryan Tishcoff, Research & Policy Analyst
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

The member institutions and home office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance operate on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Leni-Lunaape, Anishnawbek, and Mississauga peoples.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE PROBLEM

Absence of a Provincial Access Strategy

All willing and qualified individuals in Ontario should be able to access the province's post-secondary education system. However, certain groups in Ontario are underrepresented in post-secondary education and face unique barriers, not limited to finances, that restrict access for qualified individuals. The provincial government is not sufficiently committed to increasing access to post-secondary for underrepresented groups and remains focused on non-specifically increasing overall enrolment.

Inequitable Access for Students from Underrepresented Groups

Students from underrepresented groups must have equitable access to post-secondary education. Unfortunately, perceptions associated with these students' identities may cause them to select, or be encouraged to select, post-secondary pathways other than their preferred pathway. Existing support systems do not adequately address systemic barriers to accessing post-secondary education, and existing primary and secondary education systems may use a "one size fits all" approach that fails to support students from underrepresented groups.

There are also access concerns specific to particular underrepresented groups. Post-secondary institutions may inaccurately communicate their accommodations for students with disabilities, and perceptions of these students' abilities may lead to them not pursuing their preferred post-secondary pathway. Also of concern is the systemic oppression of racialized and Indigenous students that affects these students' ability to attend post-secondary. Further, students with reduced financial means may be unable to devote time to studying, pursuing extra-curricular activities, and taking other steps that help in the pursuit of post-secondary. Finally, students living in rural and northern communities are disproportionately affected by poor internet access, resulting in fewer opportunities to learn about their post-secondary options.

Performance-based funding should be used to offer fair incentives to post-secondary institutions that increase student access among these and other underrepresented groups. However, current Strategic Mandate Agreements currently do not place adequate focus on access for marginalized student groups in institutional enrolment and differentiation strategies.

Inflexible Pathways to University

Mature students often have work or family obligations that make it more difficult to access post-secondary education. Those who opt for part-time studies in order to continue working or caring for dependents often do not qualify for particular grants and/or loans, and many do not have the financial support to return to school. Unfortunately, because the OSAP definition of mature students was recently changed from four years to six, many students are unable to access the financial support they need. Further, students may lack the financial resources to transfer between post-secondary institutions, or they may be unaware of the process of transferring. Students from marginalized groups often face additional barriers when attempting to transfer between post-secondary institutions, and often do not see university as a viable option for them.

Insufficient Outreach & Awareness

Students should feel empowered to choose educational programs that best suit their goals and abilities; however, students who have not completed secondary school often do not have the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education. Further, students who did not complete the minimum university requirements

in high school (i.e., grade twelve, university-level English) are unable to access university until six years after they graduate, when they quality as mature students.

Extracurriculars can encourage students' interest in post-secondary education and help develop career and education goals. Unfortunately, these programs often have financial barriers that limit students' ability to participate in them. Lower-income parents, in particular, may be disadvantaged because they cannot afford to put young children in camps or other educational opportunities.

Finally, students should feel supported and knowledgeable about financial literacy so that they can make the decision best suited for them regarding post-secondary education. Often, however, information about financial aid arrives too late for prospective students to realize post-secondary education is an option for them. RESPs can also be inaccessible for lower-income families who do not have the ability to save money.

Lack of Support in Secondary School

The stigmatization associated with specific streams often pressures students to enroll in classes that are not the right fit for them, hindering their long-term academic and career success. In particular, students from marginalized or minority groups are often forced into the Applied stream, even when they may succeed more in the Academic stream. The difficulty of switching between streams acts as a barrier to students attending their post-secondary pathway of choice. In some cases, guidance counsellors do not have the training required to equip students with the knowledge they need to make an informed decision about their post-secondary pathway. Further, some secondary school students do not have sufficient access to resources that enable academic success and motivation to continue with education, and data shows that secondary school dropout rates are higher among groups that are underrepresented in post-secondary education.

Incomplete System Data & Information

Public policy interventions to support and broaden the accessibility of Ontario's universities should rely on comprehensive data that allows for patterns of marginalization to be scientifically identified and quantified. There is room for improvement in this area, and currently third-party groups are helping to fill data availability gaps. Due to a lack of information and longitudinal data, initiatives intended to increase access for underrepresented groups cannot always be consistently and thoroughly evaluated. Further, current data on student access is fragmented and not presented in a central location.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a Provincial Access Strategy

The provincial government should publicly commit to increasing access to post-secondary education for underrepresented groups and reducing barriers by developing a comprehensive strategic plan that addresses the unique needs of different underrepresented groups. In this strategy, access should be defined to mean reducing barriers and increasing enrolment for students from underrepresented groups.

Increase Access for Students from Underrepresented Groups

The provincial government should provide targeted programming that prepares and encourages students from underrepresented groups to pursue their preferred post-secondary pathway. The government should also commission research on how to modify primary and secondary education systems to improve access to post-secondary for underrepresented groups. Further, it should implement debt reduction

mechanisms, as well as specific streams of OSAP, to provide support for students from underrepresented groups. On a broader scale, the government should invest in addressing the systemic oppression which contributes to students from certain groups being underrepresented in post-secondary education.

To support access for students with disabilities, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HECQO) should collaborate with existing disability stakeholders to research and develop a comprehensive framework for increasing access for these students. This should include an investigation of how to support students with visible and non-visible disabilities through the distinct challenges they may face. The provincial government should provide grant funding for modifying physical infrastructure and academic processes to meet students' accessibility needs, in addition to developing a system for independently evaluating and verifying accessibility supports at post-secondary institutions and presenting this information in a central location.

The provincial government should also invest in addressing the systemic oppression of racialized and Indigenous folk in order to improve their educational outcomes. Further, it should support Indigenous communities by investing in specific enrichment programs during primary and secondary education aimed at increasing students' ability to attend their preferred post-secondary pathway.

To support students with lower socioeconomic status, the provincial government should develop guidelines so that universities can uniformly consider extenuating circumstances in admissions decisions. The government should also invest in funding streams for schools in neighbourhoods with lower socioeconomic status in order to create a high-quality learning environment for students.

To promote access in rural and northern communities, the Ministry of Education should work with school boards to promote post-secondary opportunities in these areas and create a Rural and Northern Education Strategy aimed at addressing specific barriers faced by these students. The provincial government should also introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant designed to allocate funding to students to cover travel costs from their place of permanent residence to the nearest institution offering their program of choice. Moreover, to ensure that Ontario universities' Regional Fairs reach rural and northern communities with low post-secondary attainment rates, the government should provide funding to the Ontario University Registrars' Association, the Council of Ontario Universities, and the Ontario Universities' Application Centre.

Finally, in the next iteration of Strategic Mandate Agreements, the provincial government should continue and expand upon the Enrolment Strategy section. It should also adopt a policy of moderate differentiation and specialization in improving student access, encouraging both general commitments to access and specific institutional areas of strength.

Promote Alternative Pathways to University

To ensure that mature students are able to access post-secondary education, the provincial government should increase OSAP grants for students with dependents and reduce the percentage of courses a mature student needs in order to be considered full-time to 40% of a full course load. The government should also redefine mature students within OSAP as those who have been out of school for four years, rather than six.

To assist students who wish to transfer between institutions, the provincial government should develop a grant for low-income transfer students to cover the cost of transfer fees. The government should also develop a fund for ONCAT and post-secondary institutions to provide advertisement around transfer opportunities. Further, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should develop outreach programs aimed at building knowledge around university transfer protocols and invest in the targeted outreach of those programs to underrepresented groups.

Increase Outreach & Awareness

The provincial government should work with Pathways to Education to create outreach programs aimed at people who do not have their high school diploma or GED but wish to pursue further education. Similarly, the government should develop a grant for universities to apply to that would allow them to develop outreach programs for students who: do not have these qualifications; did not complete the minimum university requirements, despite graduating high school; and/or are a member of one or more underrepresented groups. Further, the government should collect data on the long-term outcomes of outreach programs in Ontario.

To promote outreach from an early age, the provincial government should develop a grant for elementary schools to apply to in order to further support extracurriculars. The government should also develop a needs-based grant to help children in K-12 attend camps and after-school programing focused on developing an interest in education, as well as a grant that elementary schools can apply to in order to visit post-secondary institutions on field trips.

The provincial government should invest in further advertisement about financial aid to prospective students and their support systems, including a centralized database of all scholarship offerings within Ontario. The government should also develop a free online financial literacy course for adults and young adults focused on saving for and understanding post-secondary education funding.

Improve Secondary School Supports

The Ministry of Education should mandate that decisions between university and college streams be postponed to grades 11 and 12, and that school boards implement a strategic plan dedicated to a thorough explanation of these streams and the post-secondary pathways to which they lead. Further, the Ministry of Education should implement a reassessment tool to give students and parents and/or guardians a formal opportunity to re-evaluate their options and make switching between streams more accessible.

Regarding the Grade 10 Career Studies course, the Ministry of Education should regularly consult students and teachers at the secondary and post-secondary level and collect data to monitor the effectiveness of recent curriculum changes. Upon postponing streaming decisions to grades 11 and 12, the Ministry of Education should amend the Career Studies course curriculum to include a section on the outcomes of streaming decisions. The Ministry should also focus on providing resources on how to pursue post-secondary education, without prioritizing one form of post-secondary over another. To ensure students receive high-quality guidance, the provincial government should evaluate and conduct a review of the ratio of guidance counsellors to students served.

Finally, the provincial government should provide envelope funding so that school boards can hire teaching staff to develop in-school tutoring centres. It should also provide funding to the Pathways to Education program to allow for the expansion of mentorship and support programs and permit a wider reach to underrepresented populations.

Expand System Data & Information

To improve data collection and distribution, the provincial government should convene a multi-stakeholder expert panel to examine and make recommendations regarding the collection, availability, accessibility, and publication of post-secondary data in Ontario. Further, the government should collect self-identified data on access to post-secondary education on all relevant protected grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code. It should also amend the Ontario Education Number (OEN) to include, from consenting individuals, important demographic information necessary to further the goals of a comprehensive access strategy. Finally, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should, at least every three years, produce a report on student access to the post-secondary system, both for public consumption and for use in guiding the Post-Secondary Comprehensive Access Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Access to post-secondary education can be defined in one of two ways: (1) by using a "growth model," which measures how many spaces there are for students who wish to attend; or (2) by using an "equity of access model," which measures whether all students in Ontario have an equal opportunity to access and succeed in the province's post-secondary system.[1] These definitions, provided by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), highlight the different approaches a government can take in order to increase post-secondary access.

Access to post-secondary, defined using the growth model, has improved significantly in recent years. Between 2004 and 2015, post-secondary enrolment grew approximately 31%, from 555,000 to 725,000.[2] However, there is little evidence that this increase in overall enrolment has made it easier for disadvantaged students to access post-secondary education.[3] Several groups in Ontario—including students from low-income families, first-generation students, racialized and Indigenous students, students from rural and northern communities, students from single-parent families, and students with disabilities—remain underrepresented within the province's post-secondary institutions. Evidently, under the equity of access model, access to higher education, is still in need of significant improvement. This is the main focus of this policy paper, with recommendations largely aimed at ensuring equitable access to post-secondary rather than overall enrolment growth.

There is also considerable research to suggest that students make decisions about pursuing post-secondary education early in life, even prior to secondary school. A study found that 40% of individuals who went to university had always known they would attend, 40% had decided by grades nine or ten, and the remaining 20% had known by grade twelve.[4] Although OUSA's advocacy typically focuses on issues which pertain directly to post-secondary education, this data strongly suggests that in order to promote equitable post-secondary access, we must encourage outreach and support programs as early as primary school. For this reason, OUSA has decided to include several recommendations pertaining to primary and secondary school.

Similarly, this policy paper addresses streaming in Ontario's secondary schools. In July 2020, the provincial government announced that it would be ending grade nine streaming in an effort to reduce barriers to post-secondary for racialized and Indigenous students.[5] This is a step in the right direction, and this policy seeks to continue this progress and ensure that all students are able to pursue their post-secondary pathway of choice. Other recommendations include increasing post-secondary access among mature and transfer students, promoting awareness of the various pathways to post-secondary, and improving data collection and distribution in order to better evaluate post-secondary attainment and outreach initiatives.

The overarching goal of this policy paper is for the provincial government to create a formal and comprehensive access strategy comprised of the recommendations below. However, while these recommendations are designed to work together to promote equitable access to post-secondary education in Ontario, they will nevertheless provide important, tangible benefits if implemented separately.

---

[1] Deller, F., Kaufman, A. & Tamburri, R. (2019). Redefining Access to Postsecondary Education. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. 3.

[2] Ibid, 6.

[3] Ibid, 8.

[4] Finnie, Ross. "Access to post-secondary education: The importance of culture." *Children and Youth Services Review*. No. 34. 2012.

[5] Government of Ontario. "Ontario Taking Bold Action to Address Racism and Inequity in Schools," *News Release*. Retrieved November 3, 2020. https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/57543/ontario-taking-bold-action-to-address-racism-and-inequity-in-schools-1.

GLOSSARY

Disabilities: Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, a disability is "any degree of physical disability... a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability... a learning disability... a mental disorder... or an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed." The Code includes anticipated disabilities in its definition, signalling the need to take proactive measures to accommodate students who may develop a disability. This paper uses the Code definition of disability and is inclusive of both visible and invisible disabilities.[6]

Elementary & Secondary Education: In this policy, the terms "primary," "elementary," "secondary," and "high school" refer to various stages of education from grades K-12.

First-Generation Students: Students whose parents do not have a Bachelor's degree or higher education certification. Although immigrant students may be attending post-secondary in Ontario for the first time, if their parents completed post-secondary education, they would not be included in our definition of first-generation students.

Lower Socioeconomic Status (SES): In this policy paper, "lower socioeconomic status" refers to individuals from families whose combined annual income is less than $50,000. This is based on Statistics Canada's Low-Income Measure for a four-person household, before tax.[7]

Mature Students: In this policy paper, "mature students" refers to individuals who have been out of high school for four or more years at the start of their study period, or who have worked full-time for at least 24 months in a row. This is loosely based on the OSAP definition for independent students, since the mature student definition varies from institution to institution.

Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs): Documents established through negotiations with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) that provide universities and colleges with an opportunity to communicate priorities, identify areas of institutional strength/focus, and set performance metrics. Historically, some degree of public university funding has been determined by SMAs.[8]

Streaming: The process of secondary school students choosing between academic and applied streams, and later university and college streams, in Ontario's public education system.

Systemic Oppression: Systemic oppression is the intentional disadvantaging of groups of people based on their identity while advantaging members of the dominant group (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, language, etc.). It manifests in economic, social, political and cultural systems, and exists at the level of institutions (harmful policies and practices) and across structures (education, health, transportation, economy, etc.) that are interconnected and reinforcing over time.[9]

Underrepresented Students, Students from Underrepresented Groups: Students from demographic groups that have a lower percentage of participation in post-secondary education when compared to the percentage of participation in post-secondary of the general population. For the context of this paper, "underrepresented" should be understood only in the context of participation in post-secondary education, not other aspects of society. It is important to note that, while some marginalized populations may be underrepresented within the post-secondary system, the terms "marginalized" and

---

6 Ontario Human Rights Commission, Policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability (Ontario Human Rights Commission, June 2016)

7 Statistics Canada. *Low income measure (LIM) thresholds by income source and household size.* Retrieved November 26, 2020. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110023201.

8 Ryerson University. *Strategic Mandate Agreement.* Retrieved November 26, 2020. https://www.ryerson.ca/provost/strategic-plans/strategic-mandate-agreement/#:~:text=Strategic%20Mandate%20Agreements%20(SMAs)%20are,focus%2C%20and%20set%20performance%20metrics.

9 National Equity Project. *The Lens of Systemic Oppression.* Retrieved November 26, 2020. https://www.nationalequityproject.org/frameworks/lens-of-systemic-oppression#:~:text=Systemic%20oppression%20is%20systematic%20and,%2C%20language%2C%20etc.).

"underrepresented" are not synonymous and are not used interchangeably in this paper. In particular, policy makers often refer to underrepresented groups in post-secondary education as including: those from low-income families; first-generation students, those from rural and northern communities, those from single-parent families, or those with disabilities, among other marginalized populations.[10]

Willing and Qualified Students: In this policy, "willing and qualified students" refers to individuals who have a desire to attend post-secondary education and who have met the relevant admission requirements for doing so.

---

[10] Finnie, Ross. "Under-Represented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey," *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).* 2011. Retrieved November 26, 2020. http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/UnderRepdGroupsENG.pdf.

CREATING A PROVINCIAL ACCESS STRATEGY

> **Principle:** All willing and qualified individuals in Ontario should be able to access the province's post-secondary education system.
>
> **Principle:** Ontarians who complete post-secondary education tend to have improved employment and career outcomes compared to those who do not attend.
>
> **Principle:** Access is a broad term that should be interpreted specifically as increasing access and enrolment for underrepresented groups, rather than generally increasing enrolment in post-secondary education for all students.
>
> **Concern:** Certain groups in Ontario are underrepresented in post-secondary education and face unique barriers, not limited to finances, that restrict access for qualified individuals.
>
> **Concern:** The provincial government is not sufficiently committed to increasing access to post-secondary education for underrepresented groups and remains focused on non-specifically increasing overall enrolment.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should publicly commit to increasing access to post-secondary education for underrepresented groups and reducing barriers by developing a comprehensive strategic plan that addresses the unique needs of different underrepresented groups.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should clearly define access to mean reducing barriers and increasing enrolment for underrepresented groups specifically.

Research and data suggest that accessing and participating in higher education is becoming a greater necessity in Ontario. In 2015, StatsCanada reported significantly better employment outcomes for Bachelor's degree holders; that year, Ontario's employment rate for Bachelor's degree holders was 74%, compared to the province-wide rate of 63%.[11] As well, the Canadian government estimates that by 2028, roughly 68% of new jobs will require some post-secondary credential.[12] As the number of jobs requiring higher education increases, the provincial government will need to keep up with the growing demand by ensuring equitable access to post-secondary education. Most importantly, they will need to address systemic barriers that restrict access for certain demographic populations to ensure that social mobility is promoted and stratification does not continue or increase. This will be imperative to ensuring that underrepresented groups are not excluded from an increasingly highly educated labour force.

The term "access," as it pertains to post-secondary education, can be elusive and difficult to define. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) defines access in two ways: increasing the system's capacity to accommodate all interested students, and specific initiatives targeted at those who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education.[13] Over several years, Ontario has grown to become a world leader in educational attainment among young adults. HEQCO reports a 31% post-secondary enrolment growth from 2005 to 2015, with 68% of individuals aged 25-34 possessing a post-secondary credential.[14] Data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows this to be far greater than the Canadian average as well as averages in other industrialized countries for attainment of post-secondary credentials.[15]

[11] Statistics Canada. "Unemployment rate, participation rate and employment rate by education attainment, annual." Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410002001

[12] Government of Canada. "Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS) - 2019 to 2028 projections." Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/e80851b8-de68-43bd-a85c-c72e1b3a3890#wb-auto-6.

[13] Deller, F., Kaufman, A. & Tamburri, R. (2019). Redefining Access to Postsecondary Education. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. 5.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). "Current Tables (2018), National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES)." Retrieved October 20, 2020. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/annualreports/oecd/tables.asp.

However, despite significant progress in general enrolment growth, there are still concerns around barriers that exist to promote equitable access for underrepresented groups. In 2017, while nearly 70% of Ontario youth continued their education after secondary school, only 55% of students with parents in the bottom income quintile were enrolled in post-secondary education, compared to 84% with parents in the top income quintile.[16] As of 2016, 32% of Ontario's population held a university credential, but only 22% of self-identifying Indigenous individuals had one, compared with 45% of non-Indigenous individuals.[17]

This data signals the need for a substantive shift in the access and enrolment strategies of the provincial government. The provincial government has remained committed to broadly increasing enrolment via growth in the post-secondary sector as early as the initial years of the McGuinty government.[18] More recently, initiatives have targeted financial barriers that restrict access to post-secondary education, which have made some progress in promoting equitable access. However, extensive research and student testimony demonstrates the persistence of non-financial factors that continue to pose barriers to post-secondary education for certain demographic populations in Ontario.[19] Low academic performance, greater high school dropout rates, low interest and belief in the value of higher education, and insufficient encouragement from parents and peers are just a few examples of the barriers that persist for traditionally under-represented groups.[20]

As the provincial government continues to support programs like OSAP, which address financial factors, they should also create a more comprehensive access strategy to encompass the multitude of additional factors that pose barriers to accessing post-secondary education. Tthe provincial government should develop a comprehensive strategic plan, similar to previous education-based plans developed by the Governments of Ontario and Canada, that addresses equity of access to post-secondary education in the province.[21] The overarching goals of this strategy should be public accountability and ensuring that the government shifts from a general growth strategy to a strategy of equitable access. This strategy should be developed in close consultation with students and individuals from affected populations.

Such a strategic plan should be specific and include targeted policy objectives that directly translate to better outcomes for traditionally under-represented groups. Each of the underrepresented groups discussed in this paper should be independently accounted for, given the unique barriers experienced by each one. The provincial government should clearly define access to mean equitable participation for underrepresented groups in order to ensure that subsequent policy goals reflect this overall goal. The strategy should include the recommendations made in this paper, as well as other OUSA policy papers concerned with access—namely, Student Financial Aid and Credit Transfer and Mobility.[22] While a cohesive access strategy is essential for positive long-term effects, it is important to note that the policy recommendations outlined in this paper may still be taken and implemented individually, irrespective of an overarching strategic plan.

Given that post-secondary education is undeniably becoming a necessity in Ontario, it is essential that the government commit to equalizing the opportunity to participate for all demographic groups. In order to prevent persistent cycles of inequality and systemic disadvantages among underrepresented groups, a proactive strategy is essential to ensure that all students interested in participating in post-secondary

[16] Frenette, Marc. "Economic Insights
Postsecondary Enrolment by Parental Income: Recent National and Provincial Trends," *Statistics Canada*. April 10, 2017. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2017070-eng.htm.
[17] Statistics Canada. *Data Products, 2016 Census*. Retrieved October 3, 2020. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm.
[18] Deller, F., Kaufman, A. & Tamburri, R. (2019). Redefining Access to Postsecondary Education. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. p. 5.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid; Vaccaro, Angelo. "An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," *College Quarterly* 15, no. 4. 2012.
[21] Government of Canada. "Building on Success: International Education Strategy (2019-2024)"Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.international.gc.ca/education/strategy-2019-2024-strategie.aspx?lang=eng#5; Government of Ontario. *The Ontario Culture Strategy: Telling our stories, growing our economy*. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-culture-strategy-telling-our-stories-growing-our-economy; Government of Ontario – Ministry of Education. *Indigenous Education Strategy*. Retrieved November 25, 2020. http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/index.html.
[22] Bertolo, Stephanie, Matthew Gerrits, Connor Plante, and Tasneem Warwani. Policy Paper: Student Financial Aid. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019; Kettle, Kathryn, Victoria Lewarne, Brittany Pantaleo, and Mary Zhu. Policy Paper: Student Mobility and Credit Transfer. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2018.

education are able to access it. Herein, OUSA discusses specific approaches to eliminating barriers that restrict access.

ACCESS FOR STUDENTS FROM UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

Principle: Students from underrepresented groups must have equitable access to post-secondary education.

Principle: Students from underrepresented groups should particularly be supported by their primary and secondary schools, allowing them to achieve access to post-secondary education.

Concern: Students from underrepresented groups may have additional financial barriers to accessing post-secondary education.

Concern: Perceptions associated with students' identities may cause students to select, or be encouraged to select, post-secondary pathways other than their preferred pathway.[23]

Concern: Existing support systems do not adequately address systemic barriers to accessing post-secondary education.

Concern: Existing primary and secondary education systems may use a one-size-fits-all approach, which may not appropriately support students from underrepresented groups in attending post-secondary education.

Concern: First-generation students may lack the institutional knowledge and financial support required to prepare and assist them for post-secondary education.

Recommendation: The provincial government should implement specific streams of OSAP to provide additional funding for students from underrepresented groups.

Recommendation: The provincial government should implement debt reduction mechanisms for students from underrepresented groups with financial need.

Recommendation: The provincial government should continue to build and reinforce programming that encourages students to pursue their preferred post-secondary pathway.

Recommendation: The provincial government should build targeted programing that encourages students from underrepresented groups to prepare for and attend post-secondary education.

Recommendation: The provincial government should commission research on how to modify primary and secondary education systems to improve access to post-secondary education for underrepresented groups.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide targeted support programs throughout primary and secondary education to ensure that underrepresented groups have equitable access to post-secondary education.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in addressing systemic oppression which contributes to students from some groups being underrepresented in certain areas of post-secondary education.

All willing and qualified students should have access to post-secondary education; however, systemic issues often take these opportunities away from students. According to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), "[d]ecades of research has shown that certain youth are underrepresented in PSE. First-generation students (those whose parents didn't complete postsecondary), low-income

[23] "Individual attributes and self-selection of higher education: College attendance versus college completion," Journal of Public Economics, Vol. 21, Issue 1, June 1983, pp. 1-32. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0047272783900713.

students, Indigenous students and students with disabilities are less likely to enrol in postsecondary education, and less likely to attain a post-secondary education credential than their peers."[24] Therefore, it is critical that we work toward ensuring equitable access to education for all students.

Creating equitable access begins with support during primary and secondary education. Changing the post-secondary landscape alone is not sufficient. The government should implement programs which target students from marginalized groups throughout their educational career, including from a young age, in order to ensure that, when students reach the end of high school, they are well prepared for their post-graduation opportunities. There is also a need to support and encourage students to pursue their desired post-secondary pathway. We are concerned that students may feel they aren't capable of attending university or college because of stereotypes or perceptions associated with their identity. Research suggests that perceptions associated with the students' identities may cause them to pursue, or be encouraged to pursue, post-secondary pathways other than their preferred pathway.[25] This effect may also present among first-generation students and students with lower socioeconomic status.[26] As students are typically given educational direction by teachers and other support staff, it is critical that these individuals do not succumb to unintended biases when providing guidance. To address this concern, the provincial government should continue to build programming that encourages students to pursue their preferred post-secondary pathway, targeting this programming at underrepresented groups in particular.

Students from underrepresented groups may also face financial barriers to accessing university. In a 2017 OUSA survey, respondents who identified as racialized, first-generation, or as having a disability were more likely to be concerned about having enough money to complete their education.[27] Similarly, 60% of students with lower socioeconomic status said they were "very concerned" about having enough money to complete their education.[28] To address this issue, the provincial government should introduce OSAP grant funding and debt-reduction measures targeted at underrepresented groups, such as an extended interest-free grace period or an expansion of the Repayment Assistance Program for these students in particular.

Once a student reaches university, they will not always find a welcoming and supportive environment. Some students from underrepresented groups may struggle to adapt to studying at university, struggle to find peers, or be missing accessibility accommodations. These barriers make it difficult for students to thrive academically, and may be contributing factors to students' decisions not to go to university. However, challenges while a student is at university should not be confused with access to post-secondary education, which primarily deals with a student's path to get to university.

The provincial government has historically worked to address lack of access for underrepresented groups through financial assistance and targeted institutional funding.[29] However, while these measures succeed at increasing access generally, they do not adequately improve access among students from underrepresented groups. Due to the lack of data on access to post-secondary education, it is difficult to clearly enumerate this issue. However, other measures provide some guidance: for example, in a recent OUSA survey, 15% of students highlighted a greater need for equity and diversity on campus, and 33% of students noted that student support services require improvement. However, there are multiple confounding factors which affect the issue of access and which must be addressed.

Therefore, the provincial government should provide support programs targeted at underrepresented groups in order to create equitable access to post-secondary education. The needs of underrepresented

[24] Deller, F., Kaufman, A. & Tamburri, R. (2019). Redefining Access to Postsecondary Education. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. 5.

[25] Robson, Karen, Paul Anisef, Robert S. Brown. "A comparison of factors determining the transition to postsecondary education in Toronto and Chicago; "Individual attributes and self-selection of higher education: College attendance versus college completion," Journal of Public Economics, Vol. 21, Issue 1, June 1983, pp. 1-32. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0047272783900713.

[26] Bird, Grace. "The Impact of Parents' Education Levels," *Inside Higher Ed*. February 8, 2018. Retrieved November 23, 2020. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/02/08/students-postsecondary-education-arcs-affected-parents-college-backgrounds-study#:~:text=One%2Dthird%20of%20first%2Dgeneration,percent%20of%20first%2Dgeneration%20students.

[27] Tishcoff, Ryan. Affordability: Results from the 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. Research Report. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019.

[28] Ibid, 19.

[29] Ibid, 6.

groups vary significantly;[30] hence, it is important not to attempt a "one size fits all" approach to improving access to post-secondary education. These support programs should be aimed at ensuring that students from underrepresented groups understand their options for pursuing post-secondary education. However, it is important to note that the root cause of inaccessibility lies with systemic inequity in the industry of education and beyond. In order to truly address inequitable access, the government must invest in upstream social services that are shown to improve educational outcomes for marginalized groups. Studies have shown that investing in targeted public education initiatives tends to lead to higher educational mobility among marginalized populations, which contributes to upward social mobility within these groups.[31]

Students with Disabilities

Principle: Students with disabilities must have equitable access to post-secondary education.

Principle: Access to social supports and self-advocacy skills can contribute to better outcomes for students with disabilities, but should never be perceived as substitutes for disability-inclusive practices and environments.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions may inaccurately or unclearly communicate their available accommodations for students.

Concern: Lack of accessible infrastructure and reasonable accommodations during secondary education and at post-secondary institutions may limit students' ability to pursue their post-secondary pathway of choice.

Concern: Perceptions associated with students' abilities may cause them to select, or be encouraged to select, post-secondary pathways other than their preferred pathway.

Concern: Students with non-visible disabilities may face additional, distinct barriers.

Concern: A lack of disability inclusion in physical, social, and policy environments limits the ability of students with disabilities to attend and succeed in post-secondary institutions.

Concern: Primary and secondary education for students with disabilities does not adequately prioritize building resiliency and support skills.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HECQO) should collaborate with existing disability stakeholders to research and develop a comprehensive framework for increasing access to post-secondary education for students with disabilities.

Recommendation: HEQCO should investigate how to support students with visible and non-visible disabilities through the distinct challenges they may face.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in an evidence-based, comprehensive framework for students with disabilities which prioritizes their learning needs without limiting options for post-secondary pathways.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide grant funding for modifying physical infrastructure and academic processes to meet students' accessibility needs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop a system for independently evaluating and verifying accessibility supports at post-secondary institutions and present this information in a central location.

[30] Doran, J., Ferguson, A. K., Khan, G. A., Ryu, G., Naimool, D., Hanson, M. D., & Childs, R. A. (2015). "What are Ontario's Universities Doing to Improve Access for Under-represented Groups?" Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.
[31] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility.* June 15, 2018. Retrieved November 21, 2020. https://www.oecd.org/social/soc/Social-mobility-2018-Overview-MainFindings.pdf. 36.

Recommendation: The provincial government should review the effectiveness of programming and support for students with disabilities to ensure resiliency and skill development is a focus.

Recommendation: The provincial government should explore implementations of transition programs post-graduation of secondary schools to support students with disabilities in developing resiliency and key skills to thrive.

Students with disabilities were underrepresented in OUSA's 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey, which surveys students from eight universities across Ontario.[32] This indicates that students with disabilities are likely underrepresented in post-secondary education more generally. Several prevalent concerns contribute to the underrepresentation of students with disabilities.

First, at the start of the post-secondary process, the information made available to students regarding accessibility accommodations is often inconsistent and unclear.[33] This makes it especially difficult for students to identify whether their prospective institution can meet their accessibility needs. For example, some campuses are not fully wheelchair accessible, while others might not be accommodating for a wide range of invisible disabilities.[34] Moreover, a student may receive certain accommodations throughout primary and secondary school but then struggle in university because those accommodations are no longer available. This lack of accessibility and specific information about accommodations can limit a student's ability to attend their institution or program of choice, serving as a barrier to access. Second, accessibility barriers may be prevalent throughout a students' primary and secondary education as well, and a lack of accommodations during these stages may prevent a student from achieving academic success and accessing post-secondary education.[35] Third, research on supporting students with disabilities is scarce and outdated, and there is considerable room for improvement. To address this issue, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HECQO) should collaborate with existing disability stakeholders to research and develop a comprehensive framework for increasing access to post-secondary education for students with disabilities. Within this framework, HEQCO should investigate how to support students with visible and non-visible disabilities through the distinct challenges they may face.

In order to address these concerns, the provincial government should invest in a comprehensive framework to support students with disabilities through primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. OUSA anticipates that this framework would include processes for identifying and verifying disabilities, along with guidelines for developing appropriate accommodations at all levels of education. The framework would support students with disabilities throughout their education and ensure they are able to access their post-secondary pathway of choice. To augment this framework and make information more accessible, it would be beneficial to develop a central information hub of infrastructure and accommodation capabilities for each post-secondary institution in Ontario; such information would greatly assist students in making decisions for their post-secondary education. Increasing the clarity and availability of this information will also allow the government to mandate accessibility supports once more comprehensive research becomes available, as well as create competition to incentivize change within university. Further, the provincial government should provide grant funding for modifying physical infrastructure and academic processes to meet students' accessibility needs.

OUSA acknowledges that not all vocations can be viably adapted to accommodate all disabilities. However, because of the various barriers that students with disabilities face when attempting to access post-secondary, the current system adversely affects students' ability to pursue vocations which are well within their capabilities.

---

[32] De Costa, Britney and Martyna Siekanowicz. Accessibility: Results from the 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. Research Report. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019. 4.

[33] Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC). "Apply to an Undergraduate Program." Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.ouac.on.ca/ouac-101/.

[34] Fink, Samantha. "Invisible disabilities slip through the cracks," *Queen's Journal*. October 3, 2018. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2018-10-03/investigations/invisible-disabilities-slip-through-the-cracks/.

[35] Hristova, Bobby. *Families of students with learning disabilities worry amid school protests.* Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC). Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/elementary-school-protests-hamilton-1.5447994.

Racialized & Indigenous Students

> **Principle:** Racialized and Indigenous students must have equitable access to post-secondary education.
>
> **Concern:** Systemic oppression of racialized and Indigenous peoples affects educational outcomes, including their ability to attend post-secondary education.
>
> **Concern:** Perceptions associated with students' race or culture may cause students to select, or be encouraged to select, post-secondary pathways other than their post-secondary education pathway of choice.
>
> **Concern:** Lack of diversity in post-secondary education populations and leadership positions may unduly impact students' choice of institution or discourage them from attending post-secondary education at all.
>
> **Concern:** Racialized and Indigenous students may disproportionately struggle to finance their education due to inadequate access to financial information.
>
> **Concern:** Lack of support for Indigenous language and culture on campuses and euro-centric curricula may discourage students from pursuing post-secondary education.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should invest in addressing systemic oppression to improve educational outcomes for and representation of racialized and Indigenous students in post-secondary education.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should support Indigenous communities by investing in specific enrichment programs during primary and secondary education to increase students' ability to attend their preferred post-secondary education pathway.

Racialized students are another underrepresented group in post-secondary education. This group is especially difficult to quantify, as race-based data is not collected by many universities.[36] However, we do see that racialized individuals are underrepresented in university senior leadership and tenured faculty.[37] This may contribute to a racialized young person believing that university or post-secondary education is not the appropriate pathway for them. To address this discrepancy, the government must invest in remedying systemic inequities in the education system and society as a whole. While necessary, it is insufficient to make efforts towards hiring diverse faculty and administrators. To fully address the root cause of this problem, the government should invest in social services so that they can provide adequate support to racialized and other marginalized individuals, allowing them to build equal opportunities for success.

The government must also work to eliminate unconscious biases in teachers who may make assumptions about racialized and Indigenous students' prospective post-secondary pathways. For example, taking an unbiased approach when delivering the grade ten careers curriculum, which includes creating a plan for post-secondary education, is critical for ensuring that racialized and Indigenous students are truly supported in making post-secondary decisions.[38] Teachers could benefit from unconscious bias and other equity training to fully support these learning outcomes in their students.[39] Particular attention must be paid to how these outcomes are being addressed in Indigenous communities to intentionally encourage and support Indigenous students.

---

[36] Asiedu, Evelyn. "Canadian universities must collect race-based data," *Macleans Magazine*. July 29, 2020. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.macleans.ca/opinion/canadian-universities-must-collect-race-based-data/.

[37] Universities Canada. *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Canadian Universities: Report on the 2019 National Survey.* October 2019. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Equity-diversity-and-inclusion-at-Canadian-universities-report-on-the-2019-national-survey-Nov-2019-1.pdf.

[38] Government of Ontario. "Revised Course, Career Studies: Advance Release of Curriculum Expectations," *The Ontario Curriculum*. 2019. http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/career-studies-grade10.pdf. 16.

[39] Emerson, Joelle. "Don't Give Up on Unconscious Bias Training—Make It Better," *Harvard Business Review*. April 28, 2017. Accessed November 22, 2020. https://hbr.org/2017/04/dont-give-up-on-unconscious-bias-training-make-it-better; Gassam Asare, Janice. "Does Unconscious Bias Training Really Work?" *Forbes*. October 29, 2018. Accessed November 22, 2020. https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2018/10/29/does-unconscious-bias-training-really-work/?sh=5799ccafb8a2.

In addition, a lack of support for Indigenous language and culture on post-secondary campuses may discourage Indigenous students from pursuing post-secondary education. This may be compounded by predominantly euro-centric curricula, which focus primarily on western thought, histories, and ideologies. To promote these students' interests and enrich their learning outcomes, the government should provide funding for Indigenous communities so that they can offer after-school extracurricular activities, summer camps, and other enrichment programs, which have shown to be effective early intervention programs.[40] These programs can have a positive effect on students' academic success by fostering academic abilities and a sense of belonging—ultimately making it easier for them to pursue and succeed in post-secondary education.[41]

Students with Lower Socioeconomic Status

Principle: Students with lower socioeconomic status must have equitable access to post-secondary education.

Concern: Students with reduced financial means may not be able to devote time to studying and pursuing extra-curricular activities due to work or familial obligations.

Concern: Parents with lower socioeconomic status may not have access to resources to enrich their child's education in order to build lifelong learning skills.

Concern: Primary and secondary schools in neighbourhoods with lower socioeconomic status may lack the resources to fully support their students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop guidelines so that universities can uniformly consider extenuating circumstances in admissions decisions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in targeted enrichment programs which aim to build lifelong learning skills for students with lower socioeconomic status.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in funding streams for schools in neighbourhoods with lower socioeconomic status to create a high-quality learning environment for students.

Financial barriers are one of the most readily apparent obstacles to a student's ability to pursue post-secondary education. However, the burdens of lower socioeconomic status and being a first-generation university student extend beyond those limitations. Research has shown that parental involvement in a child's education can yield significantly improved outcomes.[42] However, parents of lower socioeconomic status (who often have more significant work obligations) and parents who did not complete post-secondary education are not in an advantageous position to enrich their child's education at home and through extra-curricular programs. Further, it may be more difficult for students with lower economic status to afford textbooks and physical learning materials once arriving at university, further discouraging them from attending.

In order to address the direct financial obstacles that students with lower socioeconomic status face when attempting to access post-secondary education, the provincial government should restore the "targeted free tuition" OSAP program, which overwhelmingly benefitted low-income families. In addition, to address systemic concerns, we recommend an increase in government support for enrichment and extracurricular programs; these should be made accessible throughout a student's primary and secondary

---

[40] Cunningham, A., Redmond, C. & Merisotis, J. (2003). *Investing Early: Early Intervention Programs in Selected US States*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation; Gandra, P. & Bial D. (1999). Paving the Way to Higher Education: K–12 Intervention Programs for Underrepresented Youth. Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative; Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying College Access and Choice: A Proposed Conceptual Model. In J.C. Smart (Ed.), Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research (pp. 99–157). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
[41] Martin, Andrew J. "Exploring the effects of a youth enrichment program on academic motivation and engagement," *Social Psychology of Education*. January 2005. Volume 8, Issue 2. 179-206.
[42] Shelly Albritton, Klotz, Jack & Roberson, Thelma. *Parents as Teachers: Advancing Parent Involvement in a Child's Education*. 2003. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED482696.pdf.

education. These programs have been shown to increase students' long-term motivation by fostering positive relationships and a sense of belonging, as well as students' academic abilities.[43] Subsidy of such programs will help provide enrichment and development opportunities to students from families with lower socioeconomic status, closing the gap between them and students from middle- and upper-class families. Through such enrichment programs, first-generation students and students with lower socioeconomic status will be encouraged to develop their interests and achieve greater understanding of available post-secondary pathways.

Further, there is evidence that students with lower socioeconomic status face considerable barriers to achieving academic success.[44] In particular, studies have shown a correlation between family income and EQAO test scores, and neighborhoods with a lower median income have been linked to lower average test scores (and vice-versa).[45] To address this, the provincial government should invest in funding streams for schools in neighbourhoods with lower socioeconomic status to create a high-quality learning environment for students.

Rural & Northern Students

Principle: Students from rural and northern communities must have equitable access to post-secondary education.

Principle: Students should have access to materials and resources in their preferred language.

Concern: Students living in rural and northern communities are disproportionately affected by poor internet access.

Concern: Lack of information available to students in rural and northern communities results in fewer opportunities to learn about the advantages of, and options for, post-secondary education.

Concern: The model used for calculating Ontario Student Grants does not explicitly or transparently factor in distance-related travel costs for students in rural or northern areas.

Concern: Many post-secondary institutions in Ontario do not provide support in French and Indigenous languages.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Education should work with school boards to promote post-secondary opportunities in rural and northern communities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with the federal government to ensure that students are appropriately prioritized in the federal government's investment in internet access.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Education should create a Rural and Northern Education Strategy aimed at addressing specific barriers that rural and northern students face and promoting post-secondary education to students in these areas.

Recommendation: The provincial government should introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant designed to allocate funding to students commensurate with the cost of travel, from their place of permanent residence to the nearest institution offering their program of choice.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to the Ontario University Registrars' Association, the Council of Ontario Universities, and the Ontario Universities' Application

---

[43] Martin, Andrew J. "Exploring the effects of a youth enrichment program on academic motivation and engagement," *Social Psychology of Education*. January 2005. Volume 8, Issue 2. 179-206.

[44] Jensen, Eric. *Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It*. November 2009

[45] Armstrong, James and Patrick Cain. "Interactive map: Data links low income to poor school test results," *Global News*. October 16 2013. Retrieved November 22, 2020. https://globalnews.ca/news/280867/interactive-map-data-links-low-income-to-poor-school-test-results/.

Centre to ensure Ontario universities' Regional Fairs reach rural and northern communities with low post-secondary attainment rates.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to support the provision of support services and courses in French and Indigenous languages.

The 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey found that rural and northern students were more likely to report not feeling comfortable at their post-secondary institution.[46] Despite a lack of specific data about why these students felt uncomfortable, this finding points to a concern of access for rural and northern students. Given their lack of proximity to the Ontario Universities' Fair and most university campuses, we are concerned that rural and northern students have insufficient access to information about post-secondary education. For this reason, we are supportive of some universities choosing to hold a virtual event, and we encourage the continuation of this practice in the future. We also recommend that the Ontario Student Grants model take into account students' travel costs and provide support for travel costs to, at minimum, the nearest post-secondary institution.

Rural and northern students often incur significant travel costs in order to participate in both their university and home communities; this poses a significant concern and acts as a barrier to access. In alignment with the Post-Secondary Student Support Program for Indigenous students,[47] we recommend expanding the grant funding available to rural and northern students to travel between their home and post-secondary institution.

Another key concern is support for students in French and Indigenous languages. In order to facilitate access for those who prefer, or may feel more comfortable, conversing in French or an Indigenous language, we recommend that the government provide funding to support communications in these languages. This will encourage English-speaking institutions to offer courses in languages other than English. Further, OUSA strongly recommends that the Ministry of Education research and develop a Rural and Northern Education Strategy with the goal of increasing access to post-secondary pathways and building retention through secondary education.

Use of Strategic Mandate Agreements

Principle: Performance-based funding should be used to offer fair incentives to post-secondary institutions that increase student access among underrepresented groups.

Concern: Current Strategic Mandate Agreements do not place adequate focus on access for marginalized student groups in institutional enrolment strategies and differentiation strategies.

Concern: Current metrics do not place sufficient emphasis on support for underrepresented students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should, in the next iteration of Strategic Mandate Agreements, continue and expand upon the Enrolment Strategy section.

Recommendation: The provincial government should adopt a policy of moderate differentiation and specialization in improving student access, encouraging both general commitments to access and specific institutional areas of strength.

Recommendation: The provincial government should explore using the per-student availability of specialized scholarship funding geared toward specialized areas of student access as an indicator in future performance-based funding.

---

[46] De Costa, Britney and Martyna Siekanowicz. Accessibility: Results from the 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. Research Report. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019. 14.
[47] Government of Canada. *Post-Secondary Student Support Program*. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033682/1531933580211.

Recommendation: The provincial government should implement an indicator for performance-based funding based on the provision of services which specifically support students from underrepresented groups.

Recommendation: The provincial government should create a new student access stream of operating grants under the differentiation envelope, to be strategically distributed to institutions which set and meet ambitious and meaningful student access targets through their Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Implemented in Ontario in 2014, Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) establish and document the major goals and areas of focus of universities and colleges.[48] Currently, university SMAs have a section on equity and access, which places focus on marginalized groups present at those institutions and the initiatives and approaches the institution seeks to use to expand access. Performance-based funding is a model of post-secondary funding which focuses on rewarding universities for performance on certain metrics rather than alternatives such as giving an amount purely calculated based on enrollment.

This approach is positive and should be continued. However, there is room to expand the effectiveness of SMAs. First, while the standard format for SMAs includes a chart with enrollment metrics and a section for general initiatives, there is no requirement for a section that focuses on financial affordability metrics. The University of Guelph, in its most recent Strategic Mandate Agreement, introduced its own subsection that dealt with affordability initiatives under the general initiatives section.[49] As affordability has been identified by OUSA as a barrier to access, the Ontario government should standardize this form of subsection throughout all SMAs. Furthermore, the government should take action to create standardized metrics about financial affordability, including scholarship availability.

There is also an opportunity, stemming from a difficulty with SMAs more generally, to push universities to set ambitious targets and dedicate meaningful effort to achieving outcomes. To do so, the provincial government must develop expertise in judging goals, and commit to sufficient performance-based operating grants; these should be based on the ambition and meaningfulness of each institution's quantifiable access goals, as well as each institution's success at achieving its targets. After all, good design of performance measures is a key element to the success of performance-based post-secondary education policy.[50] While not the topic of this policy paper, it is important that the metrics discussed here are matched with other metrics in order to ensure that immediate access is matched with quality of education and student success. Best practices within literature surveyed by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) pointed towards substantial funding,[51] gradual phase-in,[52] and substantial multi-stakeholder consultation on metrics.[53]

[48] Government of Ontario. *Archived - College and University Strategic Mandate Agreements, 2014-2017.* Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.ontario.ca/page/college-and-university-strategic-mandate-agreements-2014-2017.
[49] Government of Ontario. *2017-20 Strategic Mandate Agreement: University of Guelph.* Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.ontario.ca/page/2017-20-strategic-mandate-agreement-university-guelph#section-5.
[50] Ziskin, M. B.1 , Hossler, D.2 , Rabourn, K.2 , Cekic, O.3 , & Hwang, Y.2 (2014). OutcomesBased Funding: Current Status, Promising Practices and Emerging Trends. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. 21.
[51] Miao, Kysie. "Performance-Based Funding of Higher Education," *Centre for American Progress.* August 2012. Retrieved Novemebr 25, 2020. https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/08/pdf/performance_funding.pdf?_ga=2.239016707.2010924625.1601057533-399923571.1601057533. 9.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Sanford, T., Hunter, J. M. (2011) Impact of Performance-funding on Retention and Graduation Rates Education Policy Analysis Archives, 19(33). Retrieved November 25, 2020. http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/949. 5.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS TO UNIVERSITY

Mature Students

Principle: Mature Students should feel and be supported in their efforts to continue their education and lifelong learning.

Principle: Mature students who are caregivers that wish to return to school should feel able and supported by the provincial government and post-secondary institutions.

Principle: Grants and loans make it easier for part-time mature students to support themselves and/or their dependents.

Principle: Mature students often have to support themselves and/or a dependent, and thus may need to stay as a part-time student due to financial/time restrictions.

Principle: The mature student definition within OSAP should remain reliable, in order to maintain consistent funding.

Concern: Mature students often have obligations outside of post-secondary education, such as working or caring for dependents, that can make post-secondary education inaccessible.

Concern: Mature students who chose to do part-time studies in order to continue working and/or caring for dependents often do not qualify for particular grants and/or loans.

Concern: Many students may not have the financial support to return to school to continue or change their educational background.

Concern: Because the OSAP definition of mature students was changed from four years to six, many students are unable to access certain, and often necessary, financial aid support.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase current OSAP funding to grants for students with dependents to subsidize the cost of care.

Recommendation: The provincial government should amend OSAP to reduce the percentage of courses needed to be considered full-time for mature students to 40% of a full course load.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services should incentivize businesses, through a tax break, to assist employees in continuing their education.

Recommendation: The provincial government should redefine mature students within OSAP as those who have been out of school for four years, rather than six.

In a recent OUSA survey, 54% of respondents who qualified as mature students (older than 21) had dependents.[54] This can create numerous barriers, such as being tasked with finding childcare that is not only affordable and nearby, but also available during the often-unique class schedule of a post-secondary student (i.e. available late at night). Additionally, if the dependent is an elder or someone with a disability, it may be more costly or difficult to find care for them. As such, the provincial government should amend OSAP to include a grant for students with dependents to subsidize the cost of care and make it easier for mature students to afford post-secondary education.

Similarly, mature students are more likely to be studying part-time while also working.[55] Oftentimes, this work is outside their field of study and negatively impacts their studies.[56] Mature students often continue

---

[54] De Costa, Britney and Martyna Siekanowicz. Accessibility: Results from the 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. Research Report. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

working in order to support their dependents and educational costs, and often need to switch to part-time status in order to balance school, work, and life. Unfortunately, however, part-time students often qualify for less in OSAP grants or loans, even if they demonstrate the same (or more) financial need as full-time students. As such, the provincial government should reduce the percentage of courses needed for mature students to be considered full-time to 40% of a full course load.

Students who want to return to post-secondary to either change or upgrade their education should feel and be supported and able. However, individuals often do not have the financial support or the time (if they are working in their field) to return to school. The provincial government should task the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services to incentivize businesses, through a tax break, to provide financial assistance to employees who wish to upgrade their education.

Finally, prior to January 2019, OSAP defined mature students as those who have been out of school for four years; under the new definition, this has been changed to six years. This change has had a significant effect on student financial aid funding, as qualifying as a "mature" affects students' OSAP eligibility. Mature students are now less likely to receive consistent funding, hindering their ability to accurately plan their finances in regards to post-secondary education. As such, the provincial government should revert the OSAP definition of mature students to refer to those who have been out of high school for four years, not six.

Transfer Students Between Post-Secondary Institutions

Principle: Students should be able to transfer between post-secondary institutions without insurmountable financial barriers.

Principle: Students should have easily accessible and understandable information about transferring between post-secondary institutions.

Principle: Students who are willing and qualified to attend post-secondary education should feel able and supported through transitions between post-secondary institutions.

Concern: Transfer students may lack the financial resources they need to transfer between post-secondary institutions.

Concern: Students may be unaware of the process or ability to transfer between post-secondary institutions.

Concern: Students from marginalized groups often face additional barriers in transferring between post-secondary institutions, and often do not see university as a viable option for them.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop a grant, through the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), for low-income transfer students to cover the cost of transfer fees.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) allow transfer students to apply for one program, rather than a minimum of three.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop a fund for ONCAT and post-secondary institutions to provide advertisement around transfer opportunities.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should, in consultation with experts such as the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) and advocacy groups, develop outreach programs aimed at building knowledge around university protocols, expectations, supports, etc., and invest in targeted outreach for said programs to underrepresented groups.

All students should be able to transfer between post-secondary education institutions without cost being a barrier. However, in a recent OUSA survey, 13% of students who wanted to transfer said that fees stopped them from doing so.[57] As such, the provincial government should develop a grant, through the Ontario Council of Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), that low-income students can receive in order to cover the cost of transfer fees. Ideally, students would be able to indicate during the transfer process that they would like to be considered for this grant. ONCAT would then work with the student and their respective financial aid offices in order to assess whether the student would qualify for either a portion or the entirety of their transfer fees to be covered.

Though 88% of students who used ONCAT found it at least somewhat helpful, less than 10% of students who have transferred between post-secondary institutions accessed this resource.[58] Though this resource exists and is helpful for students, there is a lack of awareness of ONCAT and a lack of understanding what ONCAT does for students, and evidently, students are not being given enough information and resources throughout the transfer process. To address this issue, the provincial government should develop funding for ONCAT and post-secondary institutions to utilize in order to promote and advertise information about the transfer process and its opportunities.

Additionally, when attempting to transfer between post-secondary institutions, students are required to apply to a minimum of three programs at a cost of $156.[59] To make the transfer process more affordable, the provincial government should require that the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) give students the option of applying to only one institution, if they so choose, for a reduced fee.

Students and their families or caregivers are often forced to make decisions regarding post-secondary education early in a prospective student's life, based on numerous factors such as gender, race, income and ability.[60] Due to stereotypes and perceived ability (whether it be academic or financial), young students, specifically those in marginalized groups, may opt for certain streams over others; for example, women may avoid STEM programs.[61] However, a student may decide, after reaching post-secondary, that another pathway is not only accessible to them but also a better-suited option. In this regard, bridging programs are key to developing students' interest in other post-secondary education pathways, and in building a sense of capacity and community with other institutions. As such, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should partner with experts to development a generalized bridging program targeted to marginalized students, with the goal of building capacity, knowledge, and community during the transfer and/or bridging process to university.

---

[57] De Costa, Britney and Martyna Siekanowicz. Accessibility: Results from the 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. Research Report. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC). "Apply to an Undergraduate Program." Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.ouac.on.ca/guide/105-fees/.
[60] Vaccaro, Angelo. "An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," College Quarterly 15, no. 4. 2012.
[61] Ibid.

OUTREACH & AWARENESS

Government Initiatives

> **Principle:** Willing and qualified individuals should be able to work towards attending post-secondary education, regardless of how, when, or if they complete secondary school or a GED.
>
> **Principle:** Information about outreach programs, such as program outcomes, eligibility, and application processes, should be easily accessible and understandable.
>
> **Concern:** Students who do not have their high school diploma or GED often have limited, if any, opportunities for post-secondary education.
>
> **Concern:** There is little data focused on the outcomes and efficacy of bridging programs.
>
> **Concern:** Students wishing to access existing outreach programs may be unaware of their existence or requirements.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should work with Pathways to Education to create outreach programs aimed at people who do not have their high school diploma or GED but wish to pursue further education.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government, in collaboration with the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), should investigate and collect data on the long-term outcomes of outreach programs in Ontario.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should develop an online portal for all outreach programs that includes information and applications.

Ontario students should feel supported by their government to pursue the level of education of their choice, and while some initiatives already exist, they are not as effective as they could be. Many students may wish to pursue post-secondary education (PSE), but due to circumstances out of their control were unable to finish high school or pursue their GED. This makes it difficult for them to pursue the post-secondary education pathway of their choice.[62] As such, the provincial government should work with Pathways to Education to create outreach programs targeted at those who do not have their high school diploma or GED but who wish to obtain it and pursue PSE. Furthermore, the success rate of outreach programs is not well known, which can often make it difficult for organizations to develop additional programing.[63] In collaboration with both data collection experts and those working in existing outreach programs at universities and post-secondary-focused non-profits across Ontario, the provincial government should investigate, collect data on, and report on the long-term outcomes of outreach programs. This data should include information such as demographics of participants (i.e., gender, race, age, etc.), the program outcomes, rates of being accepted into post-secondary after completion of the programs, etc.

Further, many prospective students are unaware of the existence of bridging programs and how they can assist in their pursuit of post-secondary education.[64] Information about bridging programs and what they do to assist students should be made more accessible.[65] In order to accomplish this goal, the provincial government should create an online portal, similar to OUAC, dedicated to bridging programs. This will make it easy for students to evaluate bridging programs for themselves and apply for them, all in one centralized location.

---

[62] Miner, Rick. *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives: Point the Way to Success*. Toronto: TD Bank Group, 2011.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

Institutional Initiatives

> **Principle:** All individuals who are willing and qualified should be able to attend post-secondary education.
>
> **Principle:** Individuals should feel empowered to choose programs that best suit their goals and abilities.
>
> **Concern:** Students who have not completed secondary school often do not have the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education.
>
> **Concern:** Students who were unable to receive the minimum university requirements in high school (i.e., grade twelve, university-level English) are unable to access university until they qualify as mature students, six years after they graduate.
>
> **Concern:** Students from underrepresented groups may choose not to pursue post-secondary education due to a lack of representation.
>
> **Concern:** Students from underrepresented groups may limit their post-secondary education goals or be told to limit their post-secondary education goals.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should develop a grant for universities to apply to that would allow them to develop outreach programs for students without their high school diploma or GED.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should develop a grant for universities to apply to that would allow them to develop outreach programming for students who are missing the minimum university requirements from high school (i.e., grade twelve, university-level English), so that these students can obtain those requirements and apply for university without waiting six years to qualify as a mature student and have their high school diploma marks waived.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should develop a grant for universities to develop outreach programs for underrepresented and marginalized groups, predicated on including these groups in the development of these outreach programs.
>
> **Recommendation**: The Ministry of Education should renew funding for the Ontario Post-Secondary Access and Inclusion Program (OPAIP) so that post-secondary institutions can continue to use it to deliver enhanced outreach, access, transition, and/or retention for students.

Though there are programs, such as Pathways to Education, that work to reduce high school dropout rates and increase enrollment in post-secondary education, many of these programs are not available to students who are not currently in high school. By providing services such as tutoring, group mentoring, and bursaries, Pathways to Education assists in developing capacity, preparedness and belonging in at-risk high school students, with extremely high success rates, illustrated by the increased student enrollment in post-secondary education from 20% to 80% among those who participated in the program.[66] Unfortunately, this program is not available to those who may want to pursue post-secondary education but do not have their high school diploma or GED. To address this concern, the provincial government should develop a grant that universities can apply to in order to develop bridging programs for students without their high school diplomas or GEDs. This grant would be targeted to prospective students in these groups (as opposed to a broader bridging program that may not apply or be helpful to students in those scenarios).[67] By applying to this grant, individual institutions would be able to show their commitment to students who may not have a high school diploma or GED.

In addition, students who have graduated high school but who do not meet the minimum university requirements (such as completing grade 12 English at the university-level stream) are unable to access university until six years later, when they qualify as mature students. In order to address this, the provincial government should develop a grant that universities can use to develop programs aimed at

---

[66] Miner, Rick. *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives: Point the Way to Success*. Toronto: TD Bank Group, 2011.
[67] Ibid.

helping high school graduates who do not meet minimum university requirements upgrade their qualifications and become eligible to applying to university.

Many students from marginalized backgrounds feel that their post-secondary education goals are limited due to stereotypes, real or perceived financial restraints, and/or perceived academic abilities.[68] As such, many do not see university as a viable option for them. For example, research shows that, of Carribean immigrants in Canada who attended post-secondary education, only 42.4% chose university as their post-secondary education of choice.[69] Furthermore, women may be discouraged from pursuing STEM degrees, often due to the stereotype of women in science and the reality that STEM programs are often predominantly male.[70] Institutions such as the University of Toronto and Ryerson University have developed bridging programs targeting marginalized groups, such as students from low-income families.[71] While these programs do not have formalized reports, some do guarantee the enrollment of students upon the completion of their program.[72] As such, the provincial government should develop a grant that universities can use to create bridging programs for marginalized students, in order to develop a sense of community, belonging, preparedness, and validity. Additionally, this grant would demonstrate a meaningful commitment by the provincial government and universities to promoting access to post-secondary education for marginalized students. These bridging programs should include student and advocacy representation from these groups, and they should utilize focus groups to ensure that these programs are equitable and meet student needs.

Education in Elementary Schools

Principle: Extracurriculars should be available to all willing and able students.

Principle: Extracurriculars often encourage students' interest in post-secondary education and help develop students' career and education goals.

Principle: Parents should have a variety of supports that they can use to develop their children's interest in education.

Principle: Students should have access to post-secondary institutions at an early stage in order to support their development and interest in further education.

Concern: Extracurriculars often have financial barriers that limit students' ability to participate in them.

Concern: Parents should not have to limit their children's goals or opportunities due to financial, resource, or time constraints.

Concern: Lower-income parents are often disadvantaged because they are unable to afford putting young children in additional education opportunities, such as camps or programs that develop children's interest in education.

Concern: Some students, especially those in rural and northern communities, may not be able to access post-secondary institutions until much later in life.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop a grant for elementary schools to apply to in order to further support extracurriculars and their supplies that are not already covered (i.e. mouthpieces, uniforms, etc.).

---

[68] Vaccaro, Angelo. "An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," *College Quarterly* 15, no. 4. 2012.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Miner, Rick. *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives: Point the Way to Success*. Toronto: TD Bank Group, 2011.
[72] Ibid.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop a needs-based grant to help children in K-12 to attend camps and after-school programing focused on developing interest in education through STEM, theatre, leadership, etc..

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop a grant that elementary schools can apply to in order to visit post-secondary institutions on field trips.

A child's interest in and ability to eventually pursue post-secondary education should not be limited by their parents' finances. Research has shown that many children who participate in extracurriculars with an educational focus, such as STEM-focused camps, are associated with increased academic motivation.[73] Additionally, research has shown that students who receive higher grades, and who have a positive post-secondary education culture (i.e., come from a family who values education) are more likely to access post-secondary education.[74] Unfortunately, low-income parents, including underrepresented minorities, who struggle to afford basic living necessities may also struggle to enroll their children in these extracurricular programs. This, in turn, prevents children from low-income families from having equal access to the same opportunities as children from middle- or high-income families.

To address these concerns, the provincial government should create a grant for elementary schools to subsidize the cost of extracurriculars like field trips and club fees in cases where a student's parents are unable to pay. Further, the government should fund free education-based camps that allow students to develop an interest in, and explore their options for, post-secondary education.

Financial Literacy & Support

Principle: Early financial investment in education, such as Registered Education Savings Plans (RESPs), can help to empower prospective students to attend post-secondary education.

Principle: Knowledge of financial aid and other supports should be easily accessible to all students and empowers prospective students to pursue post-secondary education.[75]

Principle: Individuals should feel supported and knowledgeable about financial literacy in order to make the decision best suited for them around post-secondary education.

Concern: Information about tuition cuts and financial aid may be arriving too late for prospective students to realize post-secondary education is an option for them.[76]

Concern: Lack of early financial support can negatively impact school performance and decrease the odds of a student completing post-secondary education.

Concern: Lack of knowledge of financial aid, supports, and/or resources can hinder students' ability to realize that post-secondary education is an option.

Concern: RESPs can be inaccessible for lower-income families who do not have the ability to save money.

Concern: Individuals directly out of secondary school may not have the financial literacy required to access post-secondary education.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in further advertisement about financial aid to prospective students and their support systems.

---

[73] Drey, Lauren Elizabeth. *Effects of Stem Summer Camp on Motivation and Interest in Mathematics and Science*. May 2016.
[74] Vaccaro, Angelo. "An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," *College Quarterly* 15, no. 4. 2012.
[75] Miner, Rick. *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives: Point the Way to Success*. Toronto: TD Bank Group, 2011.
[76] Ibid.

> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should create a centralized database of all scholarship offerings within Ontario.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should develop an additional program for families who qualify for the Canada Learning Bond that invests an additional $250 per year for every eligible child.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should develop a free online financial literacy course for adults and young adults focused on saving for and understanding post-secondary education funding.

Though there are many grants that students can use to help finance their education, many are not advertised effectively, making it difficult for students to access them.[77] Further, students often learn about the existence of these grants too late and, as a result, do not realize that their post-secondary education pathway of preference is within their financial grasp.[78] Providing information about financial resources earlier helps students feel a sense of ownership in the financial assets, which in turn can create other positive effects in education.[79] To address this concern, the provincial government should develop a centralized database of all scholarship opportunities within Ontario including, but not limited to, information about scholarships from post-secondary institutions, private companies, and non-profit organizations. Additionally, the provincial government should invest in further, and earlier, advertisement and education of existing provincial, federal, and private financial aid. Doing so will empower students to make informed decisions about their post-secondary education choices, giving them the financial knowledge to apply and succeed in the pathway that best suits their goals.

Research also shows that earlier financial commitments can boost student academic performance and increase the odds of students going to and completing a post-secondary education program.[80] However, only 37.6% of Ontarians in lower income brackets buy into RESPs, compared to 58.3% in that demographic outside of Ontario.[81] This means that Ontarians in lower income brackets are less likely, relative to low-income folk in other provinces, to be able to make those earlier financial commitments, with one-third citing that they choose not to save because they believe they cannot afford to help their child cover the costs of post-secondary education, whether or not they start saving early on.[82] Therefore, the provincial government should buy into the Canada Learning Bond (CLB) by investing $250 per year for every eligible child. By investing additional funds to the CLB, the Ontario government can help families in lower income brackets save and plan for post-secondary education for their children. In British Columbia, there is a similar program that provides families with an additional $1200 when they first open a RESP and qualify for the CLB. Compared to the 62.4% of lower income Ontario families that do not buy into RESPs, only 40% of lower income BC families do not apply for RESPs.[83] By creating additional funding for lower income families, the Ontario government can make post-secondary education a realistic option for all families. Furthermore, by providing small amounts over a longer period of time, the RESP can be better invested and allow for more interest growth over time.

Finally, while it is important to target children while they are in the elementary and secondary school systems, it is also important to ensure that individuals who are no longer in those systems, or who are at risk of dropping out, have the resources and knowledge to save for post-secondary education should they choose to return to school. As such, the provincial government should develop a free, online course focused on developing financial literacy in adults and young adults, with specific information about saving for post-secondary; this program should be targeted at individuals who do not have a post-secondary degree or diploma but wish to pursue one.

---

[77] Miner, Rick. *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives: Point the Way to Success*. Toronto: TD Bank Group, 2011.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Government of British Columbia. *News Release: Don't let your child miss out on a $1200 grant*. June 25, 2019. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://archive.news.gov.bc.ca/releases/news_releases_2017-2021/2019EDUC0056-001318.htm.

SECONDARY SCHOOL

Streaming

Principle: Academic limitations should not be imposed on students' ability to pursue post-secondary education until they are able to fully understand the outcomes of their actions.

Principle: Students should be properly informed about the potential outcomes of their course selection and the impacts it may have on their ability to pursue post-secondary education.

Concern: The stigmatization associated with specific streams has pressured students to enroll in classes that are not the right fit for them, hindering their academic and career success.

Concern: The difficulties presented when switching between various streams acts as a barrier for students to attend their post-secondary pathway of choice.

Concern: Students are required to make choices about their stream before they understand the courses required for their post-secondary pathways.

Concern: Students from marginalized or minority groups are often forced into the Applied stream, even in cases where they may succeed more in the Academic stream.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Education should mandate that decisions made between university and college streams be postponed to grade 11 and 12 entrance.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Education should mandate that all school boards implement a strategic plan that is dedicated to a thorough explanation of the academic and applied streams and the corresponding post-secondary pathways they lead to, that will be distributed to the students to clarify their post-secondary education options.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Education should implement a reassessment tool to give students and parents and/or guardians a formal opportunity to re-evaluate their options and make switching between streams more accessible.

Ontario's streaming system places limitations on the younger student population by forcing them to make a decision that heavily shapes their academic career and chances of attending post-secondary education. The requirement to choose between academic or applied classes in grade ten heavily restricts other educational opportunities that may appear throughout their secondary school career and afterwards. Additionally, many students are unable to grasp and truly understand the outcomes of their course selections at the beginning of grade ten. One example of this is the prerequisites required to take senior courses. Students starting on the applied stream are only able to take classes categorized as college, and while those in the academic stream may have the option to take university or college level classes, they are often found to almost exclusively be in the university level classes. This is why the streaming process should be pushed further back in their educational journey, to the senior years of high school (grades eleven and twelve), when students are properly educated on the post-secondary education pathways and better able to assess the steps and courses required to pursue their preferred careers.

Not only are students ill-equipped to make streaming decisions at a young age, but the possibilities of changing streams once a decision has been made is incredibly difficult. In the 2015 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools, 62% of students taking applied math were also taking three or more applied courses; in other words, students who take one applied course often take several others as well, essentially grouping them into separate tracks.[84] This further enhances the notions of diverging pathways in academic and applied classrooms, which reinforces the difficulty students experience when trying to switch from one stream to another later in high school. Students' academic success should not be

---

[84] People for Education, "Streaming Students," *Ontario's schools: The gap between policy and reality (Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools)* (Toronto: People for Education, 2015).

penalized for making misinformed decisions at a young age, nor should they be forced to stay with learning styles that do not align with their own.

Further, the streaming system continues to perpetuate and encourage economic and educational disparities among students within Ontario. The EQAO and 2006 Census showed that students from low-income families were more likely to be enrolled in applied mathematics than other students.[85] When students from low-income families are directed into applied streams (even if this is the result of unconscious bias), it reinforces a cycle in which students from these backgrounds are not able to pursue the post-secondary pathway of their choice—ultimately increasing the likelihood that they will remain at a lower socioeconomic status. Additionally, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has confirmed that separating students into groups produced worse outcomes for students from low-income families.[86] They have recommended avoiding early tracking and deferring course selection until later in secondary school.

Streaming also creates barriers for students from minority groups, who are often overrepresented in applied streams. In the Toronto District School Board, only 25% of students were in the applied stream in 2015.[87] Yet, despite only making up one percent of the overall TDSB student population, 46% of Afghan students were in applied classes.[88] 47% of those students also reported not applying to post-secondary school in general, a stark contrast in comparison to the TDSB average of 50% of students confirming an admission to an Ontario university.[89] This situation is not unique to Afghan students: 41% of Indigenous students, 39% of Spanish-speaking students, and 36% of Portuguese-speaking students are also reported to be in the applied stream as well.[90] Evidently, students from minority groups are more likely to be placed into the applied stream and further discouraged from applying to university.

Career Studies Course Curriculum

> **Principle:** The Grade 10 Career Studies course is a crucial opportunity to inform and educate students about pursuing post-secondary education and should be used to fill students' gaps in knowledge.
>
> **Concern:** Many students lack necessary exposure to parents and peers who can provide knowledge about the pathways to and benefits of post-secondary education, and secondary school curriculum has traditionally been ineffective with providing this knowledge.
>
> **Concern:** Many students lack the knowledge needed to make an informed decision about entering university and college streams.
>
> **Recommendation:** The Ministry of Education should regularly consult students and teachers at the secondary and post-secondary level and collect data to monitor the effectiveness of recent changes to the Grade 10 Career Studies curriculum.
>
> **Recommendation:** Upon postponing decisions on streaming to grade 11 and 12, the Ministry of Education should amend the Career Studies course curriculum to include a section on educating students about the outcomes of streaming decisions and how to make an informed decision.

The Grade 10 Career Studies course is currently the only opportunity for the structured delivery of information about post-secondary education to K-12 students, and is therefore a crucial opportunity to fill

---

[85] People for Education, "Streaming Students," *Ontario's schools: The gap between policy and reality (Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools)* (Toronto: People for Education, 2015).

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Robert Brown, Newton, Lisa and Tam, George. *The Toronto District School Board's Student Group Overviews: Aboriginal Heritage, Afghan, Portuguese-speaking, Somali-speaking, and Spanish-speaking Students*. Toronto: Toronto District School Board, 2015.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

gaps in knowledge.[91] Given that students come from diverse backgrounds with varying sociocultural influences and perceptions of post-secondary education, it is essential to take advantage of opportunities to provide standardized knowledge about the importance of pursuing higher education. Much of what students know about post-secondary education is influenced by peer groups and parents, which, for students whose parents did not pursue higher education, puts some students at a disadvantage.[92] Thus, it is essential that the Ministry of Education provide opportunities to disseminate information to students so that they can make well-informed decisions about pursuing further education, and so that existing knowledge gaps are not widened.

In 2019, the Ministry of Education conducted an overhaul of the course curriculum to reflect the knowledge gaps and current needs of Ontario's diverse population[93]. The revised course format includes sections on encouraging students to develop self-awareness of various social and cultural influences that could impact their career and educational goals.[94] As well, students are required to investigate and develop detailed plans for pathways to post-secondary education, including university and college program options, financial aid, financial literacy, and admission requirements.[95] As a result of these recent changes, OUSA is pleased with the potential that the current careers course has to impact underrepresented groups and their access to higher education. We would like to see this course continue to address specific barriers experienced by underrepresented groups, including low-income, first-generation, rural, northern, racialized, and Indigenous students. Given these novel changes and the importance of this course, OUSA recommends that the Ministry of Education conduct reviews, at least every three years, to monitor the efficacy of the course and its impact on underrepresented groups. Such reviews should include direct consultation with participating students and teachers (to evaluate short-term benefits) and students exiting high school and participating in post-secondary education (to evaluate long-term benefits). Consultations should be accompanied by data collection on post-secondary enrolment for under-represented groups. The success of this course should be evaluated by collecting demographic data to measure changes in enrollment for underrepresented groups and positive student and teacher opinions.

Additionally, some students may select university or college streams based on a lack of information, which can further lower their chances of pursuing post-secondary education. In line with OUSA's recommendation to postpone streaming decisions to grades eleven and twelve, we recommend that the Ministry of Education amend the Career Studies course curriculum to account for this change. The course should include a component where students learn about the differences between streaming options, the post-secondary education and career pathways associated with each stream, and how to make informed decisions based on their unique learning style.

Guidance Counsellors

Principle: Guidance counsellors are a valuable resource for breaking down informational and other non-financial barriers in regards to post-secondary education choices.

Concern: Guidance counsellors often do not have the training and resources required to properly equip students for their journey to post-secondary education.

Concern: Students are having a negative or unhelpful experience with their guidance department and will also choose to avoid this resource in the future.

[91] Robson, Jennifer. "Better Life Chances for Ontario's Children," *Ontario 360: Post-Secondary Access*. School of Public Policy & Governance, University of Toronto. 2018. https://on360.ca/policy-papers/post-secondary-access.
[92] Vaccaro, Angelo. "An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," *College Quarterly* 15, no. 4. 2012.
[93] http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/career-studies-grade10.pdf
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Education should promote a focus on providing resources on how to pursue post-secondary education, without prioritizing one form of post-secondary education over another.

Recommendation: To ensure students receive high-quality guidance, the provincial government should evaluate and conduct a review of the ratio of guidance counsellors to students served.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Education should ensure that all guidance counsellors have the proper training in academic success through their Additional Qualifications courses, with an option to specialize in matters related to post-secondary education and mental health.

While guidance counsellors are often thought of as one of the most useful and important resources when it comes to information about pursuing post-secondary education, they are often overextended and forced to cover a wide range of fields relating to student well-being or academic success.[96] The diversion of attention away from properly informing students about their post-secondary pathways contributes to a lack of clarity on the requirements of pursuing post-secondary education and discourages students from doing so.

The overwhelming ratio of students to guidance counsellors is one of the largest contributing factors to guidance counsellors' inability to supply adequate academic support. While the provincial average is 381 students for every guidance counsellor, some secondary schools have reported numbers as high as 600 students per counsellor.[97] This places extreme strain on the system and is a product of Ontario's "per pupil" funding policy for guidance departments.[98] A single counsellor cannot realistically be expected, with such a large number of students, to provide consistent and high-quality consultations for every student's personal journey to PSE.

Further, the expectations for the guidance counsellor role have drastically changed, creating an issue of inattentiveness to post-secondary education requirements. Dr. Peter Dietsche's 2013 article, which focuses on the lack of focus on career planning from guidance counsellors, reveals that 75% of guidance appointments focus on academic issues, emotional support, and social issues.[99] With little emphasis on post-secondary education, guidance counsellors cannot properly educate and equip secondary students with the knowledge they require to make an informed choice about their future in education. This creates a barrier to post-secondary education, as some reports highlight that a significant population of students in grade eleven commit to not pursuing higher education on the sole basis of unpreparedness or feelings of not being knowledgeable enough.[100] The same testimonies have also revealed that one-third of high school students believe their school did not prepare them enough to properly make that decision, further contributing to the issue at hand.[101] To refocus and allocate time for counselling related to post-secondary education, the Ministry of Education should separate the guidance counsellors into two categories: academic-focused, and mental health. This would allow students to contact a guidance counsellor suitable to their needs, and guidance departments would not be overwhelmed by requests dealing with all aspects of student life.

While 99% of secondary schools in Ontario report that they have guidance counsellors, and the same percentage have been recorded to have additional qualifications, there is uncertainty about whether this factor contributes to adequate provision of academic advising.[102] While guidance counsellors in Canada may appear to have a wealth of certifications, often these certifications do not pertain to career or

---

[96] Daniel Hamlin, Hagen Cameron, David and Watkins, Elyse K. *Ontario's guidance counsellors: Spread thinly in an environment of growing expectations*. Toronto: People for Education, 2016.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Dietsche, Peter." Career Planning in Ontario Grade 10 Students: Counsellor Perspectives," *The Canadian Journal of Career Development*, Volume 12, Issue 1. 2013. https://dial.uclouvain.be/pr/boreal/object/boreal%3A114075/datastream/PDF_02/view#page=6.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Daniel Hamlin, Hagen Cameron, David and Watkins, Elyse K. *Ontario's guidance counsellors: Spread thinly in an environment of growing expectations*. Toronto: People for Education, 2016.

guidance counselling.[103] An increasing number of counsellors are teachers who have been relieved of their duties and been given the title of "guidance counsellor" from the Ontario College of Teachers because of their ability to give career advice.[104] By ensuring that counsellors have qualifications that genuinely relate to students' academic success, and which allow counsellors to promote various post-secondary education pathways equally, we can begin to break down the barriers students face when attempting to make informed decisions about whether and how to pursue post-secondary education. Additionally, the mandatory three-part Additional Qualification course (that all guidance counsellors complete) should include training related to properly conveying the various post-secondary education pathways, addressing emotional well-being, and preparing students for life beyond high school.

During a turbulent and vulnerable time period of their lives, secondary school students require significant mentorship from guidance departments on the next steps they should be taking in their educational career. Counsellors have a great level of responsibility to provide the necessary information and tutorials on how students can successfully accomplish their academic and career goals.[105]

Retention & Academic Success

Principle: Academic success and completion of secondary school or an equivalent bridging program are required to continue to post-secondary education.

Principle: Motivation to engage in education and academic success in secondary school are strong predictors of participation in post-secondary education.

Concern: Some students from underrepresented groups lack adequate exposure to social and cultural factors that encourage academic success in secondary school and promote interest in post-secondary education.

Concern: Secondary school dropout rates are higher among groups that are underrepresented in post-secondary education.

Concern: Some secondary school students do not have sufficient access to resources that enable academic success and motivation to continue with education.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to school boards to hire teaching staff to develop in-school tutoring centres.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to the Pathways to Education program to allow the expansion of mentorship and support programs and permit a wider reach to underrepresented populations.

Successful completion of secondary school (or equivalent bridging programs) is required in order to enrol in post-secondary education and achieve more positive outcomes in the workforce. With most, if not all, higher education institutions setting admissions standards of competitive threshold grades and secondary school diplomas, students who are poorly positioned to achieve such standards are faced with a substantial barrier to participating in post-secondary education. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, students who underperform academically in secondary school are less likely to reach post-secondary education.[106] Furthermore, students who are unmotivated to succeed academically, or who are simply disengaged with the education system as a whole, are less likely to continue on to higher education.[107] Thus, there is a clear link between motivation and academic success in secondary school and participation in post-secondary education.

---

[103] Nadon, D., Samson, A., Gazzola, N. *et al*. Becoming a guidance counsellor in Ontario: formative influences from counsellors' perspective. *Int J Educ Vocat Guidance* 16, 363–377 (2016).
[104] Ibid.
[105] Miner, Rick. *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives: Point the Way to Success*. Toronto: TD Bank Group, 2011.
[106] Statistics Canada. *Young men and women without a high school diploma*. July 24, 2017. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2017001/article/14824-eng.htm.
[107] Robson, Jennifer. "Better Life Chances for Ontario's Children," *Ontario 360: Post-Secondary Access*. School of Public Policy & Governance, University of Toronto. 2018. https://on360.ca/policy-papers/post-secondary-access.

One of the strongest predictors of whether a student will complete secondary school and continue to higher education is their so-called "predisposition to post-secondary education."[108] Perceived costs and benefits of higher education, as well as peer influence, are major factors in determining whether students are encouraged to pursue further education.[109] Parental education, support, and encouragement are also cited as critical factors for students completing secondary school and developing a predisposition to continue their education.[110] Furthermore, academic success is evidently a strong predictor of interest in pursuing further education following secondary school. One study found that low reading scores and grades accounted for 34% of low-income students who could not access post-secondary school.[111] Other studies have found positive correlations between higher grades, greater participation in tutoring, and money set aside by parents.[112] Evidently, it is crucial for students to develop an interest and belief in the school system in general, and in their own self-efficacy, in order to continue through secondary school and pursue further education.

Considering how essential secondary school success is for accessing higher education, it is concerning that underrepresented groups are disproportionately affected by poor academic performance and secondary school dropout rates. As of 2017, roughly 14% of Canadians over the age of 25 were without high school credentials, but this number was significantly greater among people with disabilities and in Indigenous or rural populations (defined as living outside of a census metropolitan area or census agglomeration).[113] As well, in a survey of 16-24 year-olds, 9% of first-generation students reported not completing high school, compared to only 4.3% of non-first-generation students.[114] Toronto District School Board data from 2012 further demonstrates the demographic divide in dropout rates: LGBTQ+, Black, and Latin students had dropout rates of 20%, 23%, and 21%, respectively.[115] The striking divide between the national average for secondary school educational attainment and that of marginalized communities shows the potential for education to further restrict social mobility. This effect may be exacerbated by the fact that current resources that facilitate upward mobility are unable to meet the demand in terms of capacity, program duration, and level of support.[116] For example, programs such as Pathways to Education and United Way are faced with short-term funding, which leaves them uncertain about future offerings.[117]

In order to promote secondary school retention and dedication to the education system, the provincial government should invest in resources targeted at underrepresented groups. The research discusses here clearly demonstrates that proactive supports and resources are required to promote access and reduce barriers to higher education. To promote academic success and solidify students' commitments to their education, the provincial government should provide envelope funding to school boards to encourage schools to open tutoring centres targeted towards at-risk students. Given that teachers are limited in the amount of hours they can work beyond regular school hours, this funding would be meant to hire supplemental teaching staff who could offer such tutoring. Finally, the provision of publicly funded tutoring services would ensure that school boards can monitor the quality and accessibility of tutoring (which is far less feasible with private tutoring services). The overall objective of this funding would be to

[108] Robson, Jennifer. "Better Life Chances for Ontario's Children," *Ontario 360: Post-Secondary Access*. School of Public Policy & Governance, University of Toronto. 2018. https://on360.ca/policy-papers/post-secondary-access; Vaccaro, Angelo. "An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," *College Quarterly* 15, no. 4. 2012.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Finnie, R. (2012) "Access to post-secondary education: The importance of culture." Children and Youth Services Review. No. 34. p. 1161-1170.
[111] Frenette, M (2007). "Why Are Youth from Lower-income Families Less Likely to Attend University? Evidence from Academic Abilities, Parental Influences, and Financial Constraints." Statistics Canada. Cat. 11, No. 295. 1-38.
[112] Sweet, R., Anisef, P. & Walters, D (2010). "Immigrant Parents Investment in Their Children's Post-Secondary Education." Canadian Journal of Higher Education. Vol.40, No. 3 p. 59-80.
[113] Statistics Canada. *Young men and women without a high school diploma*. July 24, 2017. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2017001/article/14824-eng.htm.
[114] Chatoor, Ken, Emily MacKay and Lauren Hudak. "Parental Education and Postsecondary Attainment: Does the Apple Fall Far From the Tree?" *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)*. March 29, 2019. Retrieved November 25, 2020. http://www.heqco.ca/en-ca/Research/ResPub/Pages/Parental-Education-and-Postsecondary-Attainment-Does-the-Apple-Fall-Far-From-the-Tree.aspx.
[115] Toronto District School Board. *Census Publications*. 2012.
[116] Miner, Rick. *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives: Point the Way to Success*. Toronto: TD Bank Group, 2011.
[117] Ibid.

support families who cannot otherwise afford tutoring, so that low-income students are better positioned to achieve the standards required to access higher education. The hope is that greater success in secondary school will foster a greater interest and dedication to education in general. This recommendation aligns with data showing that students who participate in tutoring are more likely to set aside money for post-secondary education.[118]

The provincial government should also increase funding to organizations like Pathways to Education who provide essential resources to at-risk students by offering academic and social supports that promote interest in higher education. The Pathways program is targeted to students at risk of dropping out of secondary school and aims to provide resources like tutoring, one-on-one and group mentorship, and support with future planning.[119] Accordingly, research has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of ensuring academic success, adequate mentorship, and social communication in promoting successful completion of secondary school and a genuine interest in pursuing higher education. Indeed, Pathways to Education has demonstrated success in both of these areas, reporting a decrease in dropout rates from 56% to 10% and an increase in participation in post-secondary education from 20% to 80% among their Regent Park-based participants.[120] As such, OUSA recommends that the provincial government commit to supporting such programs in order to prevent secondary school dropouts from experiencing further barriers to accessing post-secondary education. Increasing long-term funding to programs like Pathways to Education would also help ensure that they are able to offer programming in more communities across Ontario.

[118] Vaccaro, Angelo. "An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," *College Quarterly* 15, no. 4. 2012.
[119] Pathways to Education website. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/.
[120] Miner, Rick. *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives: Point the Way to Success*. Toronto: TD Bank Group, 2011.

SYSTEM DATA & INFORMATION

Collecting Data

Principle: Public policy interventions to support and broaden the accessibility of Ontario's universities should rely on comprehensive data.

Principle: Ontario's data on post-secondary quality and accessibility should be robust and informative.

Principle: Data collection and research-instrument design should provide opportunities for patterns of marginalization to be scientifically identified and quantified.

Principle: Data collection can and should benefit multiple stakeholders in the post-secondary education system.

Concern: Data collection in Ontario has room for improvement, and currently third-party groups are helping fill data availability gaps.

Concern: Initiatives intended to increase access for underrepresented groups cannot always be consistently and thoroughly evaluated, due to lack of information.

Concern: Lack of longitudinal data in certain areas makes measuring post-secondary access in Ontario difficult.

Recommendation: The provincial government should convene a multi-stakeholder expert panel to examine and make recommendations regarding the collection, availability, accessibility, and publication of post-secondary data in Ontario.

Recommendation: The expert panel referred to in the recommendation immediately above should be tasked with creating a framework for a common university reporting standard for demographic data on student applications, offers, acceptances, retention, and success.

Recommendation: The provincial government should collect self-identified data on access to post-secondary education on all relevant protected grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Recommendation: The provincial government, upon the advice of the expert panel should, where there are not already, establish robust metrics for access that should be tracked on a longitudinal basis at both the institutional and provincial levels.

Recommendation: The provincial government should amend the Ontario Education Number (OEN) to include, from consenting individuals, important demographic information necessary to further the goals of a comprehensive access strategy and should extend some aspects of use of the OEN to the post-secondary education system.

Data collection is important because it enables both planning and the assessment of goal achievement.[121] OUSA's recommendations for the use of Strategic Mandate Agreements and for a comprehensive provincial access strategy both rely on the existence of high-quality data on post-secondary access. The creation of an expert panel would help facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement and ensure that selected metrics are fair and useful. Though specific methods and indicators to measure access require more investigation by experts, OUSA does recommend that the provincial government determine access-related metrics for all protected classes under the Ontario Human Rights Code, with the exception of those that are only protected classes outside of the context of education.

Further, given that data is segmented between Ontario's K-12 students and post-secondary students, the Ontario government should seek to measure access and outcomes across both systems. Extension of the

---

[121] Government of Canada. *Informational Management – Guidelines.* January 5, 1996. Retrieved November 25, 2020. https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=13832.

primary and secondary school Ontario Education Number to include students in Ontario post-secondary education, as well as the addition of demographic information, would allow for high-level statistical analysis to identify access trends through all levels of Ontario's education system; this, in turn, would allow for research on access among underrepresented groups and intersecting identities within post-secondary education.[122] Recognizing that there may be privacy concerns with this expansion, and that there are currently very strict data protocols in place, a full review of Ontario Education Number privacy policy would be required before implementing this recommendation. Further, if this recommendation is implemented, students should be given the option to opt out of the additional demographic data collection.

Centralization & Publication of Data

> **Principle:** Data is most useful when it is widely available.
>
> **Principle:** Measuring the success of Ontario's post-secondary education system and the prescription of further policy efforts should be linked to measurement of longitudinal access metrics.
>
> **Principle:** Ontario's post-secondary students deserve a government culture of constant improvement and identification of policy opportunities within Ontario's post-secondary education system.
>
> **Concern:** Current data on student access is fragmented and not presented in a single location.
>
> **Recommendation:** The provincial government should, to the greatest possible extent, publish aggregate data in open data formats, with updates as frequently as the data is collected.
>
> **Recommendation:** The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should, using data collected, produce a report on student access to the post-secondary system at least every three years, for both public consumption and for use in guiding the Post-Secondary Comprehensive Access Strategy.

The publication of data provides public accountability for government policy and actions, allowing for scrutiny by the press, external experts, opposition parties, and the public at large. Frequent release of open data would also allow for independent outside expert analysis. Further, a periodic government report will offer the government the opportunity to contextualize data with respect to their policy interventions, and to make the data digestible to a lay audience in a single, digital location. Both of these methods of data communication are valuable to the public, and development of both will contribute to government accountability by adding to public knowledge about the state of Ontario's post-secondary education system. Three years was chosen as the time period for these reports to reflect the capacity of the civil service, but also because this interval is frequent enough for the government to present an accurate, detailed snapshot of access in Ontario suitable for strategic planning.

---

[122] Government of Ontario. "Ontario Education Number (OEN)," *Ministry of Education*. Retrieved November 25, 2020. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/oen/index.html.

A COMPREHENSIVE ACCESS STRATEGY

Whereas: Certain groups in Ontario are underrepresented in post-secondary education and face unique barriers, not limited to finances, that restrict access for qualified individuals;

Whereas: The provincial government is not sufficiently committed to increasing access to post-secondary education for underrepresented groups and remains focused on non-specifically increasing overall enrolment;

Whereas: Students from underrepresented groups may have additional financial barriers to accessing post-secondary education;

Whereas: Perceptions associated with students' identities may cause students to select, or be encouraged to select, post-secondary pathways other than their preferred pathway;

Whereas: Existing support systems do not adequately address systemic barriers to accessing post-secondary education;

Whereas: Existing primary and secondary education systems may use a one-size-fits-all approach, which may not appropriately support students from underrepresented groups in attending post-secondary education;

Whereas: First-generation students may lack the institutional knowledge and financial support required to prepare and assist them for post-secondary education;

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions may inaccurately or unclearly communicate their available accommodations for students;

Whereas: Lack of accessible infrastructure and reasonable accommodations during secondary education and at post-secondary institutions may limit students' ability to pursue their post-secondary pathway of choice;

Whereas: Perceptions associated with students' abilities may cause them to select, or be encouraged to select, post-secondary pathways other than their preferred pathway;

Whereas: Students with non-visible disabilities may face additional, distinct barriers;

Whereas: A lack of disability inclusion in physical, social, and policy environments limits the ability of students with disabilities to attend and succeed in post-secondary institutions;

Whereas: Primary and secondary education for students with disabilities does not adequately prioritize building resiliency and support skills;

Whereas: Systemic oppression of racialized and Indigenous peoples affects educational outcomes, including their ability to attend post-secondary education;

Whereas: Perceptions associated with students' race or culture may cause students to select, or be encouraged to select, post-secondary pathways other than their post-secondary education pathway of choice;

Whereas: Lack of diversity in post-secondary education populations and leadership positions may unduly impact students' choice of institution or discourage them from attending post-secondary education at all;

Whereas: Racialized and Indigenous students may disproportionately struggle to finance their

education due to inadequate access to financial information;

Whereas: Lack of support for Indigenous language and culture on campuses and euro-centric curricula may discourage students from pursuing post-secondary education;

Whereas: Students with reduced financial means may not be able to devote time to studying and pursuing extra-curricular activities due to work or familial obligations;

Whereas: Parents with lower socioeconomic status may not have access to resources to enrich their child's education in order to build lifelong learning skills;

Whereas: Primary and secondary schools in neighbourhoods with lower socioeconomic status may lack the resources to fully support their students;

Whereas: Students living in rural and northern communities are disproportionately affected by poor internet access;

Whereas: Lack of information available to students in rural and northern communities results in fewer opportunities to learn about the advantages of, and options for, post-secondary education;

Whereas: The model used for calculating Ontario Student Grants does not explicitly or transparently factor in distance-related travel costs for students in rural or northern areas;

Whereas: Many post-secondary institutions in Ontario do not provide support in French and Indigenous languages;

Whereas: Current Strategic Mandate Agreements do not place adequate focus on access for marginalized student groups in institutional enrolment strategies and differentiation strategies;

Whereas: Current metrics do not place sufficient emphasis on support for underrepresented students;

Whereas: Mature students often have obligations outside of post-secondary education, such as working or caring for dependents, that can make post-secondary education inaccessible;

Whereas: Mature students who chose to do part-time studies in order to continue working and/or caring for dependents often do not qualify for particular grants and/or loans;

Whereas: Many students may not have the financial support to return to school to continue or change their educational background;

Whereas: Because the OSAP definition of mature students was changed from four years to six, many students are unable to access certain, and often necessary, financial aid support;

Whereas: Transfer students may lack the financial resources they need to transfer between post-secondary institutions;

Whereas: Students may be unaware of the process or ability to transfer between post-secondary institutions;

Whereas: Students from marginalized groups often face additional barriers in transferring between post-secondary institutions, and often do not see university as a viable option for them;

Whereas: Students who do not have their high school diploma or GED often have limited, if any, opportunities for post-secondary education;

Whereas: There is little data focused on the outcomes and efficacy of bridging programs;

Whereas: Students wishing to access existing outreach programs may be unaware of their existence or requirements;

Whereas: Students who have not completed secondary school often do not have the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education;

Whereas: Students who were unable to receive the minimum university requirements in high school (i.e., grade twelve, university-level English) are unable to access university until they qualify as mature students, six years after they graduate;

Whereas: Students from underrepresented groups may choose not to pursue post-secondary education due to a lack of representation;

Whereas: Students from underrepresented groups may limit their post-secondary education goals or be told to limit their post-secondary education goals;

Whereas: Extracurriculars often have financial barriers that limit students' ability to participate in them;

Whereas: Parents should not have to limit their children's goals or opportunities due to financial, resource, or time constraints;

Whereas: Lower-income parents are often disadvantaged because they are unable to afford putting young children in additional education opportunities, such as camps or programs that develop children's interest in education;

Whereas: Some students, especially those in rural and northern communities, may not be able to access post-secondary institutions until much later in life;

Whereas: Information about tuition cuts and financial aid may be arriving too late for prospective students to realize post-secondary education is an option for them;

Whereas: Lack of early financial support can negatively impact school performance and decrease the odds of a student completing post-secondary education;

Whereas: Lack of knowledge of financial aid, supports, and/or resources can hinder students' ability to realize that post-secondary education is an option;

Whereas: RESPs can be inaccessible for lower-income families who do not have the ability to save money;

Whereas: Individuals directly out of secondary school may not have the financial literacy required to access post-secondary education;

Whereas: The stigmatization associated with specific streams has pressured students to enroll in classes that are not the right fit for them, hindering their academic and career success;

Whereas: The difficulties presented when switching between various streams acts as a barrier for students to attend their post-secondary pathway of choice;

Whereas: Students are required to make choices about their stream before they understand the courses required for their post-secondary pathways;

Whereas: Students from marginalized or minority groups are often forced into the Applied stream, even in cases where they may succeed more in the Academic stream;

Whereas: Many students lack necessary exposure to parents and peers who can provide knowledge about the pathways to and benefits of post-secondary education, and secondary school curriculum has

traditionally been ineffective with providing this knowledge;

Whereas: Many students lack the knowledge needed to make an informed decision about entering university and college streams;

Whereas: Guidance counsellors often do not have the training and resources required to properly equip students for their journey to post-secondary education;

Whereas: Students are having a negative or unhelpful experience with their guidance department and will also choose to avoid this resource in the future;

Whereas: Some students from underrepresented groups lack adequate exposure to social and cultural factors that encourage academic success in secondary school and promote interest in post-secondary education;

Whereas: Secondary school dropout rates are higher among groups that are underrepresented in post-secondary education;

Whereas: Some secondary school students do not have sufficient access to resources that enable academic success and motivation to continue with education;

Whereas: Data collection in Ontario has room for improvement, and currently third-party groups are helping fill data availability gaps;

Whereas: Initiatives intended to increase access for underrepresented groups cannot always be consistently and thoroughly evaluated, due to lack of information;

Whereas: Lack of longitudinal data in certain areas makes measuring post-secondary access in Ontario difficult; and

Whereas: Current data on student access is fragmented and not presented in a single location;

Be it resolved that: The provincial government should publicly commit to increasing access to post-secondary education for underrepresented groups and reducing barriers by developing a comprehensive strategic plan that addresses the unique needs of different underrepresented groups;

Be it further resolved that: The provincial government should clearly define access to mean reducing barriers and increasing enrolment for underrepresented groups specifically;

BIFRT: The provincial government should implement specific streams of OSAP to provide additional funding for students from underrepresented groups;

BIFRT: The provincial government should implement debt reduction mechanisms for students from underrepresented groups with financial need;

BIFRT: The provincial government should continue to build and reinforce programming that encourages students to pursue their preferred post-secondary pathway;

BIFRT: The provincial government should build targeted programing that encourages students from underrepresented groups to prepare for and attend post-secondary education;

BIFRT: The provincial government should commission research on how to modify primary and secondary education systems to improve access to post-secondary education for underrepresented groups;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide targeted support programs throughout primary and secondary education to ensure that underrepresented groups have equitable access to post-secondary

education;

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in addressing systemic oppression which contributes to students from some groups being underrepresented in certain areas of post-secondary education;

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HECQO) should collaborate with existing disability stakeholders to research and develop a comprehensive framework for increasing access to post-secondary education for students with disabilities;

BIFRT: HEQCO should investigate how to support students with visible and non-visible disabilities through the distinct challenges they may face;

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in an evidence-based, comprehensive framework for students with disabilities which prioritizes their learning needs without limiting options for post-secondary pathways;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide grant funding for modifying physical infrastructure and academic processes to meet students' accessibility needs;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a system for independently evaluating and verifying accessibility supports at post-secondary institutions and present this information in a central location;

BIFRT: The provincial government should review the effectiveness of programming and support for students with disabilities to ensure resiliency and skill development is a focus;

BIFRT: The provincial government should explore implementations of transition programs post-graduation of secondary schools to support students with disabilities in developing resiliency and key skills to thrive;

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in addressing systemic oppression to improve educational outcomes for and representation of racialized and Indigenous students in post-secondary education;

BIFRT: The provincial government should support Indigenous communities by investing in specific enrichment programs during primary and secondary education to increase students' ability to attend their preferred post-secondary education pathway;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop guidelines so that universities can uniformly consider extenuating circumstances in admissions decisions;

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in targeted enrichment programs which aim to build lifelong learning skills for students with lower socioeconomic status;

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in funding streams for schools in neighbourhoods with lower socioeconomic status to create a high-quality learning environment for students;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Education should work with school boards to promote post-secondary opportunities in rural and northern communities;

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with the federal government to ensure that students are appropriately prioritized in the federal government's investment in internet access;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Education should create a Rural and Northern Education Strategy aimed at addressing specific barriers that rural and northern students face and promoting post-secondary education to students in these areas;

BIFRT: The provincial government should introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant designed to

allocate funding to students commensurate with the cost of travel, from their place of permanent residence to the nearest institution offering their program of choice;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to the Ontario University Registrars' Association, the Council of Ontario Universities, and the Ontario Universities' Application Centre to ensure Ontario universities' Regional Fairs reach rural and northern communities with low post-secondary attainment rates;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to support the provision of support services and courses in French and Indigenous languages;

BIFRT: The provincial government should, in the next iteration of Strategic Mandate Agreements, continue and expand upon the Enrolment Strategy section;

BIFRT: The provincial government should adopt a policy of moderate differentiation and specialization in improving student access, encouraging both general commitments to access and specific institutional areas of strength;

BIFRT: The provincial government should explore using the per-student availability of specialized scholarship funding geared toward specialized areas of student access as an indicator in future performance-based funding;

BIFRT: The provincial government should implement an indicator for performance-based funding based on the provision of services which specifically support students from underrepresented groups;

BIFRT: The provincial government should create a new student access stream of operating grants under the differentiation envelope, to be strategically distributed to institutions which set and meet ambitious and meaningful student access targets through their Strategic Mandate Agreements;

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase current OSAP funding to grants for students with dependents to subsidize the cost of care;

BIFRT: The provincial government should amend OSAP to reduce the percentage of courses needed to be considered full-time for mature students to 40% of a full course load;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services should incentivize businesses, through a tax break, to assist employees in continuing their education;

BIFRT: The provincial government should redefine mature students within OSAP as those who have been out of school for four years, rather than six;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a grant, through the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), for low-income transfer students to cover the cost of transfer fees;

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) allow transfer students to apply for one program, rather than a minimum of three;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a fund for ONCAT and post-secondary institutions to provide advertisement around transfer opportunities;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should, in consultation with experts such as HEQCO and advocacy groups, develop outreach programs aimed at building knowledge around university protocols, expectations, supports, etc., and invest in targeted outreach for said programs to underrepresented groups;

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with Pathways to Education to create outreach programs aimed at people who do not have their high school diploma or GED but wish to pursue further

education;

BIFRT: The provincial government, in collaboration with HEQCO, should investigate and collect data on the long-term outcomes of outreach programs in Ontario;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop an online portal for all outreach programs that includes information and applications;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a grant for universities to apply to that would allow them to develop outreach programs for students without their high school diploma or GED;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a grant for universities to apply to that would allow them to develop outreach programming for students who are missing the minimum university requirements from high school (i.e., grade twelve, university-level English), so that these students can obtain those requirements and apply for university without waiting six years to qualify as a mature student and have their high school diploma marks waived;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a grant for universities to develop outreach programs for underrepresented and marginalized groups, predicated on including these groups in the development of these outreach programs;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Education should renew funding for the Ontario Post-Secondary Access and Inclusion Program (OPAIP) so that post-secondary institutions can continue to use it to deliver enhanced outreach, access, transition, and/or retention for students;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a grant for elementary schools to apply to in order to further support extracurriculars and their supplies that are not already covered (i.e., mouthpieces, uniforms, etc.);

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a needs-based grant to help children in K-12 to attend camps and after-school programing focused on developing interest in education through STEM, theatre, leadership, etc.;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a grant that elementary schools can apply to in order to visit post-secondary institutions on field trips;

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in further advertisement about financial aid to prospective students and their support systems;

BIFRT: The provincial government should create a centralized database of all scholarship offerings within Ontario;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop an additional program for families who qualify for the Canada Learning Bond that invests an additional $250 per year for every eligible child;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a free online financial literacy course for adults and young adults focused on saving for and understanding post-secondary education funding;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Education should mandate that decisions made between university and college streams be postponed to grade 11 and 12 entrance;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Education should mandate that all school boards implement a strategic plan that is dedicated to a thorough explanation of the academic and applied streams and the corresponding post-secondary pathways they lead to, that will be distributed to the students to clarify their post-secondary education options;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Education should implement a reassessment tool to give students and parents

and/or guardians a formal opportunity to re-evaluate their options and make switching between streams more accessible;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Education should regularly consult students and teachers at the secondary and post-secondary level and collect data to monitor the effectiveness of recent changes to the Grade 10 Career Studies curriculum;

BIFRT: Upon postponing decisions on streaming to grade 11 and 12, the Ministry of Education should amend the Career Studies course curriculum to include a section on educating students about the outcomes of streaming decisions and how to make an informed decision;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Education should promote a focus on providing resources on how to pursue post-secondary education, without prioritizing one form of post-secondary education over another;

BIFRT: To ensure students receive high-quality guidance, the provincial government should evaluate and conduct a review of the ratio of guidance counsellors to students served;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Education should ensure that all guidance counsellors have the proper training in academic success through their Additional Qualifications courses, with an option to specialize in matters related to post-secondary education and mental health;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to school boards to hire teaching staff to develop in-school tutoring centres;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to the Pathways to Education program to allow the expansion of mentorship and support programs and permit a wider reach to underrepresented populations;

BIFRT: The provincial government should convene a multi-stakeholder expert panel to examine and make recommendations regarding the collection, availability, accessibility, and publication of post-secondary data in Ontario;

BIFRT: The expert panel referred to in the recommendation immediately above should be tasked with creating a framework for a common university reporting standard for demographic data on student applications, offers, acceptances, retention, and success;

BIFRT: The provincial government should collect self-identified data on access to post-secondary education on all relevant protected grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code;

BIFRT: The provincial government, upon the advice of the expert panel should, where there are not already, establish robust metrics for access that should be tracked on a longitudinal basis at both the institutional and provincial levels;

BIFRT: The provincial government should amend the Ontario Education Number (OEN) to include, from consenting individuals, important demographic information necessary to further the goals of a comprehensive access strategy and should extend some aspects of use of the OEN to the post-secondary education system;

BIFRT: The provincial government should, to the greatest possible extent, publish aggregate data in open data formats, with updates as frequently as the data is collected; and

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should, using data collected, produce a report on student access to the post-secondary system at least every three years, for both public consumption and for use in guiding the Post-Secondary Comprehensive Access Strategy.