

**POLICY PAPER**

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*A Comprehensive Access Strategy*

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*Prepared by:*

*Jamie Cleary, Vice President  
University Students' Council, Western University*

*Kayla Smith, Vice President University Affairs  
Trent Durham Students' Association, Trent University*

*Marc Gurrisi, Research & Policy Analyst  
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*

*Danielle Pierre, Research & Policy Analyst  
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*

*Zachary Rose, Executive Director  
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*

## **ABOUT OUSA**

OUSA represents the interests of over 140,000 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.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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All willing and qualified students in Ontario should be able to access and excel within Ontario's post-secondary education system. Access, as a policy term, should have a singular meaning across Ontario that is separate from retention and persistence. The provincial government should reduce barriers to university access by developing and implementing a comprehensive access strategy. This strategy should holistically address all barriers to post-secondary education, ensuring equitable access to university for all Ontarians.

### THE PROBLEM

#### *Uncoordinated Information & Ineffective Outreach*

Students are concerned about the lack of coordinated initiatives intended to increase university access in the absence of a government driven post-secondary access strategy. Without a strategy, the definition of access remains broad, as do access-related commitments in Strategic Mandate Agreements. Contributing to the sector's lack of direction in this area is the amount of data about access and transitions that are not reported, or worse, not collected. Data about the university sector is not centralized and is seldom published in useful or comparable formats. Furthermore, there is a dearth of racial demographic data. As a result, initiatives intended to increase access for underrepresented groups cannot always be evaluated.

With out centralized data, students, families, and communities have insufficient information about university pathways, the costs and benefits of university, and the availability of financial aid. While there are a variety of community- and institution-based outreach programs in operation, they lack the outcome metrics and government regulation to prove that they reduce the aforementioned informational barriers. Admittedly, outreach initiatives can be severely under resourced, for example, childcare and primary school settings lack resources to enable parents and guardians to plan and prepare for their children's higher education. Inadequate information and planning may limit learners' future opportunities.

Too often, access strategies are implemented as one-day programs that fail to connect to a larger framework or long-term strategy. Without early, on-going exposure to the possibility of higher education, parents and students may miss out on essential preparatory opportunities. This is of particular concern for those whose parents do not hold university degrees—first generation students lack the financial literacy and pathway knowledge they need to make the best and most informed decisions for their educational futures.

#### *Inflexible Pathways*

As the final step, for most, before university, secondary school is a critical point in learners' educational careers. Unfortunately, curricular and streaming practices present barriers to certain students. Firstly, high school curriculum is predominantly Eurocentric and fails to acknowledge other valuable content from cultures and experiences that make up a significant portion of the school age population.

Secondly, students are required to make choices about their secondary school program (or stream) before they understand which courses are required for their preferred post-secondary pathway. When students are separated into streams, students from lower income groups have lower outcomes; most students from low-income families participate in applied streams that steer them away from university. Creating additional barriers, transferring between applied and academic streams is very difficult due to the limited availability of transfer credits, the undesirable times these courses are offered, and the cap on the number of secondary school credits a student may receive. Additionally, because the roles of guidance counsellors are not well defined, they are often faced with too many demands and there are not enough of them help all students.

Students who do not enter university directly from high school (non-traditional students) have skills, experiences, and credentials that are not consistently recognized by universities. These students also face stigma about their qualifications. Despite the role of the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) in enhancing transfer pathways between and within the college and university sectors, many students' credentials remain unrecognized by their receiving institutions. Barriers to institutional transfers, in effect, create access boundaries for those trying to bridge the gap between their credentials from college or apprenticeship programs and workplace experience, and university programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Create a Provincial Strategy*

Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) should be the central tool used for implementing a provincial access strategy. Institutional differentiation, while prioritizing access for underrepresented groups, should not diminish overall access to university education. Provincial performance-based funding should be associated with access initiatives outlined in SMAs. However, the Ministry should coordinate institutional specialization in SMAs.

### *Centralize System Data & Information*

Public policy interventions supporting broadened access to Ontario's universities should rely on comprehensive data. Robust, accessible information can also help prospective students and their families overcome informational barriers. The government should convene an expert panel to examine and make recommendations regarding the collection, availability, accessibility, and publication of post-secondary data, with the ultimate goal being the standardization of universities' data collection practices. The Ontario Education Number should be used to collect important demographic information required to monitor progress on a comprehensive access strategy.

### *Fund Outreach Programs*

Considered separate from institutional recruitment efforts, outreach programming needs to be specific to the communities in which they are operating and developed through consultation with relevant stakeholders. To these ends, the Government of Ontario should create a grant program specifically for outreach programs that prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented, marginalized, and low-income groups. Terms of reference for this grant should encourage collaboration between multiple stakeholders and lay out specific best practices to follow and outcome metrics to achieve. In this way, the government would be better equipped to evaluate the success and effectiveness of outreach programs in the long term.

### *Strategize within Learner Segments*

A provincial access strategy should apply multiple interventions through different stages of a learner's educational career and start early. Parents and guardians need adequate finances and information prior to secondary school in order to prepare for their children's future education. Early childhood and elementary school experiences should provide comprehensive support for parents to access financial literacy education and post-secondary pathway planning information.

#### *Secondary School Curriculum*

As students move into secondary school, the Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and Skills Development should ensure a broader range of source material that expresses more diverse cultural and social perspectives is used in the curriculum. The representation of a variety of identities should be emphasized as an access solution. The government should also continue to mandate that secondary schools increase financial literacy instruction, with a focus on increasing awareness of the costs of post-secondary education options.

#### *Secondary School Streaming*

Academic limits should not be imposed on post-secondary opportunities before students are old enough to independently plan for their futures. Similarly, academic streaming should not be a mechanism that further disadvantages underrepresented groups. Any decisions made between university- and college-bound streams should be postponed to Grades 11 and 12. As long as streaming exists, the government should invest in better guidance support for students who are trying to decide what stream to enter. Finally, the Ministry of Education should make better efforts to support school boards and individual schools in implementing more efficient processes for transitioning between university and college streams.

#### *Secondary School Guidance*

Guidance counselling represents a valuable opportunity to break down informational and other non-financial barriers to university. All students should have access to effective guidance counselling. To maximize the provinces' guidance counsellor capacity, the government should move away from a pure per-student funding formula of guidance counsellors towards a more targeted and responsive approach. The Ministry of Education should also more clearly define the role of guidance counsellors within the secondary school system. They should be mandated to receive regular skills training on OSAP and financial aid, processes for applying to post-secondary school, and university prerequisites.

### Non-Traditional Pathways to University

All students should be able to choose the university pathway that best suits their competencies, skills, and interests. Prospective students who develop interest in university education after completing secondary school should have options to demonstrate their qualifications. The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should encourage, fund, and evaluate bridging programs to help otherwise qualified students access university education. They should reward institutions that prioritize bridging programs as part of their SMAs by providing performance funding to those who enhance academic support services and reducing costs for non-traditional students. ONCAT should be tasked with developing a robust, province-wide network of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition.

## INTRODUCTION

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While post-secondary participation in Ontario has increased steadily in recent decades, the Government of Canada has estimated that by 2024, 71 percent of new jobs will require some form of post-secondary education or training.<sup>1</sup> The province is well on its way to preparing its citizens for this future. In 2013, 60 percent of Ontario's population had achieved a post-secondary credential—32 percent have graduated from university.<sup>2</sup> Ontario's university attainment rate is highest in Canada. While just 13 percent of off-reserve Indigenous people have university degrees, this is still higher than the nation-wide attainment rate (only behind P.E.I, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia).<sup>3</sup>

The benefits of post-secondary education in contributing to a prosperous and thriving society are well documented: Ontarians with a post-secondary degree are more likely to live longer, be healthier, commit fewer crimes, vote in larger numbers, donate to charity, and volunteer in their communities.<sup>4</sup> Individuals too, will have significantly better labour market outcomes if they have a post-secondary education: for example, in January 2017 the employment rate for those with a university degree was 75 percent (74 percent for those with only a Bachelor's degree), far outstripping the 55 percent employment rate among those with only a high school diploma as well as the 69 percent employment rate of postsecondary certificate or diploma holders.<sup>5</sup> In fact, "there is a marked job advantage in employability and earnings for university graduates over the population as a whole."<sup>6</sup>

A university education is still an important mechanism for individuals to improve their quality of life and for the government to maintain economic productivity. Moreover, given parents who have attained diplomas and degrees are far more likely to have children who go on to higher education, the benefits of increasing access to underrepresented groups will accrue over time, playing a role in breaking cycles of inequality and poverty.<sup>7</sup>

A forecasted decline in the number of 18 to 24 year olds is about to pass through the sector.<sup>8</sup> Any maintenance or increase of enrolment will have to come from growth in the participation rate. Now more than ever, it is crucial to reach deeper into the pool of qualified applicants by removing as many barriers as possible. Certain groups have been systematically shut out of the university system as a result of social, economic, and academic influences. Students' own choices and capabilities should be the only factors that influence their decisions to attend universities, not the expectations of others or the circumstances that marginalize them.

This policy paper outlines students' vision for a comprehensive provincial access strategy. While the policy options provided herein will impact the sector as a whole, the primary intention is to offer suggestions for improving access to university. The paper will begin by taking a high-level look at access to university in Ontario. Initial discussions are of students' concerns and recommendations surrounding the use of Strategic Mandate Agreements between the province and its universities as mechanisms for making access a provincial priority. The centralization of key sectoral data and increased funding of early outreach programming also apply to the sector at the highest levels. The discussion then takes a stage-based approach to university access and considers appropriate solutions prior to and during secondary school, as well as solutions for non-traditional students who do not enter university directly from high school.

## CREATING A PROVINCIAL ACCESS STRATEGY

**Principle:** All willing and qualified students in Ontario should be able to access and excel within Ontario's post-secondary education system.

<sup>1</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada, *Canadian Occupational Projection System 2015 Projections: Job Openings 2015-2024* (Ottawa: Government of Canada), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, "Table 477-0116 – Educational attainment of the population aged 25 to 64, off-reserve Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, and total population, Canada, provinces and territories, occasional (percent)," *CANSIM database*, accessed December 14, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ross Finnie, Childs S. & Wismer A. *Underrepresented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*. (Toronto: HEQCO, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, "Table 282-0208 – Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by educational degree, sex and age group, unadjusted for seasonality, monthly (persons unless otherwise noted)," *CANSIM Database*, accessed February 21, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Hicks and Linda Jonker, *Still Worth It After All These Years* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> TD Economics, *Special Report: Post-Secondary Education is the Best Investment You Can Make* (Toronto: TD Canada, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada, "Table 052-0005 – Projected population, by projection scenario, age and sex, as of July 1, Canada, provinces and territories," Government of Canada CANSIM database, accessed October 14, 2014, last modified September 16, 2014.

**Principle:** The provincial government should reduce barriers to university access by developing and implementing a comprehensive access strategy.

**Principle:** Access to post-secondary education should have a singular meaning across Ontario, separate from retention and persistence.

**Concern:** The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development lacks a comprehensive access strategy to reduce non-financial barriers to accessing post-secondary education.

**Concern:** Within the post-secondary education sector, access has a very broad definition leading to dilution in methods to address access barriers.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should create a comprehensive and holistic access strategy, which addresses all barriers to post-secondary education and ensures access for all willing and qualified students.

**Recommendation:** The government’s access strategy should include a definition of access to post-secondary education, which guides all access initiatives in Ontario.

Despite significant progress towards increasing broad access to post-secondary education, students are concerned about the lack of strategies for reducing non-financial barriers to accessing university. Certain groups (such as first generation students, students with disabilities, Indigenous students, visible minorities, Francophone students, and mature students) remain underrepresented or under-accommodated in our post-secondary institutions.<sup>9</sup> The underrepresentation of students with disabilities, French-language speakers, and low-income students can even be demonstrated in the province’s limited (and incomplete) demographic data in Table 1.

**Table 1: Percent of population with specified demographic characteristics in the Ontario population compared to the university population (as represented by three sources).<sup>10</sup>**

Demographic	% in Ontario Pop.	% in OPSSS	% in MYAAs	% in SMAs
People with Disabilities	15%	18%	6%	7%
French Speakers	11.31%	n/a	n/a	10%
French-only Speakers	0.34%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Indigenous	2%	2%	2%	2%
Low-Income	23%	18%	n/a	n/a
First Generation	n/a	18%	19%	23%

Table 1 shows disparities in the proportion of students with disabilities in Ontario’s population compared to that in the university population, as measured by Multi-Year Accountability Agreement (MYAA) and Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) report backs. However, the data in the table suggest that students with disabilities may be reluctant to identify themselves through official institutional mechanisms, as the proportion of students with disabilities responding to OUSA’s membership survey (OPSSS) is actually greater than what is reported to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development as well as Statistics Canada’s most recent population measures.<sup>11</sup> Comparing the proportion of French speakers and low-income youth in Ontario’s population to available data also shows underrepresentation among these groups. Lastly, while according to available data Indigenous students may not be underrepresented numerically, there is certainly a large body of research and advocacy supporting the notion that Indigenous students are under-served by Ontario’s university system. It is important to note that some demographic information for under-represented groups are not measured by MYAA or

<sup>9</sup> Ross Finnie, *Under-Represented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada, “Table 111-0015 – Family Characteristics, Low Income Measures (LIM), by family type and family type composition, annual (number unless otherwise noted),” *CANSIM Database*, accessed December 16, 2016. Statistics Canada, “2008: Aboriginal identity population by age groups media age and sex, percentage distribution for both sexes for Canada provinces and territories – 20% sample data (table),” *Aboriginal Peoples Highlight Tables 2006 Census*. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2008). Statistics Canada, “Table 115-0002 – Adults with and without disabilities, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces and territories, occasional (number),” *CANSIM Database*, accessed December 16, 2016. Statistics Canada, “Population by knowledge of official language, by province and territory (2011 Census),” *2011 Census of Population* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2013). Multi-year Accountability Agreement (MYAA) report backs to the province from publicly-assisted universities, published 2014. Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) report backs to the province from Brock University, Laurentian University, Nippising University, Ryerson University, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, University of Ottawa, University of Toronto, and York University, published 2015.

<sup>11</sup> At the same time however, this disparity between OPSSS respondents and Ontario’s population could be due to non-response bias in OUSA’s membership survey.

SMA report backs due to no data collection or non-response from institutions. This includes information about groups like crown wards, students over 25, people of colour, LGBTQ+ students, and rural and northern students.

Within the province of Ontario, disparities in participation rates are much higher than those in other provinces. This includes large disparities between the upper and lower income quartiles, which have continually increased since 2003.<sup>12</sup> As the government of Ontario continues its work reforming the Ontario Student Assistance Program, which is instrumental in addressing financial barriers, OUSA would like to see the remaining non-financial barriers addressed. In order to develop a more standardized and holistic strategy to addressing barriers to post-secondary education across Ontario, the provincial government must develop a strategy that outlines approaches to creating an inclusive sector. Such a strategy would clearly articulate methods in which the province, institutions, student associations, community organizations, and municipalities can begin to address ways to allow more marginalized and underrepresented groups equitable opportunities to attend university.

The strategy should consider and define access as a measure to support and promote student success in attending a university. It should also outline that access is not a measure for ensuring individual entry into specific programs or institutions of choice. Overall, the strategy should address access to university education with the goal of establishing equitable opportunities for all populations. Finally, provincial population dynamics should be reflected in PSE participation rates. Since a variety of organizations, including university administration and student governments, would be impacted by changes outlined in this strategy, the government must ensure that all parties have equal say in consultations, drafting, and implementation of the strategy and any associated policies. This will also allow the strategy to be implemented by a variety of groups with shared terms and in support of the provincial government.

Given the short- and long-term economic success associated with university education, both for individuals and society, it is important that we begin to address the barriers to access for underrepresented groups associated with socioeconomic status and systemic disadvantage. In order to avoid the perpetuation of continual cycles of disadvantage, a proactive access strategy must be shaped with the purpose of widespread approach for all interested parties and populations. Herein, OUSA discusses specific areas where the province's approach to university access can be expanded and re-envisioned.

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<sup>12</sup> John Doran, Amanda K. Ferguson, Gulam A. Khan, Grace Ryu, Dominic Naimool, Mark D. Hanson, and Ruth A. Childs, *What are Ontario's Universities Doing to Improve Access for Under-represented Groups?* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2015).

## USING STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS

**Principle:** Strategic Mandate Agreements should be used as a tool for increasing access for underrepresented groups.

**Principle:** Institutional differentiation should not diminish overall student access to university education.

**Concern:** Access within Strategic Mandate Agreements is generalized to overall completion and student success.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should use Strategic Mandate Agreements to monitor enrolment growth among underrepresented groups with the intention of increasing their respective enrolments to match population parities in Ontario.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should coordinate institutional specialization in SMA access priorities.

**Recommendation:** Provincial performance-based funding should be associated with access initiatives outlined in Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Underrepresentation in post-secondary education occurs when the proportion of members of a particular population is less than the proportion of this particular group in the general population.<sup>13</sup> In 2014, the provincial government signed Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) with all publicly assisted universities in the province with the intended purpose of connecting institutions to various levels of Ontario's economy. The SMAs are designed as a measure to guide growth, differentiation, and focus on strengths without limiting expansion.<sup>14</sup> As an opportunity to guide access for specific groups who experience barriers to attending university, students believe the SMAs should clearly outline institutionally specific priorities for increasing access for underrepresented groups. However, these priorities should not decrease access for other groups and MAESD should ensure that differentiation negotiations do not result in diminished student access overall.

While many institutions list commitments to a variety of underrepresented populations within their "key areas of differentiation," there is a clear focus on specific groups dependent on the university's location, history, and/or mission. At the same time, few institutions have developed clear goals related to the participation of underrepresented groups and rather use access as a measure of student success and retention.<sup>15</sup> SMA negotiations should be used as a method to encourage and outline methods of achieving system-wide population parities. This enrolment growth should also be monitored over multiple years following SMA agreements to ensure outlined metrics are being upheld.

Students believe that all willing and qualified students should have access to university education. Ministry coordinated specialization of institutional access priorities would allow for sector-wide access for underrepresented groups. For example, Queen's University's SMA outlines a commitment to increase the number of Indigenous learners at their institution while the SMA for McMaster University showcases an institutional priority to increase the number of first-generation students.<sup>16</sup> While institutions should be given some autonomy in setting their access strategies, Ministry coordination would allow for an overall provincial strategy that increases access for a variety of underrepresented groups (rather than risking a focus on only a few groups if there were no coordination).

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should further support access initiatives through the creation of performance-based funding associated initiatives that increase access for specific underrepresented groups (as outlined in SMAs). An example of a program that could benefit from performance-based funding is Queen's University's Aboriginal Access to Engineering program.<sup>17</sup> Academic research on barriers to access in post-

<sup>13</sup> Doran, *What are Ontario's Universities Doing to Improve Access*.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, "Building a Stronger Post-secondary Education System: Strategic Mandate Agreements Highlight Strengths of Colleges, Universities," *Government of Ontario Newsroom*, August 7, 2014, <https://news.ontario.ca/maesd/en/2014/08/building-a-stronger-post-secondary-education-system.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Doran, *What are Ontario's Universities Doing to Improve Access*.

<sup>16</sup> Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and Queen's University, *Strategic Mandate Agreement (2014-2017)* (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 2014). Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and McMaster University, *Strategic Mandate Agreement (2014-2017)* (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Queen's University Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, "Aboriginal Access to Engineering," [aboriginalaccess.ca](http://aboriginalaccess.ca), accessed March 4, 2017.

secondary education, could also qualify for performance-based funding. At the program-level, this could look similar to Carlton's Institute of African Studies. Such an approach would enable currently marginalized fields of research to grow and identify population specific barriers to post-secondary access.

Differentiation for on the grounds of access can be achieved by outlining how institutions plan on increasing access for specific groups, while also providing comprehensive supports to all students. Students believe that while it is important to acknowledge institutions that run access programs through targeted funding, baseline expectations and minimum standards for increased access for all underrepresented groups must be prioritized by the sector.

## CENTRALIZING SYSTEM DATA & INFORMATION

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

**Principle:** Robust, accessible information can help prospective students and their families make informed choices and overcome informational barriers.

**Concern:** There are a number of areas related to access and transitions where data is not collected or not reported.

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

**Concern:** Data about the university sector is not centralized and is seldom published in useful, comparable formats.

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

**Recommendation:** The government should develop a common standard for universities to collect demographic data for the purposes of furthering the goals of a comprehensive access strategy.

**Recommendation:** The 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.

For access strategies (and in fact, all public policies) to succeed, it is vital that they be planned and evaluated using a strong foundation of comprehensive data, capable of illuminating gaps that exist or practices that are particularly effective. Unfortunately, data in Ontario’s post-secondary education sector can be hard to come by. For example, the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE)—currently administered by all major Ontario universities—offers a rich dataset that could be useful in a number of areas, including students’ experiences upon transitioning into university. Unfortunately, universities are not required to publish the entirety of NSSE results, leaving many gaps in public information. Additionally, reporting inconsistencies frequently occur, muddling data that should be straightforward, such as information regarding class sizes.

One of the most potent data tools available to the government is currently underdeveloped. The Ontario Education Number (OEN), a random number associated with individual students’ basic information, is used for system research and planning purposes. However, while it includes information such as date of birth and gender, it is not linked to key demographic characteristics such as a race or ethnicity. The Toronto District School Boards is an accomplished leader in this area, as they collect data regarding socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, and language as well as other family information and academic information. The Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and Skills Development should follow suit. While OUSA acknowledges that self-identification and self-reporting of demographic data can often be incomplete (especially among Indigenous populations given historical misuse of data, identity legislation, the legacy of residential schools, and a resulting distrust of government), it is nonetheless a necessary step for the province in pursuit of an affective access strategy.<sup>18</sup>

In collecting sensitive demographic information and attaching it to students’ OENs, privacy rights and the protection of potentially identifiable information must be guaranteed. While demographic information such as race and ethnicity must be collected to enable the analysis necessary for increasing the sector’s capacity to improve the treatment and circumstances for students of colour, it should only be made public in aggregate. Access to the more granular formats of this data must be restricted to institutions, analysts, and Ministers whose handling of the data are bound by legislation requiring them to access it only for the furtherance of planning, providing financial aid, or

<sup>18</sup> John A. Hodson and Julian Kitchen, *A Strategy for Change: Supporting Teachings and Improving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit School Success in Provincially Funded Northwestern Ontario Schools* (Thunder Bay: Northern Policy Institute, 2015). John A. Hodson and Julian Kitchen, *A Strategy for Change: Supporting Teachings and Improving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit School Success in Provincially Funded Northwestern Ontario Schools* (Thunder Bay: Northern Policy Institute, 2015). Council of Ontario Universities, *Aboriginal Self-Identification Project: Final Report* (Toronto: Council of Ontario Universities, 2013).

conducting research into matters such as student mobility, affordability, accessibility, and quality.<sup>19</sup> Students believe that the collection of demographic and race-based data must also provide students the option to opt-out once they turn 18 years of age. This would provide students explicit choice in publicly codifying and categorizing sensitive aspects of their identity.

Though the government, universities, and stakeholders may engage in activities designed to increase access, particularly targeting those currently underrepresented in the system, existing data gaps make it difficult to evaluate what is working and what is not. A 2011 report by Dr. Rick Miner notes that, “there is much anecdotal evidence but insufficient objective measurement and research to quantify results and conduct evaluation research.”<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, when data does exist in one area, there is little infrastructure in the sector to allow for easy and widespread dissemination, which can cause confusion.<sup>21</sup> For example, in the 2010 Academic Plan put forward by Queen’s University, it was noted that their internal planning office reported dramatically different class size data than the university reported to the Common University Data Ontario database, because of different reporting processes. The Academic Plan noted, “[Council of Ontario University] methods permit Ontario universities to appear to have many more small classes than they actually do, underscoring our concern for developing appropriate metrics.”<sup>22</sup>

Aside from its importance to policy planning, data itself can be an antidote to the non-financial barriers that underrepresented groups face. For example, first-generation students face a major obstacle in that they lack familial guides with first-hand experience to help them navigate the university landscape and select a pathway.<sup>23</sup> As first-generation students are disproportionately Indigenous students, and students from other marginalized backgrounds, this segment ought to be a priority. Having relevant information readily available could be a tremendous asset in lieu of familial, first-hand experience and could minimize the effect of this barrier. This is why data must not merely be publicly available to those who specifically request it or access it through a freedom of information action, but it must be openly published as a matter of course.

Accurate, consistent, and comprehensive information is important for overcoming informational barriers and unanswered questions about accessing university. The need for a system to provide this was acknowledged by all parties in the legislature during the second reading of the *Pathways to Post-secondary Excellence Act*, which calls for the collection and centralization of program-by-program information related to access, among other areas.<sup>24</sup> Such an effort would also be a cost effective way to immediately expand the capacity of guidance staff throughout K-12 education that are stretched thin and in need of such innovations.<sup>25</sup>

The government should convene an expert panel to examine and make recommendations regarding the collection, availability, and accessibility of post-secondary data in Ontario. The panel—comprised of institutional planning and research experts and data management professionals selected by the government—should conduct an investigation and audit of current data gaps in the sector, particularly as they relate to underrepresented groups and their pathways to education. The ultimate goal of such a panel would be to inform and facilitate the creation of a digital hub, which would centralize and publish detailed, program-by-program information relating to university admissions, university experiences, and job outcomes. Moreover, in order to provide specific and timely information about the system’s performance as it relates to access for certain underrepresented groups, the OEN administration should be amended so that students (or their parents) are able to self-identify as belonging to one or more marginalized groups at the time the OEN is assigned.

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<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Training, *Colleges and Universities Act, Revised Statutes of Ontario 1990*, M.19, s.16.  
<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90m19>. *Collection and Use of Personal Information, Ontario Regulation 262/15*.  
<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/150262>.

<sup>20</sup> Rick Miner, *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives: Point the Way to Success* (Toronto: TD Bank Group, 2011), 29.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Michael A. Adamns, Tim Bryant, Yolande E. Chan, Kim Richard Nossal, Kill Scott, John P. Smol, *Imagining the Future: Towards an Academic Plan for Queen’s University* (Kingston: Queen’s University, 2010), 23.

<sup>23</sup> Angelo Vaccaro, “An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education,” *College Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (2012), 8. Marc Frenette, *Why are youth from lower-income families less likely to attend university? Evidence from academic abilities, parental influences, and financial constraints* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Ontario. Parliament. Legislative Assembly of Ontario. *Official Records for 22 October 2015*. 1st sess., 41st Parliament, 2015, [http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/house-proceedings/house\\_detail.do?Date=2015-10-22&Parl=41&Sess=1&locale=en](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/house-proceedings/house_detail.do?Date=2015-10-22&Parl=41&Sess=1&locale=en).

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Hamlin, David Hagen Cameron, and Elyse K. Watkins, *Ontario’s guidance counsellors: Spread thinly in an environment of growing expectations* (Toronto: People for Education, 2016), 7.

## FUNDING OUTREACH PROGRAMS

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**Principle:** Youth in Ontario should have access to outreach programming that promotes pathways for access to university.

**Principle:** Outreach programming should be separate from institutional recruitment efforts.

**Principle:** Strategies for outreach should be specific to the communities in which they are operating and developed through consultation with community stakeholders.

**Concern:** There is insufficient information available to students, families, and communities about university pathways, the costs and benefits of university, and available student financial aid.

**Concern:** There are a variety of community- and institution- based outreach programs that lack outcome metrics and government regulation to prove that access barriers to university are reduced.

**Concern:** Many low-income neighbourhoods lack the resources necessary to execute outreach practices.

**Recommendation:** The Government of Ontario should invest in the creation of grant funding specific to outreach programming encompassing underrepresented groups.

**Recommendation:** Outreach program funding should prioritize the inclusion of strategies targeted to marginalized and low-income communities.

**Recommendation:** Funding should encourage collaboration between municipalities, local school boards, youth organizations, and post-secondary institutions in outreach program development.

**Recommendation:** Outreach program best practices and outcome metrics must be created by the Government of Ontario.

**Recommendation:** The government must conduct long-term evaluations of outreach program participants' educational success to ensure program effectiveness.

It is well known that a majority of young people have made a decision about attending post-secondary education before Grade 11.<sup>26</sup> Access to PSE is also strongly related to parental education and other sociocultural factors separate from parental income and childhood factors, like grades and career aspirations that influence the decision to pursue higher education.<sup>27</sup> Children who make the decision to attend post-secondary education at a younger age are likely to have prepared appropriate savings, attain higher post-secondary graduation rates, and are more likely to spend their time studying rather than undertaking paid work opportunities.<sup>28</sup>

Outreach programming initiatives provide a variety of ways to provide information to students while they are planning their educational careers. This programming may deliver information about pathway planning, financial planning, pre-requisite information, and career outcomes while engaging youth when they are making decisions about post-secondary education. Program outcomes should not disseminate an understanding to students that university is the superior, preferred, or only option. Rather, outreach programming should be separate from institutional recruitment efforts and ensure that university pathways are portrayed as one viable option among many.

Special consideration must be given when designing outreach programming to warrant and incorporate a wide range of experiences, cultures, and diversities wherever possible. Ontario high school students who identify as Black, Latin American, Mixed, or Middle Eastern have the province's lowest graduation rates at 65 percent, 70

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<sup>26</sup> EKOS, *An Examination of Barriers to Pursuing PSE and Potential Solutions* (Toronto: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Ross Finnie, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer, *Access to Post-secondary Education: How Ontario Compares* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2011). Louis N. Christofides, Michael Hoy, Joniada Milla, and Thanasis Stengos, "Grades, Aspirations, and Post-secondary Education Outcomes," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 45, no. 1 (2015): 48-82.

<sup>28</sup> Ross Finnie, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer, *MESA L-SLIS Research Brief #6: When Did You Decide?* (Toronto: Canadian Education Project, 2010).

percent, 73 percent, and 78 percent respectively.<sup>29</sup> In comparison, East Asian, South Asian, and White identified students have graduation rates all above 80 percent.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, characteristics such as not having parents who attended PSE, having a disability, identifying as Indigenous, being from a rural area, or having a family income below \$50,000 negatively predict the chances of university attendance.<sup>31</sup> Current approaches to access have focused on the general population, increasing post-secondary participation rates to 50 percent of youth aged 18 to 24.<sup>32</sup> However, these programs lack clear initiatives that outline methods of increasing participation rates for underrepresented groups. Newer program development should begin to address specific populations and individualized needs.<sup>33</sup>

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should establish an outreach programming grant. The terms of reference for this grant should specify the following proposal requirements:

1. Collaboration between a variety of community stakeholders which may include post-secondary institutions, school boards, municipalities youth centres, or local not-for-profit organizations;
2. Demonstration of financial need;
3. Articulation of outcome metrics for low-income communities and underrepresented groups; and
4. Description of strategies for addressing social, academic, and knowledge barriers as well as barriers to transitioning into post-secondary education.

To demonstrate potential partnerships, applicants could create and submit their grant proposal together or through any other form that the government has demonstrated past success with. This funding would be similar to the Government of Ontario's \$55 million investment as part of the "Access to Opportunities Strategy" in 2006 and 2010. This investment provided targeted funding to post-secondary institutions to provide additional support services, outreach, and recruitment activities for students from disadvantaged and underrepresented populations.<sup>34</sup>

To make outreach programming successful, the government must mandate best practices and fund programs that implement proven strategies. Studies show that informational programs regarding higher education that start early and are coordinated throughout both elementary and secondary school are the most effective.<sup>35</sup> Research also demonstrates that the more community support there is committed to outreach projects and programs the more effective they will be.<sup>36</sup> Finally, it is also important to recognize that barriers are not always mutually exclusive and that results are most likely to be seen if multiple barriers are addressed through programming simultaneously.<sup>37</sup>

The Government of Ontario should work with post-secondary institutions and their respective student associations to track outcomes for students after they engage with outreach programs. This will allow for collaboration and innovation in the way youth are educated about current pathways in education and career planning. The University Students' Council (at Western University) and the McMaster Students' Union are two examples of students' associations that organize and plan their own outreach programming: the Reach Conference and MSU CLAY respectively.<sup>38</sup> These programs are examples of outreach initiatives that run annually and focus on engaging youth within their respective communities. They also seek to begin discussions about university education and build leadership skills. However, both programs display a deficiency of outcomes, goals, and tracking relating to students within the program. This results in difficulty securing long-term funding from external sources due to the inability to showcase long-term successes. To help new and existing programs prove they are comprehensive and evidence-based the government must develop outcome measures that encompass overall program success and long-term tracking in association with any outreach framework.

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<sup>29</sup> Doran, *What are Ontario's Universities Doing to Improve Access*.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ross Finnie, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer, *Access to Post-secondary Education: How Ontario Compares* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Vaccaro, "An Analysis of Access Barriers."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Dale Kirby, "Strategies for widening access in a quasi-market higher education environment: recent developments in Canada," *Higher Education* 62, no. 3 (2011): 267-278.

<sup>35</sup> Laura W. Perna, "Precollege Outreach Programs: Characteristics of Programs Serving Historically Underrepresented Groups of Students," *Journal of College Student Development* 43, no. 1 (2002).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond, and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States*, (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> "Early Outreach Conference," University Students' Council, accessed February 15, 2017, <http://westernusc.ca/early-outreach/>. "CLAY: Creating Leadership Amongst Youth," McMaster Students Union inc., accessed February 15, 2017, <https://www.msucmcmaster.ca/services-directory/1-clay>.

## STRATEGIZING WITHIN LEARNER SEGMENTS

**Principle:** A provincial access strategy should focus on applying multiple interventions through different stages of a learner’s educational career.

**Concern:** Too often, access strategies are implemented as one-day programs that fail to connect with a larger framework or long-term goal.

**Recommendation:** Access strategies should outline methods through learner segments to ensure students are regularly exposed to information about post-secondary learning pathways and/or options.

While OUSA supports one-day campus visits, too often these opportunities are limited to targeted districts and communities. At the moment most of the outreach and recruitment at OUSA schools are single day events or weekly camp-like programs.<sup>39</sup> These short sessions, while impactful, do not build upon previous programs in any meaningful way. This does not strategically set the foundation for future interventions or progress. By ensuring that positive interventions build upon one another, learners will be provided consistent information and exposure to post-secondary information, pathways, and options. This repeated exposure greatly increases their chance of attending post-secondary education.<sup>40</sup>

There is “no single “best” approach or policy instrument; in fact, given the tremendous complexity of access and student success issues, governments generally pursue a range of different approaches simultaneously.”<sup>41</sup> This range of approaches must address the needs of students according to where they are on their educational journey. This would allow for more nuanced approaches to access. Considering students as individuals within stage-based learner segments (early childhood, kindergarten to Grade 8 (primary), Grade 9 to Grade 12 (secondary), and post-secondary) would make it easier to apply targeted interventions at the most appropriate time in a student’s life, rather than broad-strokes interventions aimed at traditionally underrepresented groups. While learner segments allow the government to apply policy strategically, they must remain sensitive to historical and ongoing demographic realities within these segments. In this way, government programs and initiatives can ensure a continuum of support throughout learners’ lives and consider more focused policy approaches to funding, community involvement, system design, and success measures.

An example of a program that practices continual outreach and support is Pathways to Education, a charitable foundation created originally by the Regent Park Community Health Centre in Toronto.<sup>42</sup> Offering academic, social, financial, and advocacy support to students within the community, Pathways to Education provides programming and initiatives to young people helping them to graduate, access higher education, and pursue a variety of career outcomes. Due to the evaluative success of the program, the foundation receives support both provincially and federally, and has now expanded into communities across Canada. Given the success of this program and its model of continual support throughout a learner’s life, the government should build on this model to develop a province-wide access strategy. This strategy should address a variety of access barriers through all learner segments and be implemented consistently across the province.

### EDUCATION PRIOR TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

**Principle:** Parents and guardians need adequate finances and information to prepare for their children’s future education.

**Principle:** Early educational experiences should provide comprehensive support for parents to access information about university planning for their child.

**Concern:** Childcare and primary school settings lack resources that provide parents and guardians with knowledge of university programs and preparation.

<sup>39</sup> Doran, *What are Ontario’s Universities Doing to Improve Access*.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, Glen A., and Field, Cynthia (2013). “Increasing Access to Higher Education: A Review of System-Level Policy Initiatives.” Paper presented at the International Conference on Access Policy in Higher Education (Annual Meeting of the International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes) hosted by Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China, October 31-November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> “Pathways to Education,” Pathways to Education Canada, accessed February 15, 2017, <https://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/>.

**Concern:** Inadequate information and planning may cause parents to deter learners from pursuing pathways to university education.

**Concern:** Without early exposure, parents may miss out on essential opportunities to provide for their children's post-secondary education.

**Concern:** Parents who do not hold degrees may not have as much knowledge of university pathways.

**Recommendation:** The government should mandate that knowledge of university pathways be provided to parents and guardians early in learners' educational journeys.

**Recommendation:** The government should use early childhood education and care, and primary school settings to provide parents, guardians, and caregivers financial literacy education and post-secondary pathway planning information.

It is important for parents to consider and prepare for their children's education pathways. New parents are often excited about their children's futures and want offer many opportunities, but they may not understand the numerous options and contingencies that lie ahead. With equal opportunity to take advantage of financial assistance programs, information sets and perceptions of the costs and benefits of post-secondary education (university in particular) greatly affect students' decisions to attend.<sup>43</sup> When parents are uninformed, they may not have a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities available to help them provide for their children's education or how to develop plans to support them. In order to deliver positive messages about the benefits and accessibility of university education throughout all learner segments, we must look at early childhood education and primary school as avenues for information sharing and policy change.

Learning gaps present themselves by four years of age.<sup>44</sup> As a result, more than one in four children enter Grade 1 significantly behind their peers.<sup>45</sup> Research has also shown that as this learning gap persists later in life, the need for investment in expensive programs to address it increases, costing the government more in the long term than it would cost to simply close or prevent the gap in the first place.<sup>46</sup> Early childhood education can be used twofold: to better prepare children as well as their parents, guardians, and caregivers for successful educational careers.

Parental involvement and socio-economic status reflect a successful transition out of high school. The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) reports that students who live with both parents have a better chance of graduating high school (85.3%) compared to students living with only one parent or another arrangement (69.8% and 69.7%).<sup>47</sup> Parental occupation influences transition out of high school as well: students who have parents with professional occupations are more likely to graduate high school (90.3%) than students whose parents have less profitable occupations (73.3%). Likewise, when parents have attended university, children have a better chance of graduating university themselves (88.4%).<sup>48</sup> These findings indicate a strong relationship between university-educated parents and university attainment, but unfortunately, the inverse is more likely to be the case among certain underrepresented groups. Indigenous parents, for example, are less likely to have a university education and are thus less likely to have relevant experience and knowledge to encourage their children to consider university pathways.<sup>49</sup> Crown wards may miss out on these parental influences entirely.

Immigrant parents are more likely to save for their children's future education compared to parents who are native-born Canadians.<sup>50</sup> While it seems that these parents are aware they lack the privilege of native-Canadians, and attempt to combat these disadvantages using education, it is often hard to save money when they are coping with new lifestyles, paying off mortgages, and trying to obtain secure employment.<sup>51</sup> So while the overall post-secondary access rate is higher among first and second generation immigrants, the university attendance rate is lower.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Angelo Vaccaro, "An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," *College Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (2012).

<sup>44</sup> Charles E. Pascal, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Margret Norrie McCain, J. Fraser Mustard, and Kerry McCuaid, *Early Years Study 3: Making decisions, Taking action* (Toronto: Margaret & Wallace McCain Foundation, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Toronto District School Board, *Grade 9 Cohort of 2006-2011*.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Toronto District School Board. *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).

<sup>50</sup> Toronto District School Board. *Student Group Overviews*.

<sup>51</sup> Toronto District School Board. *Student Group Overviews*. Vaccaro, "An Analysis of Access Barriers."

<sup>52</sup> Vaccaro, "An Analysis of Access Barriers."

To avoid creating barriers at the beginning of students' educational careers, the government should continue its work to centralize and develop Best Start Child and Family Centres as outlined in the *With Our Best Future in Mind* strategy.<sup>53</sup> OUSA would like to emphasize the importance of this initiative. The centres should include appropriate information for families and caregivers about post-secondary education pathways to ensure accurate information about employment outcomes, financial planning, and program choice are available.

As students move through their primary school education, more specific information about post-secondary education pathways can be conveyed to parents and guardians. This would be an appropriate time to discuss specific mechanisms for accumulating savings (for example, Registered Education Savings Plans and the associated grants and bonds for low-income families) and the real costs of different educational pathways. Recognizing that decisions to pursue higher education are made very early in students' lives, elementary school is also the time to discuss with students and their parents and guardians the specific prerequisites and application processes associated with various post-secondary education pathways.

While universities themselves should not be approaching students during their primary education, it is crucial to begin developing a "culture of PSE" at this stage that dismantles early, informal streaming practices. This necessitates a combined effort between parents or guardians and schools, as not all children have the privilege of living with two parents. Elementary school achievement is influenced by informal streaming; an effect that carries forward to secondary school when formal streaming into academic/applied, college/university streams occurs.<sup>54</sup> The consequence is such that lower streams show substantially higher dropout rates and less post-secondary participation. Being more mindful of the social and academic expectations that parents, guardians, and elementary schools impose upon young students serves to circumvent the relegation of underrepresented groups to educational pathways that reinforce their marginalization.<sup>55</sup>

## SECONDARY SCHOOL

### *Curriculum*

**Principle:** High school is a significant period of impact in students' pathways to post-secondary education.

**Concern:** High school curriculum is predominantly Eurocentric, and fails to acknowledge other valuable content from cultures that make up a significant portion of the school age population.

**Concern:** First generation students lack the financial literacy information that they need to make the best decisions for their future, including possible attendance of post-secondary education.

**Recommendation:** The Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and Skills Development should introduce a broader range of source material in the curriculum that has diverse perspectives.

**Recommendation:** The government should invest in collecting data with the purpose of emphasizing representation as an access solution.

**Recommendation:** The government should continue to mandate that high schools increase financial literacy instruction through implementing mandatory courses, with the purpose of increasing knowledge surrounding the financial costs of post-secondary education.

Students are lacking information they need to make decisions for their futures. They are not aware of all the possible options and pathways, and what might work best for them. One possible solution to lies in mentorship models. Miner suggests that high schools, guidance departments, and post-secondary schools should collaborate with the intention of better supporting students in graduating high school and furthering their education.<sup>56</sup>

A review of socio-demographic data in particular demonstrates that students are faced with varying difficulties and are often lacking in particular resources or supports, therefore creating demographic gaps in the Ontario student

<sup>53</sup> Vaccaro, "An Analysis of Access Barriers."

<sup>54</sup> David Clandfield, Bruce Curtis, Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Alison Gaymes San Vicente, D.W. Livingstone, and Harry Smaller, "Restacking the Deck: Streaming by class, race and gender in Ontario schools," *Our Schools/Our Selves* 23, no. 2 (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Miner, *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives*.

population.<sup>57</sup> In particular, immigrant groups need supports to create equity to combat the problem of racism. Part of this includes inclusive curriculum.<sup>58</sup> Multicultural education is defined as teaching “powerful ideas of the past and differences in how ideas are constructed.”<sup>59</sup> The current curriculum lacks this way of teaching and reinforces structural and institutional oppression and disadvantage.

The ideas of race and culture have become concepts that are frequently discussed but poorly understood. It is valuable for students to understand the roots of diversity and the systems of power and oppression that have developed from colonialism.<sup>60</sup> For example *Making Space* provides a reminder to teachers that there are various groups in our society that are not able to fully participate in community, employment, and education, due to systemic and attitudinal barriers, both intentional and unintentional. The goal of multicultural education is to enable development of potential and the attainment of knowledge, skills, and attitudes so that marginalized groups can fully contribute to society. It is the responsibility of the education system to prevent differences among learners from impeding participation in school, particular learning outcomes, or contribution to society.

The idea behind incorporating diversity and culturally relevant practices into high school curriculum is to instill a sense of power and identity in learners; that they might better understand their capability to choose their post-secondary pathway. The following research shows that students who receive multicultural education have better post-secondary attainment rates and life outcomes in general.

One example is the Biwaase’aa program in publicly funded schools in northwestern Ontario. Program attendance was associated with increases in literacy and math scores, lower rates of behavioural referrals, lateness, and increases in attendance.<sup>61</sup> The program involves education focused on traditional knowledge as well as allowing teachers to present contemporary knowledge while involving the culture of the local Indigenous community.<sup>62</sup> In typical programming First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students in northwestern schools have been shown to perform poorer compared to their Biwaase’aa educated peers in reading, writing, and mathematics (as Grade 3 and 6 EQAO tests have shown).<sup>63</sup>

Another example: the Nunavut Sivuniksavut (NS) program teaches young adults about the history of their world, land claims, and politics from an Inuit perspective. The goal of the program is to aid Inuit young adults in their transition from high school to post-secondary education or the workforce. Due to the relevance of the course content to the participants’ cultural identity, the responsiveness and flexibility of the instructors’ curriculum, and the positive relationships made through the program, the program has been successful in alleviating insecurity in students. After completion of the program, 42% of students attend college and 15% attend university.<sup>64</sup>

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should adapt what and how high school curriculum is taught. Students who attend Ontario institutions come from a wide range of backgrounds and heritages that are not holistically represented by the current Eurocentric perspective, which dominates social studies, studies of history, geography, literature, and the sciences. The Ontario Science Curriculum manual outlines some productive ways that equity and inclusive education can be applied in the sciences. For example, when teachers are choosing examples, samples, and questions to use in their classrooms they need to be representative and inclusive of their students and the provincial population.<sup>65</sup>

Dayo Baiyewu, English teacher at Winston Churchill Collegiate Institute, has said of the Africentric approach applied in Toronto: “It’s not so much about having all black teachers, you need teachers who are comfortable using materials that are more culturally diverse than what they’re used to.”<sup>66</sup> Diane Janzen, the education manager at Seabird Island Band and former Chilliwack school trustee in BC reminds policy makers: “When a student doesn’t

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<sup>57</sup> Miner, *GTA Post-secondary Access Initiatives*.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> John A. Hodson and Julian Kitchen, *A Strategy for Change: Supporting Teachings and Improving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit School Success in Provincially Funded Northwestern Ontario Schools* (Thunder Bay: Northern Policy Institute, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Murray Angus and Morley Hanson, “The New “Three R’s”: An award-winning college program for Inuit youth shows the benefits of a small learning environment and culturally-relevant curriculum,” in *The Voice of Nunavut: Learning from the Eastern Arctic’s education challenges, Our Schools/Our Selves* 20, no. 4 (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education, *Revised Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12: Science* (Toronto: Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> People for Education. *The Annual Report on Ontario’s Public Schools*. (Toronto: People for Education, 2007).

graduate, it's not about their failure; it's about [the system's] failure, [and its] inability to provide education that's relevant."<sup>67</sup>

In addition, there is evidence that low levels of financial literacy have been linked to poor life outcomes, such as increased personal and household debt, poor health, adverse choices, and inadequate retirement planning.<sup>68</sup> It is important for young adults to be informed as they begin to navigate adulthood because they will be forced to make financial decisions while trying to also navigate other life changes. Poorly informed decisions can have long-term consequences.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, there are well-established correlations between financial literacy and financial wellbeing. Saving is less of a concern in early adulthood and research demonstrates that debt management rather than assets accumulation is their primary financial concern.<sup>70</sup> With the exception of student loan balances, financial literacy education leads to lower average debt balances, improvements in repayment behaviour, and decreases in dependence on debt as well as an increase in the ability to manage debt that does exist.<sup>71</sup>

OUSA recognizes that the provincial government is embedding financial literacy into subjects across the curriculum from Grades 4 through 12, particularly in Grade 10 Careers classes. High schools should continue to increase financial literacy instruction to best prepare students for the future decisions they will need to make—especially decisions involving the use of financial assistance to pay for post-secondary education.

### **Streaming**

**Principle:** Academic limits should not be imposed on post-secondary opportunities before students are old enough to independently plan for their futures.

**Principle:** Students from underrepresented groups should not be disadvantaged in their academic stream.

**Concern:** High school course selections influence educational pathways such as post-secondary options and career opportunities.

**Concern:** When students are separated into streams, students from lower income groups have lower outcomes.

**Concern:** Students are required to make choices about their stream before they understand the courses required for their post-secondary pathways.<sup>72</sup>

**Concern:** Most students from low-income families participate in applied streams in Ontario secondary schools.<sup>73</sup>

**Concern:** Transferring between applied and academic streams is very difficult due to the limited availability of transfer credits, the undesirable times these courses are offered, and the cap on the number of secondary school credits a student may receive.<sup>74</sup>

**Recommendation:** Decisions made between university and college streams should be postponed to Grades 11 and 12 entrance.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Education should make efforts to support school boards and individual schools in implementing an easier process for transitioning between university and college streams.

**Recommendation:** As long as streaming exists, the government should invest in better guidance support for students who are trying to decide what stream to enter in Grade 9.

<sup>67</sup> Katie Bartel. "Are our schools failing aboriginal students?" Chilliwack Progress, last modified October 14, 2014, <http://www.theprogress.com/news/279211512.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Cull and Whitton, "University Students' Financial Literacy Levels: Obstacles and Aids," *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 21, no. 1, (2011): 99-114.

<sup>69</sup> Cull and Whitton, "University Students' Financial Literacy Levels."

<sup>70</sup> Meta Brown, Wilbert van der Klaauw, Jaya Wen, and Basit Zafar, *Financial education and the debt behaviour of the young*, Staff Report (New York: Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2013).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10: Guidance and Career Education* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> People for Education. *The Trouble with Course Choices in Ontario High School: Should Low-income = High Applied?* (Toronto: People for Education, 2013).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

The 2015 Annual Report on Ontario’s Publicly Funded Schools indicates that when students make course selections prematurely, they often make decisions that are not reflective of what they might value in the future – once they have gained more insight.<sup>75</sup> The same report also indicated that by putting students into separate streams, the lower groups do not perform as well and drop out of post-secondary schools at higher rates.<sup>76</sup> The results from a TDSB study showed that of students from high-income neighbourhoods, only six percent picked applied courses, whereas in low-income neighbourhoods 33 percent of students picked applied courses.<sup>77</sup> These results suggest that not all students are afforded equitable access to university directly out of high school. The current streaming system severely limits this access, since students are required to make decisions before they have comprehensive understandings of their pathway options.<sup>78</sup>

It also seems that the current system streams students according to their expected performance, rather than their intellectual abilities. While we are aware of its original pedagogical intentions, streaming fails to improve access and allow students to explore potential pathways to education. For this reason, OUSA believes streaming would be more beneficial if it were to begin in Grade 11. This change will also bring streaming inline with its original intentions to enable students to choose to learn in the style best for them (theoretical learning versus hands-on learning).

Students from disadvantaged groups are more likely to “be enrolled in courses with lower expectations, more limited opportunities to learn, and fewer post-secondary options.”<sup>79</sup>As a result, assumed social deficits are conflated with individual deficits and the system entrenches assumptions of different levels of educational intention and ability on the part of racialized and Indigenous youth.<sup>80</sup> Histories of exclusion continue to reproduce discrimination against Indigenous students and students of colour. The TDSB has found that lower proportions of students with Indigenous heritage enroll in Academic courses compared to the school board’s average (48% compared to 66%), while higher proportions enroll in Applied courses (41% compared to 25%).<sup>81</sup> As a result, just 26 percent of Indigenous students in the TDSB apply to university.<sup>82</sup>

As is demonstrated in Table 2 below, among secondary school students in the TDSB, “Black students are significantly overrepresented in Applied, Essential, and Undefined programs.”<sup>83</sup> While they represent about 13 percent of the total student population, they make up almost 23 percent of students in Applied courses, about 29 percent of students in Essential courses, and 16 percent of students whose program is Undefined.

**Table 2: Distribution of TDSB students across program of study (POS) by race.<sup>84</sup>**

Race Across POS	Indigenous	Black	East Asian	Latin American	Middle Eastern	Mixed	South Asian	South East Asian	White
<b>Academic</b>	0.1%	8.8%	20.5%	1.7%	4.9%	6.6%	22.7%	4.7%	29.9%
<b>Applied</b>	0.7%	22.7%	10.5%	3.8%	7.9%	7.9%	16.9%	5.8%	23.8%
<b>Essentials</b>	1.2%	29.3%	5.1%	3.5%	7.6%	7.0%	15.9%	4%	26.5%
<b>Undefined</b>	0.4%	16.1%	21.6%	2.9%	8.1%	5.5%	16.7%	5.4%	23.3%
<b>Total</b>	0.3%	12.6%	17.9%	2.2%	5.8%	6.9%	21%	4.9%	28.3%

Optimal student streaming depends on the interplay of two effects: on one hand, the tracking decision is more appropriate the later it takes place, but on the other, more pupils may benefit from more selective systems.<sup>85</sup> Countries that use streamed (sometimes referred to as “tracked”) education systems—especially early tracked systems—are characterized by high educational inequality and lower average performance.<sup>86</sup> A small number of schools in Ontario have recognized the inequities associated with students’ course decisions in Grade 8 and have

<sup>75</sup> People for Education. *The Annual Report on Ontario’s Publicly Funded Schools*. (Toronto: People for Education, 2015).  
<sup>76</sup> People for Education. *Streaming Students. Excerpt from The 2015 Annual Report on Ontario’s Publicly Funded Schools*. (Toronto: People for Education, 2015). David Clandfield, Bruce Curtis, Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Alison Gaymes San Vicente, D.W. Livingstone, and Harry Smaller, “Restacking the Deck: Streaming by class, race and gender in Ontario schools,” *Our Schools/Our Selves* 23, no. 2 (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014), 79.  
<sup>77</sup> People for Education. *Streaming Students*.  
<sup>78</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>79</sup> People for Education. *The 2013 Annual Report on Ontario’s Publicly Funded Schools*. (Toronto: People for Education, 2013).  
<sup>80</sup> Clandfield et al., *Restacking the Deck*.  
<sup>81</sup> Toronto District School Board. *Student Group Overviews*.  
<sup>82</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>83</sup> Clandfield et al., *Restacking the Deck*, 194.  
<sup>84</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>85</sup> Andrea Mühlenweg, *Educational Effects of Early or Later Secondary School Tracking in Germany*, Discussion Paper No. 07-079 (Mannheim: ZEW Centre of European Economic Research, 2007).  
<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

attempted to combine applied and academic courses in Grade 9.<sup>87</sup> Initial results have been promising with teachers reporting improved student behaviour and time on task in mixed ability Grade 9 academic math classes.<sup>88</sup>

In line with other Canadian provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland & Labrador, and Nova Scotia), the Ministry of Education should commit to this initiative and postpone secondary school streaming to a later grade. That is, students would make decisions to take more academically rigorous and university-bound courses over less academic, more skills-focused courses aimed at entrance into college, or essential skills level courses later in Grade 10, instead of Grade 8.

A study of ability-segregation in Ireland found that expanding entrance into elite schools (effectively detracking, or destreaming, school for some students) had strong, positive net effects on the education system such that overall performance improved.<sup>89</sup> Students previously on the margins of being selected into elite schools performed as well as top-ability students—showing that these students benefitted from the high-ability school context.<sup>90</sup> The highest achieving students did not suffer from attending school with comparably “less able” peers.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the Irish policy change had a negative effect on non-elite schools due to the absence of higher achieving students mixed in with lower achieving students.<sup>92</sup> In Germany, where streaming takes place very early in students’ educational careers, later ability segregation had the most positive effects on students from disadvantaged backgrounds (like students’ whose parents are unemployed or who are first generation immigrants).<sup>93</sup>

While these studies involved students who are assigned to different school tracks at much younger ages than they are in Ontario, the OECD provides evidence against separating students by ability early in secondary school. Using the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the OECD confirmed that separating students into ability groups produces lower outcomes for lower-income groups, especially when they are separated from their peers early in secondary school.<sup>94</sup> They recommend education systems “avoid early tracking and defer student course selections until upper secondary.”<sup>95</sup>

It is both rare and difficult for students to transfer from applied to academic streams. The People for Education’s 2013 Annual Report on Ontario’s Public schools showed that students transfer from applied to academic courses “never” or “not very often.”<sup>96</sup> Ministry policy requires students to complete transfer courses to move from applied courses to academic courses at the next level, however many schools do not offer these courses during school hours. These courses are often offered during the summer or as evening classes. In fact, 34 per cent of schools’ report that they require students to take a transfer course, but of those who require the transfer course, 81 per cent do not offer one during school hours.<sup>97</sup> As long as any type of formal streaming exists, the Ministry of Education should make efforts to support school boards and individual schools in ensuring that transfer courses and better guidance supports are available to students who request them during regular school hours.

### **Guidance Counselling**

**Principle:** Guidance counselling represents a valuable opportunity to break down informational and other non-financial barriers.

**Principle:** All students should have access to effective guidance counselling.

**Concern:** Students under-utilize their guidance counsellors.

**Concern:** Since their roles are not well defined, guidance counsellors are often faced with too many demands and insufficient capacity to help students.

<sup>87</sup> People for Education. *Streaming Students*.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Nina Guyon, Eric Maurin, and Sandra McNally, “The Effect of Tracking Students by Ability into Different Schools: A natural experiment,” *The Journal of Human Resources* 47, no. 3, (2012): 684-721.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Mühlenwag, *Educational Effects of Early or Later Tracking*.

<sup>94</sup> People for Education. *Streaming Students*.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>96</sup> People for Education. *The Trouble with Course Choices in Ontario High School: Should Low-income = Applied?*

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

**Recommendation:** To maximize the provinces' use of guidance counsellors, the government should move away from a pure per-student funding formula of guidance counsellors to a more targeted and community responsive approach.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Education should mandate that guidance counsellors receive regular skills updating regarding processes such as OSAP and financial aid, the process of applying to PSE, and the secondary courses and grades required for university.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Education should define the role of guidance counsellors within the secondary school system to prevent a focus on PSE recruitment efforts.

Guidance counsellors present an invaluable opportunity for students to learn about the educational pathways available to them and how to approach the question of post-secondary education. They can help students dismantle informational hurdles, allowing them to overcome barriers to post-secondary education.

Unfortunately, this potential is not being realized. Evidence suggests that guidance counsellors are not having a positive impact and potentially no impact at all on students seeking higher education. A 2010 survey report released by the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations in partnership with OUSA found that only 20 percent of Canadian university students used guidance counsellors as a primary source for financial aid information. By comparison, a vast majority used friends (57.2 percent) and parents (51.4 percent) as major sources of information.<sup>98</sup> Similar trends can also be found at a secondary-school level.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, a report by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation found that only a minority of students actually interacted with their guidance counsellor.<sup>100</sup> The study concluded that, despite the presence of guidance counsellors, many high school students felt anxious and unprepared to make decisions regarding their post-secondary options.<sup>101</sup>

A study of two high schools in Southern Ontario specifies that students preferred to speak with their family and friends about career-related matters, but that females were more likely than males to consult a guidance counsellor for both academic and career-related matters.<sup>102</sup> As males are currently lagging behind females in terms of university enrolment, it is particularly disconcerting that they may be experiencing greater barriers to information. By not seeking out advice from guidance counsellors students are missing out on important information about the value of higher education, the options available to them, financial aid, and student supports.

Another factor limiting the effectiveness of guidance counsellors in promoting post-secondary access is the broad and imprecise nature of their roles; a survey report released by People for Education reveals how drastically guidance counsellors' duties vary across schools and the wide array of subjects other than post-secondary planning to which they must devote attention, such as mental health and behavioural issues in addition to academic advice.<sup>103</sup> Their roles become less effective when they are not able to narrow their focus.

To address high, varied demand and low capacity, a new structure for providing funding for guidance counselling should be developed. Given that youth in some areas face greater challenges and place higher demand on guidance programs, it is recommended that guidance counsellors be allocated to schools through a needs-based approach, rather than solely based on the number of students, as is currently the case.<sup>104</sup> For example, the current model allocates fewer guidance counsellors to smaller schools; however, smaller schools are often located in rural or remote communities, or in communities with significant numbers of students from marginalized backgrounds. As these students may also be underrepresented in the system and facing the greatest numbers of barriers to university they are also those with the most to gain from guidance counselling. The government should begin developing a new funding strategy that is mindful of this dynamic, which is responsive to the number of pupils in a school while also accounting for the makeup of the student body, especially the presence and proportion of underrepresented students.

<sup>98</sup> M. Kramer, J. Rogers, and E. Kaznowska, *The Illiteracy of the Literate: The Lack of Financial Aid Knowledge among Canadian University Students* (Ottawa: Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2011).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, "Fear of the unknown Due to a lack of information, many Canadian youth have anxieties about post-secondary education," *CAP Journal* (Montreal: Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2009).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> J. Domene, J. Shapka, and D. Keating, "Educational and career-related help-seeking in high school: An exploration of students' choices," *Canadian Journal of Counselling* 40, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>103</sup> Daniel Hamlin, David Hagen Cameron, and Elyse K. Watkins, *Ontario's guidance counsellors: Spread thinly in an environment of growing expectations* (Toronto: People for Education, 2016), 4.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 5.

To further boost the efficacy of guidance counselling in promoting post-secondary access, ongoing professional development and training on OSAP and transitions into higher education should be required. Guidance counsellors are typically education professionals who take advanced qualification (AQ) courses to qualify for guidance positions. OUSA has been successful at working some familiarity of OSAP into these AQ courses however, its impact has yet to be assessed and it may not be sufficient given ongoing OSAP reform. Moreover, while Ontario secondary schools are mandated to administer a “guidance curriculum” that includes financial literacy, this too lacks a specific focus on OSAP and other relevant considerations important to dismantling preconceptions about the costs of university.

OUSA believes that it is extremely important that guidance counsellors are fully educated in all aspects that help students make academic decisions. Especially those aspects that could help a student make a decision about PSE such as OSAP and financial assistance, debt management, application requirements, and alternative pathways. The Ministry of Education should mandate that guidance counsellors receive regular skills updating, as changes and requirements in the education sector and to social assistance programs are frequent.

## TRANSFER PROGRAMS & BRIDGING PATHWAYS FOR NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

**Principle:** All willing and qualified students seeking to pursue a post-secondary education should be able to choose the pathway that best suits their competency, skills, and interests.

**Principle:** Prospective students who develop qualifications and interest in university education later than the completion of secondary school should have recourse to demonstrate their abilities and pursue university access.

**Principle:** Transfer students should experience the same level of accessibility to Ontario’s universities as traditional students.

**Concern:** Prospective students who develop the interest in, or qualifications for, postsecondary education after the completion of secondary school have limited options to get on the track to university, and these options tend to be inaccessible or decentralized.

**Concern:** Despite the role of the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) in enhancing transfer pathways between and within the college and university sectors, many students’ credentials remain unrecognized by various institutions.

**Concern:** Transfer barriers, in effect, create access boundaries for underrepresented groups trying to bridge their credentials from college and/or apprenticeship programs to university programs.

**Concern:** Many non-traditional students have skills, experience and/or credentials that are not consistently recognized by university admissions.

**Concern:** Non-traditional students face stigma about their qualifications.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should task ONCAT with developing a robust network of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) to be implemented across the province to improve post-secondary pathways for non-traditional students and underrepresented groups.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should encourage, fund, and evaluate bridging programs to help otherwise qualified students access university education.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should reward institutions that prioritize bridging programs as part of their Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) by providing necessary funding for the purposes of enhancing academic support services and reducing student costs.

Sometimes prospective students lack the interest in, or qualifications for, accessing university immediately upon secondary school graduation as a result of systemic barriers affecting marginalized populations.<sup>105</sup> This is partly a result of various socialization factors stemming from the public education system’s use of secondary school streaming, as well as general accessibility issues surrounding university recruitment strategies and targeting towards traditional, secondary students. If prospective students in such circumstances later develop the necessary interest and qualifications, they should have recourse to demonstrate such via alternate pathways.

<sup>105</sup> Jones and Field, “An Analysis of Access Barriers,” 2012.

The demand for such pathways among these populations is clear. According to a recent survey conducted by OUSA, non-traditional students (students not entering directly from high school) are often first generation, over the age of 21, come from Indigenous ancestry, come from a low-income background, have some type of disability and/or have dependents.<sup>106</sup> English Language Learners and new immigrants entering Ontario's education system for the first time can also be considered non-traditional.

The Government of Ontario established the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) in 2011 “to enhance student pathways and reduce barriers for students looking to transfer among Ontario's 45 public post-secondary institutions.”<sup>107</sup> This agency has been essential to developing a credit transfer system between and within the college and university sectors. However, despite their efforts, findings indicate that over one third (36%) of students that have used credit transfer services (whether coming from an institution within or outside Ontario) get less than 40 percent of their credentials recognized by their respective university institution.<sup>108</sup> As such, it is imperative that more substantial efforts are made to ensure that credentials from colleges and apprenticeship programs receive recognition from university programs across Ontario.

Non-traditional students also often enter university with a combination of education and work experience. The extent to which institutions recognize this knowledge and experience is varied and entirely conditional on program status, registration space, and/or partnership with their students' prior institution. OUSA acknowledges that Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) “enables individual participants, employers and providers of further education and training to target and build upon the learning assets that people have acquired experientially and formally in order to fill the specific upgrading gaps that need to be addressed.”<sup>109</sup> As such, the provincial government should task ONCAT with developing a robust network of PLAR to be implemented across the province to improve post-secondary pathways for non-traditional students and underrepresented groups.

Finally, bridging programs offer another viable route for non-traditional students to earn and demonstrate university qualification despite having had lower grades upon finishing secondary school. The options available for such students are limited despite often having faced systemic barriers and information on these programs tends to be inaccessible and decentralized. For example, these programs are typically costly, are not always designed for the specific needs of all underrepresented groups, and tend to be restricted to select programs.<sup>110</sup> To a certain extent bridging programs in Ontario are intended to quell the impact of ‘transfer shock’ on students. This accounts for anticipated drops in GPA and the social and economic challenges of the transition between post-secondary institutions.<sup>111</sup> One of the fundamental aspects of a successful bridging program should “reflect the maturity and outside obligations of transfer students.”<sup>112</sup> OUSA believes that the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should encourage, fund, and evaluate bridging programs to help students with insufficient credits or inadequate entrance averages access university education. Furthermore, the provincial government should reward institutions that prioritize bridging programs as part of their Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) by providing necessary funding for the purposes of enhancing academic support services and reducing student costs.

While OUSA does not advocate for lower standards, or pushing university on those who are not interested, willing, or qualified, it is important to recognize that the choice of attending university or not must be based on personal preference or genuine merit. When these things are determined not freely, but imposed on individuals through systemic barriers, options such as credit transfer and bridging programs become important safeguards and opportunities for correction in the system.

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<sup>107</sup> “About Us,” Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer, accessed February 16, 2017, [http://www.oncat.ca/index\\_en.php?page=about](http://www.oncat.ca/index_en.php?page=about).

<sup>108</sup> Gurrissi and Pierre, *Accessibility*, 14.

<sup>109</sup> Morrissey, Mary and Douglas Myers, *Achieving our potential: An action plan for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) in Canada*, (Halifax: PLA Centre, 2008), 6-7.

<sup>110</sup> Andrea Medovarski, Leslie Sanders and Brenda Spotton Visano, *Is there a Best Fit? Assessing Alternative Entrance Pathways into an Undergraduate Degree for Non-Traditional Students at York University*, (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2015), 16-17.

<sup>111</sup> A. Kerr, M. McCloy and S. Liu, *Forging Pathways: Students who Transfer Between Ontario Colleges and Universities*, (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

<sup>112</sup> Nancy Luckai, Rachel Kushnier, Calla Sampson, Sarah Prouty, Anna Meer, Anthea Kyle, Andrea Tarsitano and Andrew Heppner, *Transitioning to University: Best Practices for College Transfer Bridging Courses* (Toronto: Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer, 2015), 40.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

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### *A Comprehensive Access Strategy*

**Whereas:** All willing and qualified students in Ontario should be able to access and excel within Ontario's post-secondary education system.

**Whereas:** The provincial government should reduce barriers to university access by developing and implementing a comprehensive access strategy.

**Whereas:** Access to post-secondary education should have a singular meaning across Ontario, separate from retention and persistence.

**Whereas:** Strategic Mandate Agreements should be used as a tool for increasing access for underrepresented groups.

**Whereas:** Institutional differentiation should not diminish overall student access to university education.

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

**Whereas:** Robust, accessible information can help prospective students and their families make informed choices and overcome informational barriers.

**Whereas:** Youth in Ontario should have access to outreach programming that promotes pathways for access to university.

**Whereas:** Outreach programming should be separate from institutional recruitment efforts.

**Whereas:** Strategies for outreach should be specific to the communities in which they are operating and developed through consultation with community stakeholders.

**Whereas:** A provincial access strategy should focus on applying multiple interventions through different stages of a learner's educational career.

**Whereas:** Parents and guardians need adequate finances and information to prepare for their children's future education.

**Whereas:** Early educational experiences should provide comprehensive support for parents to access information about university planning for their child.

**Whereas:** High school is a significant period of impact in students' pathways to post-secondary education.

**Whereas:** Academic limits should not be imposed on post-secondary opportunities before students are old enough to independently plan for their futures.

**Whereas:** Students from underrepresented groups should not be disadvantaged in their academic stream.

**Whereas:** Guidance counselling represents a valuable opportunity to break down informational and other non-financial barriers.

**Whereas:** All students should have access to effective guidance counselling.

**Whereas:** All willing and qualified students seeking to pursue a post-secondary education should be able to choose the pathway that best suits their competency, skills, and interests.

**Whereas:** Prospective students who develop qualifications and interest in university education later than the completion of secondary school should have recourse to demonstrate their abilities and pursue university access.

**Whereas:** Transfer students should experience the same level of accessibility to Ontario’s universities as traditional students.

**Be it resolved that:** The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should create a comprehensive and holistic access strategy, which addresses all barriers to post-secondary education and ensures access for all willing and qualified students.

**Be it further resolved that:** The government’s access strategy should include a definition of access to post-secondary education, which guides all access initiatives in Ontario.

**BIFRT:** The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should use Strategic Mandate Agreements to monitor enrolment growth among underrepresented groups with the intention of increasing their respective enrolments to match population parities in Ontario.

**BIFRT:** The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should coordinate institutional specialization in SMA access priorities.

**BIFRT:** Provincial performance-based funding should be associated with access initiatives outlined in Strategic Mandate Agreements.

**BIFRT:** The government should convene an expert panel to examine and make recommendations regarding the collection, availability, accessibility, and publication of post-secondary data in Ontario.

**BIFRT:** The government should develop a common standard for universities to collect demographic data for the purposes of furthering the goals of a comprehensive access strategy.

**BIFRT:** The 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.

**BIFRT:** The Government of Ontario should invest in the creation of grant funding specific to outreach programming encompassing underrepresented groups.

**BIFRT:** Outreach program funding should prioritize the inclusion of strategies targeted to marginalized and low-income communities.

**BIFRT:** Funding should encourage collaboration between municipalities, local school boards, youth organizations, and post-secondary institutions in outreach program development.

**BIFRT:** Outreach program best practices and outcome metrics must be created by the Government of Ontario.

**BIFRT:** The government must conduct long-term evaluations of outreach program participants’ educational success to ensure program effectiveness.

**BIFRT:** Access strategies should outline methods through learner segments to ensure students are regularly exposed to information about post-secondary learning pathways and/or options.

**BIFRT:** The government should mandate that knowledge of university pathways be provided to parents and guardians early in learners’ educational journeys.

**BIFRT:** The government should use early childhood education and care, and primary school settings to provide parents, guardians, and caregivers financial literacy education and post-secondary pathway planning information.

**BIFRT:** The Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and Skills Development should introduce a broader range of source material in the curriculum that has diverse perspectives.

**BIFRT:** The government should invest in collecting data with the purpose of emphasizing representation as an access solution.

**BIFRT:** The government should continue to mandate that high schools increase financial literacy instruction through implementing mandatory courses, with the purpose of increasing knowledge surrounding the financial cost of post-secondary education.

**BIFRT:** Decisions made between university and college streams should be postponed to Grades 11 and 12 entrance.

**BIFRT:** The Ministry of Education should make efforts to support school boards and individual schools in implementing an easier process for transitioning between university and college streams.

**BIFRT:** As long as streaming exists, the government should invest in better guidance support for students who are trying to decide what stream to enter in grade 9.

**BIFRT:** To maximize the provinces' use of guidance counsellors, the government should move away from a pure per-student funding formula of guidance counsellors to a more targeted and community responsive approach.

**BIFRT:** The Ministry of Education should mandate that guidance counsellors receive regular skills updating regarding processes such as OSAP and financial aid, the process of applying to PSE, and the secondary courses and grades required for university.

**BIFRT:** The Ministry of Education should define the role of guidance counsellors within the secondary school system to prevent a focus on PSE recruitment efforts.

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should task ONCAT with developing a robust network of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) to be implemented across the province to improve post-secondary pathways for non-traditional students and underrepresented groups.

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