



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)

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STUDENT LEARNING UPDATE: PREPARATION OF STUDENTS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

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PURPOSE:

1. This report provides an update on student enrolment across program pathways, job skills programs, and secondary courses, and highlights pathways-focused experiential learning opportunities for students in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB). It also reports on student achievement data for credit accumulation and graduation rates, as well as student perceptions of future preparedness, in alignment with the Ministry of Education's focus on preparing students for future success.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. Student achievement planning and prioritization are directly aligned with the OCDSB's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan and the Ministry's Student Achievement Plan (SAP), outlined in Appendix A. This alignment is evident in the OCDSB's Board Priority Learning Plan (BPLP), outlined in Appendix B, for Pathways and Preparedness, as well as the Learning and Social Responsibility pillars of the OCDSB's Strategic Plan. Specifically, the priorities in the BPLP are: enhancing program access for underserved students; fostering diverse and student-driven learning; closing achievement gaps; amplifying student voice; and developing essential life and learning skills.

CONTEXT:

3. In 2023, the Ministry introduced the Student Achievement Plan (SAP) to establish a consistent framework for school districts in prioritizing student success. The SAP outlines key priority areas: enhancing core academic skills, fostering student engagement and well-being, and preparing students for future success. The OCDSB provides annual reports on each priority area, alongside the Ministry's [SAP reporting template](#). This regular reporting on student outcomes demonstrates progress and guides strategic planning toward OCDSB's short and long-term goals. This final student learning update specifically addresses the section of the SAP related to preparation of students for future success.

Table 1. Timeline for OCDSB Updates on Student Learning

Report Timing	Priority Area
February 2025	Achievement of Learning Outcomes in Core Academic Skills
March 2025	Student Engagement and Well-Being
May 2025	Preparation of Students for Future Success

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. **SAP Indicators for Preparation of Students for Future Success**
Relevant to preparing students for the future, the SAP identified specific and measurable indicators. These five indicators are reported in the OCDSB Student Learning Update: Preparation of Students for Future Success Appendix C:
 - credit accumulation;
 - participation in job skills programs;
 - graduation rates;
 - enrolment in grade 11 and 12 math and science courses; and,
 - student perceptions of preparedness.

Note that although Ministry indicators have been used to identify key data sources for monitoring progress, there are some inconsistencies between Ministry-reported and internally-calculated results. These discrepancies arise due to differences in methodology, storage and sharing of records, and the inability locally to track students who transition in and out of the OCDSB. As such, Ministry data is ideal for comparisons between the province and the District, while internally-calculated results are ideal for the disaggregation of data.

The OCDSB uses disaggregated data to monitor the progress of identified groups and inform efforts to reduce disproportionalities. Student identity data is based on information available from the student information system and the Valuing Voices Student Survey. Disaggregation of data, including disproportionalities indices, is included in Appendix C. When disaggregating data, it is important to consider participation rates and how low counts can contribute to fluctuations in

percentages. Additionally, it is important to consider how a group is identified (e.g., through self-identification, formal assessment, or records from Statistics Canada). Note that students with special education needs include those with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and/or those who have been identified through the Identification and Placement Review Committee (IPRC), and excludes students identified as gifted.

4.1 Credit Accumulation

Grade 9 and 10 students typically take a full course load of eight credits each year to establish a solid foundation in a range of subjects. Research shows that completing 16 credits by the end of grade 10 keeps students on track to graduate with their peers. The way the OCDSB tracks and monitors credit accumulation has recently evolved to better align with provincial reporting (e.g., reporting is based on the cohort of students who were active in grade 9 the previous year).

Data on student credit accumulation shows that 82% of OCDSB students are on track to graduate by the end of grade 10, compared to 78% of students province-wide. Compared to 2022-2023, there was a 1% decrease in the percentage of OCDSB students meeting this target. To facilitate early intervention, the OCDSB also monitors credit accumulation at the end of grade 9, at both the school and District-levels, as part of the Board's Priority Learning Plan.

Differences were observed in credit accumulation based on student identity data. Based on population-level data, students who identify as Indigenous were the least likely to be on track to graduate, followed by students with special education needs (excluding gifted). Data is further explored by various aspects of identity, based on both population-level and survey data, and is reported in Appendix C.

4.2 Job Skills Programs (Specialist High Skills Major, Dual Credit, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program)

A number of innovative programs are available to students to encourage a secondary school experience that is engaging and aligned with students' strengths and future goals. Some of these programs are OCDSB-created, as described below and in pathways-focused & experiential Learning opportunities at the OCDSB, outlined in Appendix D, while others are offered throughout the province. Three Ministry-directed programs include:

- Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) offers specialized learning and courses within schools, allowing students to explore specific career sectors in depth. A key aspect involves collaboration with community partners and industry professionals to tackle authentic and meaningful challenges;
- Dual Credit allows secondary students to take college courses, earning both college and high school credits simultaneously, while building confidence and further developing their skills; and,
- Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) allows students in trades-focused cooperative education programs (co-op) to complete their Level 1 Apprenticeship, gaining practical trade experience and

accumulating apprenticeship hours.

Participation in at least one of the job skills programs listed above is considered an indicator of preparedness for future success and is included as an indicator in the Ministry's Student Achievement Plan. In 2023-2024, 15% of grade 11 and 12 students were enrolled in at least one job skills program at the OCDSB ($n = 2,016$). Note that this rate is much higher than the rate that the Ministry reports for the OCDSB (8%). To ensure greater accuracy in the next Ministry report, the OCDSB has identified strategies this year to improve the collection and sharing of enrolment data for OCDSB job skills programs, enabling more meaningful comparisons with provincial averages moving forward.

Disaggregation by identity-based data shows that participation was higher for some historically underserved groups of students. Students who identify as Indigenous, transgender, non-binary, or gender diverse, and students with a special education need (excluding gifted) had higher participation rates in the job skills programs when compared to the overall grade 11-12 population. Multilingual learners (MLLs), on the other hand, had a lower participation rate.

4.3 Graduation Rates

Earning a high school diploma is an important milestone for future opportunities after graduation. To calculate graduation rates, the Ministry tracks a cohort of students based on when and where they started grade 9 to determine the percentage of students earning an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) within five years¹. Based on these calculations, 91% of OCDSB students who started grade 9 in 2018-2019 graduated within five years (compared to a rate of 90% for the province).

While the Ministry's cohort-level calculations cannot be replicated without information for students who have moved out of the OCDSB, an internal metric has been calculated to approximate the Ministry's criteria for the students who stayed at the OCDSB through to graduation². Disaggregation of data, based on this cohort, is done using identity-based data from the students' grade 9 year (or closest possible time point) and the 2019 Valuing Voices Student Survey. This analysis demonstrated that students who identify as Indigenous and those with disabilities are proportionately less likely to graduate with an OSSD within 5 years of starting secondary school, compared to the District average. East Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian students had higher-than-average graduation rates.

¹ Students are considered as belonging to the board where they first started grade 9, even if they switched boards prior to graduation. The calculation excludes students who moved out-of-province or who are deceased.

² This is based on the dataset validated by the Ministry of Education, employing set criteria for calculations, and is not necessarily reflective of all students served at the OCDSB (e.g., excludes Adult High School and Continuing Education).

4.4 Enrolment in Senior Math and Science Courses

Senior math and science courses are no longer compulsory. To monitor student engagement in math and science pathways, a key indicator is the percentage of students enrolled in either grade 11 science, grade 12 science, or grade 12 math (as a proportion of all students enrolled in any grade 11 or 12 course). In 2023-2024, OCDSB rates held steady from the previous year at 59%, a rate 1% higher than that seen province-wide. District-wide identity-based data shows that students who identify as Indigenous, transgender, non-binary, and/or gender diverse are underrepresented among those enrolled in grade 11 and grade 12 math/science. Although to a lesser extent, there are also proportionally fewer students with special education needs (excluding gifted), MLLs, and students residing in low-income neighbourhoods enrolled in these courses, as compared to the District average. Additional analysis by identity data is included in Appendix C.

4.5 Preparedness for Next Steps in Learning

In 2023-2024, the EQAO Questionnaire included a question about whether students felt prepared for learning in the next semester or next school year. This question was included for students in grade 6 and 9, as well as those writing the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). Since this was the first year the question was included, data is not available to monitor change over time. The Ministry's Student Achievement plan reports on the aggregate responses across all three questionnaires, indicating that 63% of students reported feeling prepared at the OCDSB and across the province. When explored across the different grade levels, results show higher rates of feeling prepared in the older grades. Although patterns vary across the three groups, overarching trends tend to show that students who identify as Indigenous and students with special education needs (excluding gifted) reported the lowest preparedness for future learning. MLLs reported higher preparedness for future learning than the District average. Additional disaggregation is included in Appendix C.

5. **Pathways-Focused & Experiential Learning Opportunities at the OCDSB**

Providing diverse and relevant learning opportunities is paramount to student success, both academically and in their transition to post-secondary pathways. Authentic student engagement cultivates agency, empowering them to actively shape their learning, especially when exploring future options. The OCDSB is committed to offering a comprehensive suite of experiential learning opportunities, encompassing Ministry-directed initiatives, expanded Ministry initiatives, and innovative OCDSB-created programs driven by student voice, all designed to meet the varied needs of the OCDSB's student population. By prioritizing and acting upon student perspectives, the District is fostering more meaningful and diversified learning experiences that value students' unique identities and lived experiences. This approach effectively bridges classroom learning with authentic experiences, enabling students to explore their interests, thoughtfully consider future pathways, and build essential confidence through practical engagement.

The District is demonstrating significant growth and success across several key programs and learning opportunities for students:

Program	Key Achievements
Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% increase in enrolment and diplomas awarded in 2024-2025 • 3 new programs approved by Ministry for 2025-2026
Cooperative Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student engagement grew by nearly 7% in 2024-2025 • Partnerships are expanding to include an additional 150 specialized co-op positions for 2025-2026
School Within a College (SWAC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully re-engaged over 50 out-of-school students this year (over one-third of whom are Indigenous), with 47 projected to earn their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)/Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC) by the end of this year • 184 students have graduated in the past 5 years through SWAC
School Within a University (SWAU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation has increased by 30% for 2024-2025, with all students identified as Indigenous or from a historically underserved group
Authentic Student Learning Experience (ASLE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 400 students have earned over 900 credits in 2024-2025 • Over 4,000 credits earned since 2020-2021
Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will see an increase of 200 spaces available for students next year • OYAP participation increased by 35% in 2024-2025, with an overall increase of 95% since 2020-2021
Trades and Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 100 additional sections added this year, representing approximately 2000 students engaging in technology and trades
eLearning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offerings will grow from 160 courses in 2024-2025 to 240 courses that will be offered in 2025-2026
New Opportunities and Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding partnerships with trade unions and businesses to establish authentic learning experiences in different pathway options for students in 2025-2026

The following section highlights a selection of other impactful experiential learning opportunities that have been implemented this year. A comprehensive overview of the numerous programs, initiatives, and events that support experiential learning, pathways exploration, and the central role of student voice, including their impact and outcomes, can be found in Appendix D.

5.1 Learning Takes Flight

Learning Takes Flight is an initiative targeting high school students (ages 14 to 18) to enhance their science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics

(STEAM) literacy and introduce them to potential career pathways in the aviation, space, and mobility sector. The program uses authentic learning methodologies, engaging students in analyzing current industry issues and collaboratively developing innovative solutions, supported by mentorship from professionals in the field.

Student Learning Need:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic engagement linking classroom learning to contextualized industry challenges • Opportunities to analyze issues and create innovative solutions for industry-related problems • Exposure and awareness to diverse learning pathways • Incorporation of student perspectives in shaping learning experiences to foster agency
Actions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnered with the Canada Aviation and Space Museum (CASM) and industry partners • Students engaged with relevant and authentic “Problems of Practice” connected to the industry
Evidence of Impact:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student participation doubled from 2023-2024; over 1000 students participated in 2024-2025 from all pathways and curricular areas • Students and educators reported significantly higher engagement and enjoyment compared to regular classes, with students expressing strong interest in future opportunities • Examples of cross-curricular learning discoveries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 12 Physics: A student-led project resulting in a zero-noise emission, cost-effective surveillance drone so effective it led to the student's hiring by Transport Canada to address a specific Government of Canada need. • Grade 11 Fitness: The development of a specialized fitness regime for astronaut health in zero-gravity and re-entry scenarios. • Grade 10 Business: The design and marketing of innovative "Airports of the Future" driven by insights into traveller dissatisfaction. • ESL (English as a Second Language) and ELD (English Language Development) Classes: The creation of an essential "Newcomers Guide to Air Travel in Canada." • The program was highly valued by students and educators for its real-world relevance, development of critical skills, and experiential learning, leading to high satisfaction and influencing how educators assess student learning. • CASM will be using this as an exemplar for other industry partners and museums as they develop a national program.

5.2 School Within a Trade (SWAT) and Apprenticeship

The School Within a Trade will immerse grade 11 and 12 students in intensive skilled trades training, directly integrating co-op placements that will extend into apprenticeships. This experiential learning model, building on the success of

similar programs, equips students with practical skills and industry-recognized certifications, offering a direct pathway from secondary school to a career in the trades.

<p>Student Learning Need:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessity for more engaging and diverse learning experiences, both in and out of the classroom, to develop foundational knowledge and practical skills in technology and skilled trades, better preparing them for apprenticeships and future careers • Importance of ensuring students are well-prepared, safe, and fully supported when participating in experiential learning opportunities within the community to maximize their engagement and success
<p>Actions:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched the SWAT in partnership with Carpenters Union 93 and industry • Secured \$250,000 Skills Development Fund Grant to support the SWAT model, integrating academic credit with apprenticeship training • Obtained \$250,000 from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) to develop a new cooperative education partnership • Targeted SWAT engagement for underserved students interested in trades/apprenticeships, individualizing opportunities • Established employer relationships to provide support and mentorship for underrepresented groups in trades and technology (e.g., female, Indigenous, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) students)
<p>Evidence of Impact:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid co-op placements at Carpenters Union Local 93 provided specialized training for 12 students, leading to 8 securing full-time employment and Level 1 college progression • In 2024-2025, there was an increase of 35%, representing 1005 students engaged in OYAP placements through co-op, with 78 moving to sponsored apprenticeships • Apprenticeship examples include: 8 Construction program graduates transitioning to fully paid Level 1 apprenticeships; 11 students joining the Department of National Defence Army Reserves Program; 10 apprenticeships with Ottawa Police Services; and 20 apprenticeships in Early Childhood Education and Youth Work

5.3 STEMquest

The STEMquest Initiatives (STEM refers to science, technology, engineering and math) cultivates essential STEM skills with students in grade 7 and 8 through inquiry-based and authentic learning experiences. These programs prioritized the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration, aligning learning with curriculum objectives and student interests. Notably, student-led investigations and the creation of student-run businesses fostered engagement and provided practical, authentic applications of STEM concepts.

Student Learning Need:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and STEM comprehension through engaging learning experiences that foster a passion for continuous learning • Connect STEM theory to practical understanding through authentic learning experiences aligned with curriculum and individual interests • Understand diverse educational and career pathways, empowering informed choices and integrating student perspectives into the learning process
Actions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered grade 7-8 students to develop critical thinking through collaborative STEM inquiries aligned with their curriculum and interests • Supported authentic learning experiences, co-designed with school teams and community partners, that inspired and engaged students
Evidence of Impact:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 1400 students participated, indicating broad engagement • Intermediate Student Success Teachers reported significant re-engagement of underserved students through program activities • The program fostered teacher-student collaboration, creating a more dynamic learning environment • Educators shifted pedagogy towards authentic STEM learning experiences, enhancing student understanding • Collaboration between schools and central staff led to more extended learning opportunities that valued student voice and community connections

6. Further Actions in Response to Achievement Gaps

Staff continue to learn from the impact of many of these innovative learning opportunities on student achievement and well-being. At the same time, the District recognizes the need to increase intentional programming support for students who continue to achieve at a lower rate. Staff continue to explore, develop, and implement diversified learning experiences to better meet the needs of all OCDSB students. Some examples of opportunities that specifically support and address the needs of underserved students include the following:

- Identity and culturally relevant considerations driving access to program options;
- Centering student voice to support student-driven and co-constructed learning and choice in connecting lived experiences (i.e., Indigenous learnings), working towards achieving pathway goals (e.g., Authentic Student Learning Experience(ASLE));
- Prioritizing specific groups of students for programs (e.g., SHSM, Dual Credit, SWAU, etc.) that are historically undersubscribed by Indigenous and underserved communities;
- Supporting expansion of the ASLE framework, providing meaningful, experiential learning for underserved, credit-deficient students, linking their lives to formal learning and pathway exploration, effectively re-engaging students with diverse needs and experiences;

- Recognizing and valuing lived experiences for newcomers to Canada through assessments at the Family Reception Centre (FRC), connecting credits to those lived experiences;
- Re-engage students while creating direct connections to college and university through SWAC and SWAU;
- Events like Women in Trades and We Build a Dream expose female-identifying students to skilled trades and technology careers; and,
- Embedding CRRP and Indigenous practices within math learning.

This report presents information and examples of OCDSB learning opportunities and experiences that support student achievement and wellbeing. It is understood, however, that the work undertaken has not yet met the needs of every student, and barriers exist that limit options and cause harm to some students. Additional actions to change this reality include, but are not limited to:

- Understand student needs and identities to ensure equitable access to diverse program options and targeted support for those who need it most;
- Support multiple pathways and program options at the school level to help students achieve their postsecondary goals;
- Enhance learning experiences for all students, especially the underserved, by incorporating student voice, building educator capacity, and broadening the understanding of how learning is demonstrated; and,
- Actively engage students, alongside educators and parents, to co-develop diverse, experiential, and culturally relevant learning practices that connect life, learning, and future goals.

7. **Using Data to Support Schools and Students**

To ensure that student data effectively guides the OCDSB's work at the District and school levels, the OCDSB utilizes a Data Support Model, which strategically connects research staff directly with school principals, fostering a collaborative environment for data analysis and interpretation. By working together, principals gain deeper insights into their student populations and achievement trends, while the research team benefits from essential contextual understanding. This partnership is crucial for facilitating data-driven decision-making and implementing evidence-informed practices that directly benefit student outcomes.

Furthermore, to leverage data and enhance pathway engagement, pathway data profiles have been created for every school. These one-page infographics present three years of District and school data on a range of Experiential Learning programs, including Cooperative Education, Dual Credit, eLearning, Trades and Technology, SHSM, OYAP, ASLE, and the Launch Secondary virtual conference. By prompting principal and educator reflection and discussion on these profiles, the aim is to deepen understanding of their practical application in the classroom, cultivate shared responsibility for pathway success, and identify professional learning opportunities to effectively support student participation.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8. All expenses for this work have been funded through existing District funds and Ministry of Education grants.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

9. The information presented in this report is an important component of District-level monitoring and accountability to the community. The data also provides important context for schools, as administrators work with central departments such as the Research, Evaluation, and Analytics Department (READ) and Program Services to have more in-depth and tailored conversations about their school-level data. Some of the innovative opportunities for students are also promoted publicly to showcase the unique experiential learning opportunities available at the OCDSB.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

10. The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:
- How does the strategic plan inform the evolution of District work?
 - How does this data inform the District's focus on program quality and accessibility?
 - What observations can be made from this data to inform next steps for the District?
 - What questions does the data raise?
 - How can the District ensure that the learning priorities of underserved students are clearly articulated in our ongoing work?

FOR DISCUSSION

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Student Achievement Plan

Appendix B Board Priority Learning Plan

Appendix C Student Learning Update: Preparation of Students for Future Success

Appendix D Pathways-Focused & Experiential Learning Opportunities at the OCDSB