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Pathways-Focused & Experiential Learning Opportunities at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

This appendix highlights the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board’s (OCDSB) commitment to actively engaging authentic student voice through a comprehensive suite of experiential learning opportunities that intentionally connect students' lives, learning, and future pathways. This overview details a range of opportunities, including Ministry-directed and expanded initiatives, alongside innovative OCDSB-created learning opportunities driven by student input. All are strategically designed to address the diverse needs of the OCDSB’s student population and foster meaningful learning experiences.

Ministry-Driven Programming		
<p>These Ministry-driven requirements embed foundational opportunities related to exploring future pathways and authentic applications, influencing experiential learning across the OCDSB. While the overarching framework is set provincially, the OCDSB strategically implements these mandates to provide meaningful connections to diverse post-secondary pathways for all students.</p>		
	Description	Impact
Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programs provide students with in-depth, sector-specific learning through specialized courses and collaborations with community and industry partners. This enriched learning includes valuable certifications and sector-specific cooperative education, culminating in a special diploma seal that recognizes their focused expertise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2024-2025, 772 students enrolled in 40 SHSM programs, representing a 10% increase in student enrollment from 2023-2024. 70% of students are completing their SHSM diplomas, an increase of 10% from 2023-2024. 40 SHSM programs, with an additional 3 approved for 2025-2026. 23 secondary schools have active SHSM programs.
Dual Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dual Credit pathway offers students a valuable opportunity to take college-level coursework while earning both college and high school credits. This pathway benefits students who may have faced challenges in previous educational experiences, empowering them to discover their strengths and build essential skills and self-confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 225 students were enrolled in Dual Credit courses across the Fall 2024, Winter 2025, and Spring 2025 terms. This included 66 multilingual learners and 130 students requiring learning accommodations. In Fall 2024, 94 students from 21 OCDSB schools enrolled in 8 Dual Credit courses, achieving a 79% retention rate and a 96% success rate. Participation in skilled trades pathways through Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) Level 1 saw increasing engagement with two students in Fall 2024, 10 students in Winter 2025, and 9 students (commenced) in Spring 2025 across various trades.
Ontario Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ontario Youth Apprenticeship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2220 students enrolled in Cooperative

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<p>Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)</p>	<p>Program (OYAP) enables full-time secondary school students to start apprenticeship training in skilled trades through Cooperative Education placements. Typically, students explore trades in Grade 11 and become registered apprentices in Grade 12.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This program allows students to earn their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) while gaining valuable hands-on experience and apprenticeship hours, leading to a Certificate of Qualification as a journeyman in one of over 150 designated trades across various industries. 	<p>Education, a significant increase from the 1891 students in 2023-2024. Of these, 1005 (45%) participated in OYAP programming, a substantial rise compared to the 724 OYAP participants in 2023-2024.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within the OYAP participants, 927 students explored apprenticeship as a potential pathway, while 78 students were engaged as OYAP Registrants, working as full apprentices with skilled trades journeymen.
<p>eLearning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The eLearning program offers grades 9 to 12 credit courses delivered entirely online. Students remotely access course materials, interact with teachers, and complete assignments, with potential in-person requirements for exams or support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2024-2025, strong student interest led to full enrollment in all 160 eLearning courses, with a significant waitlist of approximately 2000 students. To better meet student needs and Ministry targets, the OCDSB is expanding its eLearning program from 160 courses in 2024-2025 to 240 in 2025-2026 and a projected 290 courses by 2027-2028, offering students a wider range of learning opportunities. eLearning offerings directly reflect student course selections, ensuring access to a broader variety of courses aligned with their interests and pathways, including options potentially unavailable at their home schools.
<p>Cooperative Education (Co-op)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student participation in co-op opportunities is experiencing significant growth across diverse sectors. Students and schools are increasing their engagement in established programs and showing a strong interest in emerging, specialized pathways. Students engage in various unique co-op placements, including notable partnerships with the Department of National Defence (DND) Army Reserves, Ottawa Police Services, Canadian Tire Auto, and the YMCA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student engagement in Cooperative Education continues to rise, with 2220 participants in 2024-2025, an increase from 1891 in 2023-2024. 414 co-op students benefited from new certification training opportunities, completing over 1600 valuable certifications. 33 students secured specialized co-op placements, many offering paid employment and/or direct pathways to apprenticeship opportunities. Partnerships are expanding to include 150 specialized paid co-op positions,

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	<p>(in fields like Early Childhood Education and Youth Work). Many of these partnerships offer paid employment during and after the co-op term.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exciting new specialized programs, such as the Local 93 Carpenters, School Within a Trade (SWAT), and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) initiatives, are providing substantial benefits to students, including stipends, essential tools and personal protective equipment (PPE), and direct pathways to valuable apprenticeship opportunities. The IBEW partnership has been secured for the next three years. 	<p>reflecting sector demand and student interest in diverse placements.</p>
<p>Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR/ Mature PLAR)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) is a process that facilitates mature students receiving credit for knowledge and skills they have gained outside of traditional schooling. PLAR involves a formal evaluation process that allows individuals to earn high school credits for experiences like work, volunteer work, or independent study. Mature PLAR refers explicitly to this process as it applies to adult learners. These initiatives create more personalized and equitable pathways for all students to achieve their academic goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training sessions in 16 secondary schools are strengthening and supporting the recognition of prior learning for credit and potentially accelerating student progress. Students are successfully demonstrating prior learning through the "Challenge for Credit" pathway, with the number of earned credits showing a rising trend: 2 in 2022-2023, 95+ in 2023-2024, and 100+ projected for 2024-2025 due to partnerships with Explore Canada and the Ottawa Carleton Educators Network (OCENET).
<p>OCDSB Framed Ministry-Driven Programming</p> <p>As an extension to Ministry directions, the OCDSB prioritizes the creation of relevant and engaging pathways and experiential learning opportunities tailored to student interests. This allows the board to build upon provincial guidance, enriching student learning through targeted programs and community partnerships that support diverse pathways.</p>		
	<p>Description</p>	<p>Impact</p>
<p>School Within a College (SWAC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The School Within a College (SWAC) program, a partnership between the OCDSB and Algonquin College, re-engages out-of-school students facing high barriers to graduation. SWAC provides a supportive, adult learning environment where students can earn their OSSD and dual credits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 50 previously disengaged students (18+) are on track to achieve academic milestones, with 44 projected to earn their OSSD and three their OSSC this year. SWAC has a strong 5-year history of facilitating graduation. As of June 2025, 181 students earned their

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This program provides collaborative support to youth under the care of the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO), facilitating their progress in credit attainment and the completion of their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)/Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC). ● This approach accelerates credit acquisition and ensures that graduates have clear post-secondary pathways to college, university, or employment, equipped with the necessary skills and credentials. ● A key focus has been leveraging the college environment to provide enriched experiential learning opportunities aligned with students' interests and post-secondary goals. This has included targeted visits to Algonquin College's trades and technical labs and direct engagement with student support services, such as AC Aspire, the Centre for Accessible Learning, and the Student Learning Centre. 	<p>OSSD and three earned their OSSC, and nearly all SWAC participants successfully connected with a college, university, or skilled trades.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 18 Indigenous youth, part of the 50+ re-engaged students, benefited from culturally responsive programming, contributing to positive learning outcomes. ● Feedback confirms the program's positive influence on student learning and future aspirations.
<p>Experiential Learning</p>	<p>Untapped:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Untapped is a student-led business initiative where high school students, guided by teachers and supported by community partners like Youth Ottawa, develop and launch their businesses. Students generate ideas, conduct market research, secure seed funding, and bring their ventures to life. The initiative culminates in the "Untapped" event at City Hall, where students sell their products to the community, with all proceeds benefiting a charity of their choice. ● Collaboration between OCDSB and Carleton University: The OCDSB Program Services Secondary Team and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) at Carleton University held reciprocal meetings and observations to enhance their mutual understanding of secondary school practices and undergraduate learning. This collaboration aimed to bridge the gap between the two 	<p>Untapped:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Untapped engaged over 400 students in authentic learning, developing critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and practical business skills. <p>Collaboration between OCDSB and Carleton University:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● OCDSB secondary students will learn at Carleton University, gaining direct exposure to a university setting and informing their post-secondary aspirations. ● Within 12 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) subjects, students will broaden their understanding of potential career paths in these fields. ● Students will tackle local environmental issues, enriching their learning and connecting it to authentic applications. ● Students will learn from university faculty and community experts, providing diverse perspectives and potential mentorship opportunities.

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	<p>educational levels and explore the potential for a joint experiential learning opportunity for OCDSB secondary students at Carleton University. This initiative is currently being developed for the 2025-2026 school year.</p> <p>Pathways to Planning (P2P)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged with Vice-Principals in 10 schools to support Instructional Leadership related to changing learning experiences through Experiential Learning. 	<p>Pathways to Planning (P2P):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All 10 schools have participated in experiential learning opportunities. Notable examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earl of March Secondary had 17 classes (over 500 students) participate in Learning Takes Flight. This experience changed assessment practices by integrating authentic learning. A student at Hillcrest has started his own business supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by creating sensory tools as a result of this opportunity.
<p>Tech and Trades</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective September 2024, a change in graduation requirements required all students to complete a Technology course in either Grade 9 or Grade 10. All students entering skilled trades co-op placements received essential hands-on health and safety training tailored to their specific work environments and industry certification requirements. To facilitate the exploration of construction careers and post-secondary opportunities, ConstructOURs offered 40 students an immersive experience that included tours of Algonquin College and a major construction site, where they gained insights from industry professionals. To enhance the delivery of engaging, hands-on learning experiences in Technology and Trades, teacher training focused on innovative design equipment (CNC milling, 3D printing, laser cutting). This training was directly informed by student voice and interest in these areas as valuable forms of experiential learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2024-2025, over 100 additional sections of Technology and Trades were introduced, serving approximately 2500 students. Over 90% of schools will have implemented the Technology graduation requirement by June 2026. Over 500 female-identifying students in grades 9-11 gained exposure to skilled trades and technology careers through hands-on activities and engagement with industry professionals through Women in Trades and We Build a Dream events. The Master Taper's Academy Workshop provided 40 students, with a focus on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) youth, with practical, hands-on training in mudding and taping techniques and mentorship opportunities in construction trades. A Thought Exchange involving over 1200 students and 20 teachers indicated that the new technology and teacher training effectively engage students and enhance their learning within the updated curriculum.

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OCDSB Student-Driven Learning Initiative		
<p>Driven by a deep understanding of student aspirations and local opportunities, OCDSB-initiated programs often place experiential learning and personalized pathways at their core. These innovative approaches directly address student-identified needs, fostering authentic skills development and clear pathways for future success.</p>		
	Description	Impact
Authentic Student Learning Experience (ASLE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentic Student Learning Experience (ASLE) is an OCDSB pathway-dependent and interest-driven approach that provides underserved, credit-deficient students with meaningful and experiential learning opportunities. This student-centred process empowers them to shape their education according to their needs and interests, offering authentic learning contexts and demonstrating their understanding. ASLE is a powerful re-engagement tool, fostering hope and renewed connection to education for previously struggling and disengaging students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2024-2025: Approximately 400 students have earned over 900 credits through the ASLE process so far <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2023-2024: 398 students earned 856 credits 2022-2023: 285 students earned 505 credits. Over 2,500 students and over 4,000 credits have been earned since the 2020-2021 academic year, allowing underserved students to see themselves meaningfully in their learning and academic journey. ASLE's personalized projects effectively re-engage students facing significant challenges, fostering trust, increasing participation, and enabling academic success. Notable examples include trauma survivors finding healing through literature projects and disengaged students gaining college pathways via video game/3D modelling interests.
Student Success at the Family Reception Center (FRC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OCDSB's Family Reception Centre (FRC) is a crucial initial point of contact for newly arrived families and students. Building upon years of experience conducting comprehensive assessments to develop individualized learning profiles, the FRC has enhanced its support by integrating a Student Support Teacher (SST) role. This dedicated position facilitates in-depth engagement with students and families to elicit narratives sharing prior experiences and skills. This proactive approach enables identifying and recognizing previously acquired learning, allowing students who may lack formal educational documentation to commence their secondary education with earned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FRC has facilitated the initial stages of the educational journey for many newly arrived students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2022-2023: 2,295 students 2023-2024: 2,238 students 2024-2025: 2,265 students Through the PLAR/MPLAR process, students can earn Lived Experience Credits, providing a pathway to graduation. The impact of this initiative is evident in the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2021-2022: 289 credits awarded to 91 students. 2022-2023: 404 credits awarded to 136 students 2023-2024: 247 credits awarded to 103 students. For the current school year (July 2024 - April 2025), 145 credits have already been awarded to 75 students, with the year ongoing.

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	<p>credits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By valuing and leveraging these diverse backgrounds, the FRC initiative streamlines the transition towards the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), empowers students, and affirms the validity of their varied learning journeys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The data shows that OCDSB secondary schools are progressively building capacity to implement PLAR/Mature PLAR, and this continues to be supported through ongoing professional development for Guidance, Student Success Teachers, and English as a Second Language and English Language Development (ESL/ELD) staff at both district and school levels.
School Within a University (SWAU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Within A University (SWAU) offers an experiential learning pathway for Grade 11-12 OCDSB students through partnerships with Carleton University and Saint Paul University. It provides university-capable students, who may not have initially considered university, with the opportunity to experience university-level studies and explore potential pathways, with a focus on prioritizing underserved and Indigenous students. Tuition funding is provided by alumni from both Carleton and Saint Paul University. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the 2024-2025 school year, 13 students earned a dual credit, receiving both a high school university preparation credit and credit for a first-year undergraduate course. All students identified as Indigenous or were from a historically underserved group. Eight of the 10 students who participated in 2023-2024 began University, and one additional student started at College.
School Within a Trade (SWAT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OCDSB, in partnership with the Carpenters Regional Council, has secured Ministry funding to implement an expanded, enhanced construction learning experience called SWAT for Grade 12 students. This experience will offer intensive construction training and co-op placements. Implementation will commence in the 2025-2026 school year for approximately 40 students. This initiative, modelled after SWAC and SWAU, will provide a hands-on pathway to skilled trades, including paid co-op opportunities and direct entry into apprenticeship levels for successful graduates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students gain intensive construction trades training, which facilitates entry into Level 1 of OYAP and provides a direct route to becoming certified tradespeople. Partnership with the Carpenters Regional Council (CRC) allows students to earn dual credits, recognizing both secondary and post-secondary learning. SWAT aims to improve graduation rates by offering an experiential learning pathway for students who excel in hands-on environments. The program learning experience aims to facilitate employment within the Carpenters' Union upon completion.
Pathways Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OCDSB offers a suite of virtual events and learning experiences for students and their families, including All About High School, High 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These initiatives empower students by providing them with crucial knowledge and resources to navigate their academic journeys and plan for

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	<p>School Course Selection, and Applying to Post-Secondary, as well as specialized events targeting underserved families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collaborative Launch post-secondary pathways conference offered secondary students a virtual conference to explore diverse post-secondary options, including colleges, universities, careers, and support services. • Algonquin College Connections 2025 was a collaborative initiative with Algonquin College that invited OCDSB students in grades 10 and 11 to explore diverse college post-secondary pathways by experiencing a day in the life of over 20 different programs. • These initiatives aim to provide students and their families with accessible and comprehensive information regarding post-secondary applications, high school course selection, pathways planning, and general insights into high school life and future opportunities. 	<p>their futures. They reduce anxiety and foster informed decision-making regarding post-secondary education and high school pathways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students gain clarity on application processes, course selection, and diverse experiential learning opportunities, connecting them with post-secondary institutions, workplaces, and community support. • Including student voices and alumni perspectives offers relatable guidance and inspiration, while targeted sessions for newcomer communities ensure equitable access to essential information.
<p>Student Voice Conference</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Student Voice Conference was a targeted initiative designed to cultivate student leadership capacity and directly incorporate student perspectives into the ongoing development and improvement of SHSM programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected SHSM and OYAP students, identified by administrators and teachers for their potential and insights, participated in a conference on leadership skill development and practical strategies for initiating positive change within their schools. • A key component of the conference involved school-specific meetings, during which students collaboratively identified areas for improvement and articulated their desired changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These discussions yielded actionable feedback, expanded trade class offerings, simplified cooperative education processes, and enhanced awareness of existing programs and learning experiences for students.
<p>Explore</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Explore program and OCENET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57 students earned 97 high school

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<p>and OCENET (Ottawa Carleton Educators Network)</p>	<p>International exchanges provide immersive opportunities for students to engage in a dynamic environment to enhance their French language proficiency while experiencing the richness of communities through travel. The OCDSB has engaged in these partnerships for many years to develop experiential language and cultural awareness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting in the 2024-2025 school year, a unique learning opportunity was offered to participating students. Following their travel experience, students demonstrated their acquired knowledge and skills by applying to challenge relevant high school courses for academic credit through the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) process. 	<p>credits through the Explore Program and PLAR challenge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most participating students successfully obtained two high school credits, recognizing their linguistic development. Approximately 25 students travelled to France, with 9 leveraging this immersive experience in their PLAR portfolios, demonstrating authentic application of their French skills. The initiative facilitated significant academic advancement for participating students through credit recognition for their learning.
<p>Re-Engagement Initiative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In May 2024, the OCDSB Program Services and Learning Support Services departments launched a pilot re-engagement initiative for students who had become disengaged. The initiative consists of a 5-week in-person phase in Semester 1 focused on classroom reintegration, peer connections, academic goal setting, and parent/caregiver support groups. This was followed by virtual student support and continued parent resources. This initiative is delivered with Social Work, community partners, and Student Success teachers. This initiative aimed to provide a supportive environment for students to successfully return to their home schools for the second semester by informing them and their families about OCDSB and community supports and strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial pilot (2023-2024) successfully re-engaged 80% (16/20) of disengaged Grade 7-10 students, leading to credit accumulation (23.5 credits for Grade 9/10) and improved school connection. The current initiative (until Oct. 2024) has successfully supported 82% (9/11) of previously non-attending students in returning to school or establishing a re-engagement plan. An additional session (May-Sept. 2025) anticipates engaging 25-30 more students, indicating continued program expansion. The Ministry of Education and other Boards recognize the initiative as an exemplar for improving student attendance and well-being, highlighting its successful strategies.
<p>Growing Student Success Conference:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Spring 2025, the OCDSB hosted the inaugural Eastern Ontario Student Success Conference, bringing together Student Success Teachers (SSTs) from nine school boards. This day-and-a-half event provided a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The conference included 300 educators (principals, superintendents, teachers, directors). The conference fostered collaboration among educators to enhance strategies for supporting underserved students.

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	<p>valuable platform for collaboration and sharing best practices to support underserved students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The conference featured a diverse range of topics, including credit rescue/recovery, various SST models, re-engagement initiatives, social entrepreneurship, experiential learning, and supporting students in trades. Growing Student Success: Insights and Highlights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCDSB SSTs indicated significant impact, reporting changes in their practice and highly valuing the conference. Sharing best practices in areas like credit recovery and re-engagement across nine boards will lead to better interventions for students facing barriers. Positive feedback from leaders suggests a widespread influence on approaches to student success across Eastern Ontario.
<p>Power of Ten: Number Sense through Experiential Learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through Multimodal Numeracy Development, this initiative employs visual supports and hands-on activities to build foundational number concepts for English as a Second Language and English Language Development (ESL/ELD) learners, students in the General Learning Program (GLP), and students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH). Strategies are used to bridge interactive activities with written tasks, enabling ESL/ELD students to express their numeracy understanding through varied language modalities. Teachers learn evidence-based assessment techniques to form individualized guided math groups, directly addressing diverse language and numeracy learning needs and ensuring measurable growth in number sense. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Twelve schools (both elementary and secondary) have engaged with this math developmental opportunity. Students have developed from basic number sense to algebraic representations through experiential learning. ESL/ELD students are orally sharing their understanding of math, showcasing both numerical sense and the development of English communication skills.
<p>Spring into the Outdoors Conference</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Spring Into the Outdoors Conference, a collaboration between the OCDSB and Ottawa Catholic School Board, provided K-12 educators with practical strategies to integrate experiential, land-based, environmental, and outdoor learning into their teaching. Held at the OCDSB's MacSkimming Outdoor Center, the conference featured hands-on workshops led by experienced educators, community partners, and Indigenous Leaders and teachers. These sessions emphasized the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 220 educators gained confidence and practical strategies to facilitate outdoor learning experiences for students. This professional development will create more engaging and authentic learning opportunities for K-12 students in outdoor settings. Increased outdoor learning opportunities are expected to foster a stronger connection to the natural world among students and enhance student learning outcomes.

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	connection between the Ontario Curriculum and learning in natural environments, incorporating Indigenous perspectives and knowledge of the land, and fostering community and a deeper connection to the traditional territories.	
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