

JUNE 2006

Curriculum Update

News and information
for Ontario's Educators

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Winner

Ontario teachers: Meeting the challenge of change

Over the past months I have come to appreciate the deep commitment to excellence that is shared by educators across the province. Speaking with teachers, principals and board leaders at meetings and conferences, it is evident that there is a sense of optimism and excitement in the system, and a profound belief that we are effecting positive change.



Student achievement is on the rise, and our goal to see 75 percent of students achieving at the provincial standard is within reach. Likewise, we have already seen a steady improvement in the graduation rate, and I am confident that we will reach our goal of 85 percent by 2010.

This has been a year of tremendous accomplishment. It has also been a year of accelerating change, which demands the very best of Ontario teachers. We are committed to your success, and recently announced \$23 million in funding to support specialized training for all Ontario teachers during this coming summer.

I hope that you will take full advantage of this opportunity for professional development, to renew and refresh your own personal vision for 2006-07. I wish you the very best, and thank you for the dedication that makes Ontario teachers among the best in the world.

The Honourable Sandra Pupatello
Minister of Education

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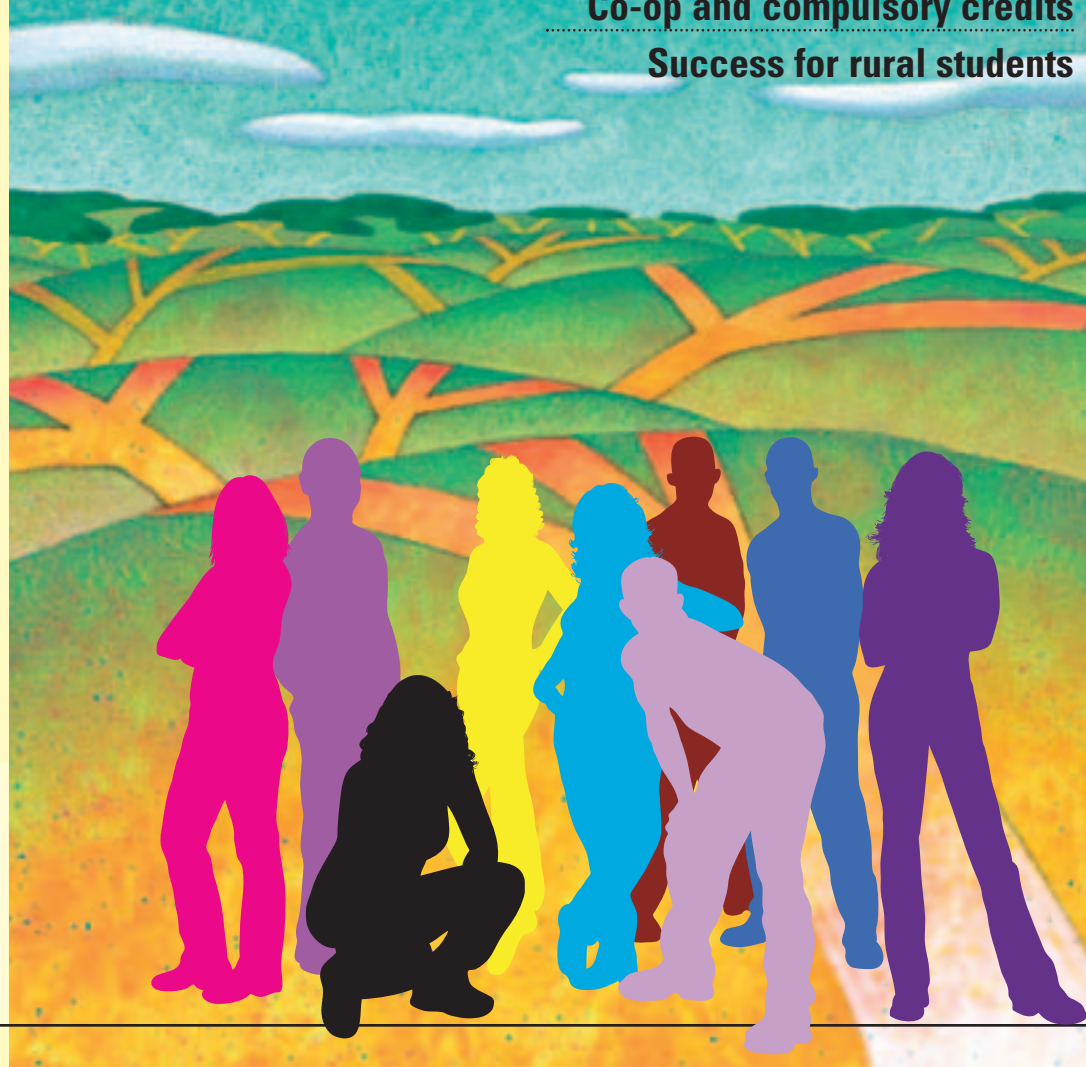
Building the Vision: Student Success Phase III

e-learning in Ontario schools

Early school leavers

Co-op and compulsory credits

Success for rural students



BUILDING THE VISION:

STUDENT SUCCESS PHASE III LAUNCHES IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

Ontario's Student Success Strategy, a multi-phased initiative designed to provide all secondary students with opportunities for success both in school and in their postsecondary destinations, has entered its third phase with a series of new initiatives that enhance and build on the success of phases I and II.

Phase III initiatives include the addition of a Specialist High Skills Major to the OSSD and the introduction of a new Provincial Skills Certificate, expanded opportunities for co-operative education, the development of dual credit programs and recognition of credits for ministry approved external credentials, expanded support for rural schools, and the introduction of legislation designed to ensure that students continue learning until the age of 18 or graduation.

The Student Success Strategy also sets out specific targets for 2010 focused on achieving dramatically improved high school graduation rates, and reducing the number of students who drop out. At the foundation of these targets is a belief that every student deserves a good outcome from his or her education. That outcome should provide the best possible fit with each student's potential, enhance students' willingness and capacity for learning, and provide a core of common knowledge, skills, and values for all students.

“

...every student deserves a good outcome from his or her education.

”

Building Career Futures: Specialist High Skills Major

The new Specialist High Skills Major is designed to provide students with a solid academic grounding, and the opportunity to focus their secondary school education and explore their career goals.

Students enrolled in the Specialist High Skills Major will bundle 6 to 12 credits in a selected area of interest, aligned with postsecondary, apprenticeship, or workplace learning. Bundles will be developed for specific industry sectors including: manufacturing, health care, construction, hospitality and tourism, agriculture, business, and arts.

Students pursuing the Specialist High Skills Major will have more opportunities for experiential learning, while still completing:

- > 30 credits in total
- > 18 compulsory credits, including English, math, history, and science
- > the Ontario literacy graduation requirement
- > 40 hours of community involvement

Students who major in High Skills will participate in learning opportunities through employers, skills training centres, colleges, and community organizations. They will be able to concentrate in a series of courses related to their specific area of interest that prepare them for work and post-secondary success. They will also have the opportunity to earn industry recognized certifications such as CPR, first aid, and Good Host.

The ministry will phase in Specialist High Skills Major programs in a limited number of sectors and school boards in September 2006, and will move to broader provincial implementation in September 2007.

Success for All Students: The Provincial Skills Certificate

To ensure a good outcome for all students, a new Provincial Skills Certificate will be created for students who may not achieve an OSSD.

The Provincial Skills Certificate will focus on the positive recognition of acquired skills including:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| > workplace preparation | > experiential learning | > development of a portfolio |
| > essential skills training | > external certification | > life skills |

The new certificate will improve employment and earning options for students, and contribute to their sense of accomplishment and competence.

Raising the Bar: Learning to 18 Legislation

In concert with the Student Success Strategy's aim to provide meaningful and engaging opportunities for all students, legislation has been introduced which will, if passed, raise the school leaving age from 16 to 18.

The legislation will require that students keep learning in a classroom, apprenticeship or workplace training program, until the age of 18 or graduation. It also creates links between high schools and postsecondary destinations to allow external equivalent learning to be recognized for high school credits.

Reaching Ahead: Dual Credit Programs

Dual credit programs enable high school students to earn a number of credits by participating in apprenticeship training and postsecondary courses that count towards both the OSSD and a postsecondary diploma, degree, or apprenticeship certification.

A number of boards in Ontario began piloting the dual credit model in the fall of 2005. High school students in Brant Haldimand Norfolk District School Board and Grand Erie District School Board, for example, have been exploring the trades through a partnership with Mohawk College. Students in the pilot earn secondary school credits in manufacturing technology, construction technology, and English while they are earning college preparatory credits from the college.

Students in the pilot are taught by a team of secondary school teachers and college professors, and are exposed to a broad range of related apprenticeships, college programs, and careers. Teachers and professors participating in the pilot report that students are more engaged in their studies, and have dramatically improved their academic achievement with the dual credit model.

Building Partnerships: Cooperative Education

Through the Student Success Strategy, stronger partnerships between education, business, and community organizations are being developed to increase the number of co-op and job placement opportunities for students.

To broaden the recognition of experiential learning, students are now able to apply up to two cooperative education credits towards their 18 compulsory credits. Cooperative education courses serve as the education system's best and most successful example to date of a way of recognizing student learning outside the traditional classroom.

(For more information see the article on cooperative education in this issue of Curriculum Update.)

Forging new Links: Postsecondary Destinations

In addition to enhancing connections with business and community organizations, efforts are being made to forge stronger links with all postsecondary destinations.

This initiative is designed to ensure better information and coordination among various deliverers such as school boards, colleges, and community agencies.

For example, some Ontario high schools are now delivering level one of the apprenticeship training program for a number of skilled trades, as part of the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). This gives students a head start as they pursue their certificate of qualification as a skilled tradesperson.

In addition, a new Adult Education Policy Unit has been established to build direct links between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

“...efforts are being made to forge stronger links with all post-secondary destinations.”



Expanding Options:

Credits for External Credentials

Through the Student Success Strategy, students will be able to obtain up to two credits for equivalent learning that falls outside the instruction traditionally provided in a school setting.

Guidelines and standards are currently in development, and may recognize credit for industry training or certifications, international language training, and youth development programs.

Broadening Opportunities:

Support for Rural Schools

A number of initiatives have been introduced to put rural high schools on an equal footing with their urban counterparts, including extra support for operating costs, development of a new "farming and rural major" as part of the High Skills diploma program, and extensive pilot programs designed to explore innovative new approaches to student success. (For more information on these initiatives see the articles on success for rural students and e-learning in this issue of Curriculum Update.)

Taking Aim: Graduation targets

The new provincial graduation targets are intended to cut Ontario's dropout rate in half by 2010. By the target date, 85 percent of all Ontario students will graduate, up from an estimated 71 percent in 2004-05.

In support of these targets, a new Managing Information for Student Achievement (MISA) tracking system has been established, along with key indicators which will be used to assist parents, schools, and boards to measure success across the province. The MISA system will support:

- > early identification of secondary school students struggling with the curriculum, focused on credit accumulation in Grades 9 and 10, and success in Grade 9 and 10 compulsory courses;
- > provision for individual school and board accountability to parents by tracking key indicators year by year;
- > use of key indicator data as the trigger for school improvement planning; and
- > the development of baseline data to measure the success of Ministry initiatives.

STUDENT SUCCESS: FIVE KEY GOALS



1. Better learning

Students will experience better learning as the result of earlier success, earlier intervention, expanded teacher training, increased availability of remedial assistance, more tutoring, additional credit recovery, mentors, selected class size limits, and other programs.

2. Healthier attitudes and expectations

Students, parents, teachers, and the public will be encouraged through a variety of means to have high ambitions for students that show equal respect for the varied kinds of potential each student may have.

3. Schools that are caring and engaging places

Students will see education as the best option for reaching their full potential. Additional staffing, training, programming, and resources will combine with special student engagement programs to ensure that students get the personalized attention and encouragement they need.

4. Clear workplace-with-learning, apprenticeship, college and university linkages

Students will be much more able to see how the courses they choose are relevant to their future education, training and, ultimately, their careers. Formal cooperation will be strengthened between schools and postsecondary institutions, programs, workplaces, and community organizations.

5. Targets for success

The ministry has set a provincial graduation target of 85% by 2010, up from 71% in 2004-05.

INSIGHT:

Graduation rates and future success

Statistics show that some 70 percent of all new jobs in Ontario require at least a high school education. Ontario's recent postsecondary review report, *Ontario: A Leader in Learning*, indicates that those without a high school diploma earn almost 40 percent less than those with a trades certificate or diploma. In addition, the report shows that individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 who drop out in Ontario are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as those who graduate. To read the full report, visit www.raereview.on.ca.

e-LEARNING: POWERFUL NEW TOOLS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



With the maturing of information technologies such as the world wide web, e-learning has emerged as a practical, powerful, and effective model for teaching and learning which is now in use around the world. The value of e-learning has been well-established in supporting basic skills in literacy and numeracy, enriching teaching and learning in the classroom, providing equitable access to learning opportunities for rural and isolated students, and supporting learning for students with special needs. In this issue, we look at the new e-learning pilot project being launched by the ministry, and talk to three educators seconded to the ministry as part of the e-Learning Ontario development team about the benefits this new technology has to offer Ontario teachers and students.

e-Learning Ontario, a ministry initiative which has been in development since 2004, is designed to benefit students and educators by broadening the range of learning opportunities available to all students for completing graduation and preparing for post-secondary destinations. The initiative helps boards to support many key elements of the Student Success Strategy:

- > providing students in small, rural and isolated schools equitable access to diverse courses and learning resources
- > providing added support for building strong literacy and numeracy skills
- > allowing students greater flexibility and choice in completing the OSSD
- > providing students with an effective tool for credit recovery

Ontario's e-learning strategy

Development of the provincial model for e-learning was based on extensive research on the use of e-learning in international jurisdictions, and comprehensive consultation with Directors of Education in Ontario, as well as technical staff, teachers, parents, students, and others in the broader community.

Research was conducted by The Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning – the precursor to e-Learning Ontario – which worked in concert with the Council of Directors of Education (CODE) to explore the status of e-learning in Ontario schools, and gather points of view on the use of e-learning technology.

The resulting e-learning strategy for Ontario schools includes:

- > access to online secondary school credit courses
- > access to additional online educational resources for K-12
- > policies and guidelines for school boards and schools
- > specifications regarding infrastructure and technical issues
- > provincial standards for e-learning content
- > professional development for teachers

Implementing e-learning

Courses are written by teachers through e-Learning Ontario, and are offered by local school boards using a common software-based Learning Management System. All courses are taught by teachers employed by district school boards, who work online with their students.

In January of 2006, approximately 800 students in 11 participating English-language school boards began piloting a total of 15 online courses provided through the initiative. It is expected that the number of participating boards will increase in the 2006-07 school year.

In addition, teachers and students in all English-language district school boards will have access in the Fall of 2006 to online educational resources through the e-Learning Ontario 'Learning Object Repository'. Samples of these electronic learning objects, which can be used to support teaching and learning in a variety of elementary and secondary subject areas, are currently available for viewing on the e-Learning Ontario website.

The twelve French-language school boards, which established an e-learning project in 2000 – the Service d'Apprentissage Médiatisé Franco-Ontarien (SAMFO) – will join Apprentissage électronique Ontario (AÉO, the French title for e-Learning Ontario) in 2007. AÉO will build a relationship with SAMFO, which has developed an expertise in the development of courses and resources over the years. SAMFO's 39 e-learning courses and 640 learning objects will be migrated to the provincial platform and Learning Object Repository by September 2007. SAMFO will also continue to assist AÉO by developing new courses and resources for the French-language school boards.

Visit the e-Learning Ontario website

Visit the e-Learning Ontario website at www.elearningontario.ca for more information on e-learning in Ontario schools.

What technologies are incorporated in e-learning?

e-learning utilizes a wide variety of technologies to support teaching and learning such as electronic whiteboards, chatrooms, e-mail, and threaded discussions. Through the Learning Management System, secondary school credit courses are taught by teachers online, and electronic learning resources may be used in all grades, from K-12, in regular classrooms.



Where is e-learning being piloted?

A total of 11 school boards chose to participate in the e-Learning Ontario initiative:

- > Algoma District School Board
- > Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario
- > Greater Essex County District School Board
- > Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board
- > Niagara District School Board
- > Northeastern Catholic District School Board
- > Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
- > Sudbury Catholic District School Board
- > Thames Valley District School Board
- > Upper Canada District School Board
- > York Region District School Board

>> ASK A TEACHER... ONLINE!

Online resources have long been offered to Ontario students through the Independent Learning Centre (ILC), a division of TVOntario. A specialist in distance education, the ILC offers an alternative to many students who want to earn a diploma, gain or recover credits, or upgrade their skills at their own pace, and at a time and place suited to their needs.

In addition to more than 70 secondary school credit courses, the ILC provides a varied range of online resources to support student learning. Among these is the unique 'Ask a Teacher' resource which provides students with real-time online tutoring and homework help from certified Ontario teachers, and is available to any student in Ontario.

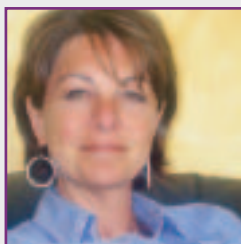
The ILC provides many other online tools such as web-based tutorials, known as 'webits' which give students an opportunity to focus interactively on the most challenging concepts within a given course of study, and receive immediate feedback on their progress. Among other 'Ask a Teacher' services and resources are essay evaluation by e-mail, chat rooms where students can connect live with teachers for one-on-one help, an online 'brain bank' of learning resources, and many other resources such as exercises, games, and quizzes to test student comprehension.

You can learn more about these and other supports for students by visiting the Independent Learning Centre website at www.ilc.org.

E-LEARNING IN ACTION: Three educators share their personal experiences

How can educators implement e-learning for the benefit of students? Is e-learning appropriate for all students and all learning tasks? What should educators know about these new technologies for teaching and learning? Curriculum Update spoke with three educators, currently working with e-Learning Ontario, about their personal experiences with e-learning prior to their work with the ministry.

Nicole Cadieux
Service d'Apprentissage
Médiatisé Franco-
Ontarien (SAMFO)



"As educators, I don't think we've even begun to grasp the full potential of e-learning. It is still young... and I think you'll see it grow as we learn more and more about how to apply it.

If you look, for example, at the challenges a smaller school – or a remote school – may face in providing programming, especially optional courses, the immediate benefit becomes obvious. You might have a larger school which has the specialized expertise and the resources to offer a particular course. With e-learning, that course can be offered, not just within the school, but across the province. So suddenly, you have students enrolled from many schools – students who might not otherwise have access to that course offering at all. Nine of the students in this course might be from the home school, while the remainder of the class will be from schools throughout the province. The impact is enormous.

Courses can be offered in synchronous mode – through teleconferencing for example. Here, the teacher and the students are all interacting in real

time. They can all see each other. They can ask questions. They can literally be "virtually" taken to a lab setting which, again, might not be available in their home school. Then, of course, you have the asynchronous mode in which the interaction between the students, the course content and the teacher, does not necessarily take place in real time. Or it may be a blend of the two.

In all cases, it's critical to realize that all e-learning courses are teacher-mediated; an online teacher provides the pedagogical support and engages students on a day to day basis. The quality and the frequency of the communication between students and teacher is crucial in an online environment.

For students, it can be a very engaging way to learn. It can be a lot of fun. Students might have access, for example, to an interactive learning object to demonstrate a concept that simply can't be demonstrated in a traditional classroom. In Grade 12 biology there's a unit on molecular genetics that deals with cloning, for example. In a

traditional classroom, the teacher is limited to explaining the process. But here we have a learning object that simulates cloning. The students actually clone a mouse online and, in a way that mimics exactly what they might do in a lab, complete with all the sights and sounds. I very often use this in my talks to teachers, and you should hear the 'ooohs' and 'ahhhs' in the room. It's a very high quality form of learning, and a very different style of learning.

Of course, e-learning also has particular significance for French-language boards, for whom the availability of resources is a challenge. So needless to say this technology opens up the possibility of providing access to many additional resources – and learning opportunities for students – that allow them to receive the learning they need in preparation for post-secondary destinations without having to leave their school of choice. This is a very exciting tool that will go a long way toward providing equitable service to students across the province."

What are the features of the Learning Object Repository?

Every teacher, student and parent in a publicly funded school will be able to access a library of online resources this Fall, known as the 'Learning Object Repository'. This library will hold digital resources, all linked to curriculum expectations, for students from K to 12. Teachers will be able to:

- use a search function to find multimedia resources by grade, subject, strand, key word, author, or learning style; and
- contribute their own educational resources.

Laurie Hazzard
Avon Maitland District
School Board



"My background in e-learning comes out of my experience as the principal of what I think is probably still the only online school in the province, at Avon Maitland.

All of the credits are delivered using e-learning. And, in fact, the school just celebrated its thousandth student. The first year, we ran one section with 30 students and by the time I left there were well over 800. It just keeps growing.

Avon Maitland is a rural board, and we have a number of smaller secondary schools. And so we needed to find a way to ensure that our kids had a really wide breadth of courses available to them. With the e-learning model we implemented, we have students – working in a cross-curricular computer lab – taking courses from across the system. There is a teacher assigned to teach a particular course, and that teacher will be online for those 76 minutes each day. But in addition, students are encouraged to send all of their questions in a threaded discussion, so that every student in the class is able to benefit from the interaction, whether it's in real time or two hours later.

We certainly had some growing pains. In the earliest iteration, the teachers were simply utilized as markers. Students would go in, get the materials, do the assignments, and then e-mail them to the teacher. And the success rate was abysmal. When we put regular contract teachers in, it went through the roof. So that was an important learning.

One of the things you find with e-learning is that teachers can become incredibly creative in the way they deliver curriculum. For example, we had a history teacher who had a guest visit the class every week. One of the "guests" was Winston Churchill. We had a geography teacher who would invite a guest from a university that might be 100 miles away to talk about careers in geography. The possibilities are limitless.

e-learning may not be suited to every student, but then I'm not sure that any form of education is suited to everyone. You have kids who sit well in your classroom, and kids whose skin is crawling because they don't want to be there. For these kids, the experiential nature of e-learning can often be very engaging.

We've also found that e-learning can be very powerful in bringing students back to school to complete their OSSD. This is a way to help these kids complete their diploma, but in a way that is com-

What are the features of the Learning Management System?

A Learning Management System – essentially a software application that enables the delivery of e-learning – has been licensed by the ministry for Ontario school boards. The Learning Management System enables teachers and school boards to:

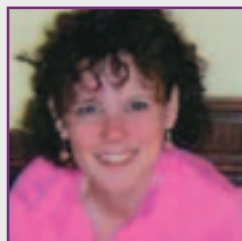
- > enrol students in courses
- > track student progress
- > engage in teaching and learning activities
- > use technologies such as chat rooms, e-mail, threaded discussions, and electronic whiteboards
- > communicate and collaborate
- > customize courses to meet local needs
- > use a technical help desk

fortable for them, and can completely accommodate their timetables and their needs. These kids will come in for one training session, usually with the parent, and then off they go. The rest of the course is done online.

We've also found some amazing applications of e-learning for co-op education. We had a student who wanted to be in the space program. You can understand that there are not a lot of space program placements available in rural Ontario. But this student did an e-co-op program with the Canadian Space Agency. We also had kids from military families stationed in Germany talking to kids in our schools about what Remembrance Day means to them.

Providing access to opportunities for smaller boards and schools is one part of the picture. But I think e-learning has application for all students in all boards, and we're only just now beginning to explore the possibilities."

Rose Burton-Spohn
London District
Catholic School Board



"I came at e-learning from a student's perspective, long before I went on to develop e-learning courses for the London Catholic board. I took some career counselling courses at a community college. These courses were online, and when I began the work, I was immediately struck by the power of this medium.

Now, the variety of ways e-learning can be approached is enormous. Those first courses I took were little more than a textbook online. Some of the courses I did later at university appeared to have very little traditional 'content' but most of the learning took place through discussion between the professor and the students.

So there's a huge range, and I think this brings up an important concept. When we think about e-learning, we often think about interaction between the student and the content, or the student and the technology. But e-learning allows some very powerful interaction between teacher and learner, and learner and learner.

You're always going to have people assume that a particular course can't be taught using this medium...phys ed, or music, or foods. And yet, when you talk to people who actually teach these courses online, you find out they can work. Music online can work very well. I know of an art teacher who teaches art online. Or, take the case of science. Where's the lab? Well, there are all kinds of amazing flash-based simulations out there. Or, experiments students can do at home.

There are so many kids who can benefit from this. Of course, you have kids in a smaller school or board that may not have the ability to access certain courses. Even in a larger school, there may only be one section of a course being offered which doesn't fit the student's timetable. And it really goes from there. Many traditional classrooms are set up for the extrovert. So many times an introverted child will blossom in an e-learning environment. e-learning can also be ideal for students who are gifted.

But e-learning could also be effective for that group who are at risk, a group of students for whom the traditional classroom isn't working. Maybe you have a child who can't keep up with the spoken language in the classroom, but whose reading and writing capabilities are fine. You may have a student who needs a bit of extra time. What about the child who is bullied? Or the Grade 11 student who is still working on Grade 9 science? And then there are the students I would describe as 'school-phobic', who just don't feel they fit in. We all know students like that.

Another aspect of e-learning that I think is often forgotten is the value of being exposed to the technology itself. There is a lot of e-learning happening out there, to the extent that I think it might be fair to say that most of our students will engage in e-learning at some time in their lives. Some would argue that it is our role to prepare kids for the world they're going to find themselves living and working in, and I think e-learning is becoming an increasingly important part of that equation."

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

In conversation with Dr. Bruce Ferguson

Early School Leavers: Understanding the Lived Reality of Student Disengagement from Secondary School, a research report commissioned by the Ministry of Education and completed in 2005, provides new insights into the complex array of factors that can cause students to leave secondary school, and the supports that may help students stay in school and complete their secondary school graduation. In this issue, Curriculum Update highlights key report findings, and speaks with Dr. Bruce Ferguson of the Hospital for Sick Children, one of the principal leaders of the research project, and an outspoken advocate for students.

Curriculum Update: The report covers a great deal of territory. What are some of the findings that stand out for you?

Ferguson: Well, one of the issues that became clear to us – and I speak very directly to teachers and principals about this – is that we tend to be reluctant to engage these kids.

One young man we interviewed said “I was not doing well academically...and I was getting into trouble...but nobody ever asked me what was wrong.” Someone else I recall said “Nobody ever went one-on-one with me.”

Before the research, we trained our interviewers to thank the students, particularly because we knew how difficult it would be to share this information. But in many cases they would say “No, it was great. Nobody ever asked me before.”

Curriculum Update: This often comes up in the research...the importance of knowing that someone cares.

Ferguson: Yes, it's critically important for all young people. We talk about the 5 Cs of success: competence, character, caring, connection, and confidence. Well, there's a good reason we book-ended competence and confidence. Because it's the first that leads to the second.

You know, when we work on self-esteem – this business of telling kids they're beautiful, smart, and wonderful no matter what – this is not a very solid thing in my mind.

What you do is give them competence. And then say “Look what you can do!..”



Curriculum Update: The report also highlights the importance of relationship and connection in the community.

Ferguson: Yes, it's all inter-connected. And what's particularly important is having meaningful connections with adults other than family. It's a wonderful thing when a lot of people in a community care about you.

For one thing, you're much more reluctant to do foolish things. You're not nearly as reluctant when you think nobody cares.

Curriculum Update: You place a great deal of emphasis on this connection between relationships and early school leaving.

Ferguson: Absolutely. It isn't a decision that suddenly crops up at one point in time. What happens is that it's dependent on the relationships that the student has with people in his or her family, the relationships the student has with people at school – both teachers and peers – it depends on students' academic experiences, how successful they feel.

Young people travel on hope, the same way cars travel on gas. If they don't have any hope they stop travelling.

I was in a northern community and I was asked “What are we going to do with our young people?” I said “What's your vision of the future for this

community?..” The response was that there was no vision for the future, to which I replied “Then there's nothing you can do for your young people.”

What we do for young people is that we create hope. If we go to places in the world where young people in large groups don't have hope, then you see trouble. Then you see large populations of youth who don't see a legitimate way to make it.

Curriculum Update: So how do we fuel kids with that hope?

Ferguson: Well, we can't expect educators to do it on their own. And this raises an important point. I believe that the community has withdrawn a bit from its involvement in education.

If you look, say, 40 years ago at secondary school events in Toronto, I think you'll find that the community had a lot more interest in them. More parents came out to parent/teacher night, they came out to school plays, football games, that kind of thing.

But they don't do that any more, and not in the same numbers. In part that's because students don't feel the same way about schools, and I don't think communities embrace schools the way they once did.

There needs to be respect flowing in both directions. Schools need to take care that they are not throwing up barriers. And in turn, it would not be an altogether bad thing if we went back a few hundred

Why do students leave school before graduation?

The factors influencing student disengagement and early school leaving are complex and multi-faceted. The research stresses that disengagement:

- > is a 'process' rather than an 'event'
- > occurs, not in isolation, but in the context of relationships and interactions with peers, teachers, schools, and communities
- > is influenced by community/school factors, by family/classroom factors, and by individual factors

While the risk factors are varied and complex (see the chart Key Risk Factors for Youth in this article), the most commonly cited reasons offered by early school leavers for disengagement were school-related. Leavers, for example, are more likely to perceive their school environment as unrewarding, have negative interactions with their teachers, and experience social and academic problems.

What factors support students and minimize the risk?

The report identifies three main protective factors which positively influence the likelihood that students will remain in school:

- > High levels of school engagement (social and academic)
- > High levels of parental involvement (in all areas of a youth's life)
- > Moderate levels of employment (between 10 and 15 hours per week)

It also examines a variety of approaches to prevention and intervention which hold promise. These include:

Early prevention programs: parental skills training and family involvement; early childhood education; and reading and writing programs.

Basic core strategies: mentoring/tutoring; service learning (linking significant community service experiences with academic learning); alternative schooling; and out-of-school enhancement (after-school and summer-school, recreation, and social programs).

Instruction-related practices: professional development; openness to diverse identities, learning styles and multiple intelligences; and the use of instructional technologies.

Community-related strategies: community collaboration; career education and workforce readiness; conflict resolution and violence prevention.

The report outlines a number of key strategies for working effectively with all youth, and highlights the common characteristics of high-performing schools, including:

- > A clear and shared vision and purpose
- > High standards and expectations
- > Effective school leadership
- > High levels of collaboration and communication
- > Curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned with defined standards
- > Frequent monitoring of teaching and learning
- > Focused professional development
- > A supportive learning environment
- > High levels of community and parental involvement

In order to be effective, according to the report, programs for students must be comprehensive, and directed toward all facets of a student's life. Because students leave school early for a variety of reasons, services and supports must be flexible and customized to meet a wide range of individual needs, often requiring the integration of community services. Schools and programs are most effective when they have a broad focus that includes academic, social and supportive activities, and when they are as multi-dimensional as the problems they are intended to solve.

Key Risk Factors for Youth

In exploring the process of disengagement, the report identifies a variety of complex pathways to early school leaving, each with different starting points, faltering points and end points. The study also points out unique risk factors associated with gender, and with transgender issues, and the experiences of Aboriginal, rural, Francophone, newcomer, second-plus generation youth, and visible minorities.

	Community/School	Family/Classroom	Individual
Non-School Related	• Low social class • Minority status • Gender • Urban/rural • Youth culture • Immigration/resettlement	• Family • School-home link • Adult status	• Disabilities • Risk-taking • Social isolation • Identity issues • Moves/interruptions
School Related	• Ineffective discipline • Lack of referral, counselling or outreach • Negative school culture • Negative administrator relations • School structural flaws • Lack of assessment of disabilities • School culture conflicts	• Negative teacher-student relations • Curriculum • Passive instruction • Disregard for learning style • Lack of support/outreach	• Low level of engagement • Suspension/expulsion • Retentions

Key Protective Factors for Youth

	Community/School	Family/Classroom	Individual
Non-School Related	• Urban/rural • Supportive others in the community (such as links to child welfare)	• Family • School-home link • Moderate employment	• Educational advantage • Friends/partners • Healthy lives • Insight, reflection, motivation
School Related	• Positive school climate • School and class size • Tutors and support style • Alternative education	• Teaching style/care • Counsellors/outreach • Curriculum	• Friends/peers • Classmates

DVD Explores Key Strategies

In an informative 10 minute DVD presentation distributed to school boards in the spring of 2006, Dr. Bruce Ferguson speaks about the key strategies used by educators to ease the transition for students in Grade 8 as they prepare for secondary school. The DVD also highlights protective factors such as the importance of a caring adult in the life of a student. To obtain a copy, contact your Student Success Leader or Superintendent.

years to the days when the school – and the teacher – were the centre of the community.

Curriculum Update: You mean a sense that the entire community takes ownership.

Ferguson: Yes. I'll tell you, my jaw drops when I hear someone say "I don't have kids in school, why should I pay taxes?." We can't afford to be this short-sighted.

Curriculum Update: This concept, then, of the caring community...how does it extend into the classroom?

Ferguson: Well, the community, the school, the classroom...it all has to be about the kids.

It's interesting...I attended a meeting recently where a research questionnaire was under discussion which had to do with identifying the characteristics that make good teachers.

Well, I took a look at this questionnaire, and it was about all the cognitive characteristics of people. I pointed out that while all these cognitive characteristics were desirable, I thought that someone could be at the very high end of all of them and still be a poor teacher, because they didn't see themselves as human developers.

Curriculum Update: Can you elaborate?

Ferguson: The first question a teacher has to ask himself or herself, I think, is "Do I see myself as a human developer, or am I teaching geography?" The answer I would hope to hear is "I'm a human developer, and geography is my vehicle."

A human developer looks at every kid, and looks at the life trajectory they're on, and says, is there anything I can do in the time I have with this kid, to put them on a better life trajectory. That's a wonderful gift we can give young people.

Curriculum Update: What about the role of the school?

Ferguson: Well, one of the recommendations in the report is "Be flexible." And a prime example of how we might apply that is to think about adolescent development when we organize our schools.

Biologically, adolescents don't wake up until late morning. It's not because they're lazy, it's how their biology is.

The other reality is that the part of our brain that helps us plan and strategize, develop hypotheses, test hypotheses logically, and monitor our behaviour – our forebrain – finishes developing when we're in our early 20s.

So there's an example of a case where we have to be careful not to set kids up with such an overwhelming array of assignments that the odds are stacked against them. Rather we need schools

that respond to who these kids are – and where they are – so that their success is inevitable.

Curriculum Update: What observations does the research lead you to, where students are concerned?

Ferguson: Many. But one I would highlight is this: If you ask "Who are the most important students in the school?." You are likely to be told that the Grade 12 students are the most important, because they're the ones heading out to their various destinations.

I would say just the opposite. The most important students in the school are the Grade 9 students because they are going to be there for four years. I can't think of a life transition that's more difficult than the transition from an elementary school where all the teachers know you and love you, to a secondary school with 1500 students.

So we need to treat this group of students as if they were the most important students in the school. We need to invest in them. And we need to invest in them early.

Curriculum Update: This sense of 'investment' is clearly a thread that runs through all of your thinking.

Ferguson: Yes. Investment by every partner in the process.

In order for kids to be as good as they can be, they have to be engaged themselves. Their teachers have to be engaged, in terms of

wanting good outcomes for the kids, both academically and personally. School leaders need to be engaged in creating school environments which welcome these kids, and help them turn around if they are making poor choices. The quality of teaching and the quality of the school environment, including being flexible and responsive to kids' differing needs, are vastly important.

Then we bring in parents and the community. Parents have to be comfortable coming into the school, and seeing that there's something they can do. I would also say that parents need to clearly understand their role. They need to be asking their kids what's going on at school, do you have homework, what can I do to make it possible to do that homework.

We need to convince the community that they have a vested interest in the life of the school. They have to be informed, they have to feel welcome, they have to feel that the school wants them there.

That's what this is about. A renewed sense of community, and a shared commitment to these kids. They're all good kids. We need to ask ourselves every day "Are we using everything we know, and doing everything we can, to help them be as successful as they can be?"

Where can I find the full report?

The report on early school leavers can be found on the ministry website at www.edu.gov.on.ca. Enter the Administrator's section of the website and click on the 'reports' link.



GRADE 8 TO 9 TRANSITIONS: A KEY PRIORITY

Credit failure early in students' secondary school careers is a well-established predictor of later school difficulty and, in many cases, early school leaving. Decreasing the number of students in Grade 9 who lose a credit is a key ministry priority for 2006-07.

In support of schools and boards, training was provided to more than 250 Student Success Leaders and Supervisory Officers from across the province in May of 2006. The training focused on the importance, for both boards and schools, of developing and putting in place a clearly defined process, with explicit steps and strategies, to enhance effective student transitions.

The training also highlighted effective practices for school teams such as developing a checklist of the characteristics of effective transitions, and developing plans that reflect those characteristics with identified strategies and timelines, interventions, information about how and what data sharing will occur, and the enhancement of protective factors such as caring adult connections.

How can we intervene effectively on behalf of all students?

The report concludes that successful strategies for reducing early school leaving must reduce risk factors while increasing protective factors at the community, school and personal levels. It summarizes by offering three key principles to guide effective intervention and support:

1. Be more understanding

- > Listen to what students have to say
- > Understand the complex ‘youth culture’ students live in
- > Recognize the impact of various forms of racism, discrimination, and bullying
- > Operate according to principles of respect and fairness
- > Accept different lifestyles and life plans
- > Take acquisition of cultural competence seriously through, for example, adequate teacher training

2. Be more flexible

- > Take into account the adult roles of youth (work, parenting)
- > Develop local courses to meet local needs
- > Use innovative, interactive, and personalized instructional strategies
- > Develop interdisciplinary alternatives to suspension/expulsion
- > Build links with the community
- > Consider the fit between school structure and adolescent development
- > Include a broad offering of extra-curricular activities
- > Expand alternative approaches to school structure

3. Be more proactive

- > Be proactive when youth begin to disengage from school
- > Provide sufficient and appropriate resources for assessment, counselling, and needed interventions
- > Develop better communication with parents and seek ways to increase parent involvement in schools
- > Improve teacher skills at monitoring student understanding/progress
- > Find ways to use school facilities for homework help and mentoring
- > Create a culture in which youth feel they ‘belong’ in a school

CO-OP AND COMPULSORY CREDITS: NEW PATHWAYS TO STUDENT SUCCESS

Recently announced revisions to the province’s OSSD graduation requirements are opening new doors for students who want to build on their strengths and interests through experiential learning opportunities outside of the traditional classroom.

Under the revised policy, which is retroactive to September, 2005, a maximum of two cooperative education credits may be applied toward meeting the groups 1, 2, or 3 compulsory credit requirements of the OSSD. The options now are:

GROUP 1:

Students can now select a guidance and career education or cooperative education credit to meet this requirement previously restricted to a credit in English, a third language, social sciences, and the humanities, or Canadian and world studies.

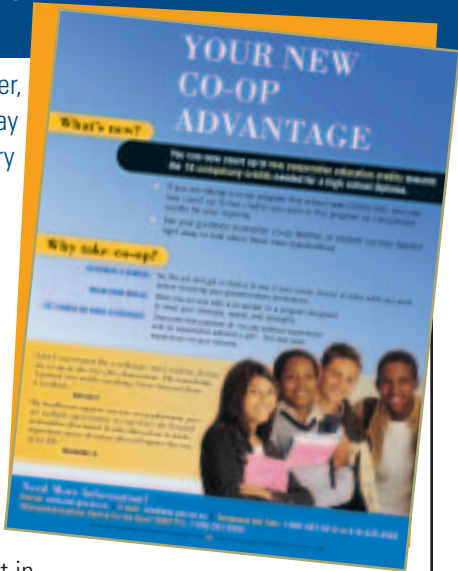
GROUP 2:

Students can now select a cooperative education credit to meet this requirement previously restricted to a credit in health and physical education, the arts, or business studies.

GROUP 3:

Students can now select a cooperative education credit to meet this requirement previously restricted to a credit in science or technological education.

Cooperative education has served for many years as a ‘model’ for recognizing learning outside of the traditional classroom as a meaningful part of students’ secondary education. With the introduction of co-op credits which may be counted as compulsory credits, however, the range and scope of experiential learning opportunities will be dramatically increased for Ontario students. In this issue, Curriculum Update speaks with a number of Ontario educators about how these changes will benefit students.



PERSPECTIVES: Ontario Educators on the new co-op credits

Krista-Layne Brandon • Conseillère Pédagogique • Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud

“We’ve always said that co-op education is for all students, and that philosophy hasn’t changed. Since the change to allow up to 2 co-op credits to count as compulsory credits was introduced, we’ve met with our principals to explain the changes, and we’ve worked to create schedules that will allow more students to enjoy the benefits of cooperative education, whether they’re destined for the workplace, college, or university.

Of course, co-op education also benefits those students who are having challenges academically. For these students, cooperative education meets their needs and helps us to help them develop the skills they need for employment.

But I think one of the things this announcement really does is to eliminate the possibility that cooperative education is seen as a ‘dumping ground’ for kids who are doing poorly. It reinforces, I think, the fact

“If it takes a village to raise a child, then co-op... is a demonstration of how it takes a community to educate a child.”

that for all students – regardless of their destination – co-op can be an extremely valuable aspect of learning, and preparation for the future.”

Marc Verhoeve • Head of Counselling Services • Forest Heights Collegiate Institute Waterloo Region District School Board

“The change to co-op credits is going to allow us to tailor our course offerings with much more flexibility to meet the genuine needs of students.

If you look at group 1, for example, you’ll see that all of these courses – language, social science, world studies – are driven by language comprehension. And of course that’s a valuable skillset. But it may also disenfranchise some students. Similarly, students facing the group 1, 2, or 3 compulsory credits may have learning difficulties that make one or more of those problematic, and create a real barrier to progressing toward graduation.

The inclusion of guidance and cooperative education is a huge package that opens up a massive range of possibilities. I have always thought, particularly working with students at risk, that allowing these as compulsory credits would be an astounding thing for these kids. What these courses really accomplish is to show these students the transferability of their skills to the workplace. So they have a chance to say, “Okay, now I see why I need English and math.” That’s a very important means to improve retention and re-engage kids. And of course it’s also a powerful way for kids to

search validly for possible directions after high school, and receive credit for it.

We had 17 students this year alone who would probably have dropped out, but stayed for the GLN and GLD. That in itself is an awesome result.”

Carlos Sousa • Vice-Principal • Alternative Learning Communities York Catholic District School Board

“This is a huge announcement. As educators, it provides us with much more flexibility, and a wider range of possibilities for programming.

Of course, it provides students with another way to meet graduation requirements, but in a way that honours the fact that this is important learning. Co-operative education is now a credentialed way to learn by virtue of counting as a compulsory credit. That’s critically important.

This announcement benefits all students. For example, you might have a student who wants to pursue university or college journalism studies. This student can now use a fifth English credit to meet the group 1 requirement and a co-op experience at a journalism placement to meet the group 2 and 3 requirements. In this way, the student can tailor his or her program pathway and be in a better position to make informed career and education decisions.

But I think the main benefit here is a recognition that, for many kids, this is the preferred method of

learning. Many of our students thrive at co-operative education placements because it’s hands-on, it’s real life, and it’s relevant to them. For many students, this is the way they learn best. They are interested and they are engaged. That’s what really matters.”

Mary-Jo Dick-Westerby, Principal • Victor Disyak, Co-Op Teacher • Robert Bateman High School • Halton District School Board

“I think this is a huge step forward in legitimizing different ways of learning, and in recognizing that these courses – and the students who take them – are part of the mainstream.

These courses are important for kids who are headed toward all destinations. Lots of kids, for example, think they want to pursue a particular career because they’ve seen something on television, or maybe their parents have suggested it. But a student who wants to pursue medicine, and then discovers through a co-op experience that he or she does not like the hospital setting, has succeeded – has gained some very valuable experience. You also find students who had no idea how much they enjoy a particular setting until they’ve had the opportunity to experience it.

The other thing this change does is to bring the community into education in a much more powerful way. If it takes a village to raise a child, then co-op education is a demonstration of how it takes a community to educate a child.

We’ve found that the reaction from the community has been overwhelming. We thought that it would be difficult to place students in cooperative settings. But we hear perhaps 5 in 100 responses that are a ‘no’. What is even more exciting is the transformation that can happen for students, when you’re able to make a really good match. We’ve seen students go from depression to an entirely new frame of mind – and body language – that’s truly remarkable, and in a very short time. There’s nothing more positive we could say than that.”

Melanie Parrack • System Superintendent, Student Success Toronto District School Board

“I think one of the things we need to pay attention to is keeping kids engaged in their education. Because the fact is that, like it or not, there are people out there who don’t learn in the way we originally constructed classrooms, with the rows of desks.

Which courses can be applied?

The additional compulsory credit requirement for group 1 may now be met by successfully completing one of the following courses:

Learning Strategies: Skills for Success in Secondary School

Grade 9, Open (GLS10, GLE10, GLE20)

Discovering the Workplace

Grade 10, Open (GLD20)

Designing Your Future

Grade 11, Open (GWL30)

Leadership and Peer Support

Grade 11, Open (GPP30)

Advanced Learning Strategies: Skills for Success After Secondary School

Grade 12, Open (GLS40, GLE40, GLE30)

Navigating the Workplace

Grade 12, Open (GLN40)

The additional compulsory credit requirement for group 1, 2, or 3 may also be met through a cooperative education course. Cooperative education courses are described in *Cooperative Education and Other Forms of Experiential Learning: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Secondary Schools, 2000*. A maximum of two of the three group 1, 2, and 3 credit requirements may be met through cooperative education.

These kids need relevance, they need to touch, taste and feel what it's like to apply their learning. And that's how they make a genuine connection with the subject material.

So co-op education is an absolute lifesaver for a lot of kids. First, for those students who want that work experience, who participate in our regular co-op programs, the kids who go out, and then come back to continue their education.

Then there is the group of kids who are teetering, who are just at the tipping point of leaving school. For that group, these changes open new doors and create new hope.

But we've also instituted several types of cooperative education programs to bring kids back and

re-engage them with the school system. There are lots of kids who really do want to be in school. But school just doesn't work for them. So if we give them a co-op experience that values what they're already working at, and re-engages them, we've realized a huge success. Allow them to earn compulsory credits at the same time? That's going to change lives."



“ STUDENT VOICES: COOPERATIVE EDUCATION ”

"All I wanted to gain from my co-op experience was some insight and a taste of what the engineering field has to offer. Never would I have imagined that I would be given the responsibility to complete the kind of tasks that I was assigned. This experience has confirmed my postsecondary aspirations of pursuing my interest in engineering. Co-op was everything I thought it would be and more!"

Daniel Baggio

"I was never sure what I wanted to be or if my interest in journalism was purely a dream. Now I know I actually have skill and talent that others can appreciate. Seeing my work published and recognizing it as the best step toward my life goals is definitely the greatest accomplishment and the best feeling I've ever experienced."

Liz Johnson

"Since Grade 9, I have heard about co-op. Now that I am here, I am so happy! I have a connection to those people and feel like I belong here. I am on the right path."

Michael Jones

"These experiences allowed me to make important career decisions that will have an impact on the rest of my life. I will never forget the many things that I learned and witnessed during my co-op placements. I wouldn't trade this opportunity for anything."

Miranda Strucke

"I was pleased and proud to have decided to take the co-op course because it saved me precious time. If it hadn't been for that course, I would have studied business without knowing that it wasn't the right field for me."

Fadilah Jamous

"Co-op is the greatest experience that I have ever had in my high school career. Co-op opened my eyes to what I would like to do for my future job. It has given me the opportunity to find out more about myself, and it has taught me the importance of taking the initiative to ask questions in order to learn more. It has also taught me how to be successful."

Tracey Cave

CURRICULUM UPDATE Receives IABC Award of Merit

Curriculum Update has been recognized by the International Association of Business Communicators with a 2006 Ovation Award of Merit. This award, which recognizes excellence in communication, is bestowed annually by the IABC, a global network of communications professionals in the field of corporate communications.



SUCCESS FOR RURAL STUDENTS: NEW INITIATIVE RECOGNIZES UNIQUE NEEDS

Rural schools represent 25 percent of all Ontario schools, and serve some 15 percent of the province's student population.

The role of the rural school is distinct, however, and many rural schools face unique needs and challenges. In particular, rural schools typically serve smaller school populations – averaging just over 500 students – and often cover a large geographical area. Rural schools in many cases play an expanded role in the community, and contribute significantly to the overall quality of community life. Equally important, they play a vital role in serving distinct local needs and building the economic prosperity of the communities they serve, which has become an increasingly critical issue as many rural communities face declining population.

Through the Rural Student Success Program, a series of initiatives has been introduced to address the unique needs of rural schools, and ensure greater success for Ontario's 75,000 rural secondary school students.

A critical component of the province's Student Success Strategy, this initiative includes a lighthouse program to explore and promote successful practices for rural schools, expanded credit opportunities for rural students, and new e-learning pilot projects being launched across the province.

Rural Lighthouse program

The Rural Lighthouse program has provided rural secondary schools with funding to pursue 70 innovative projects that address the unique needs of rural schools and communities, and to develop successful practices that can be adopted province-wide. Programs selected for funding are focused on successfully retaining students in rural high schools, increasing graduation rates, and encouraging a greater number of students to pursue post-secondary education.

Among the funded lighthouse initiatives are an agricultural academy, an Aboriginal centre for

student success which provides tutoring and exposure to the arts, a virtual e-learning campus, and an adventure-based learning program. The mini-profiles included in this article highlight just ten of the 70 projects underway across the province.

Expanded credit opportunities

A Farming and Rural Major has been introduced as part of the new Specialist High Skills Major program, which provides sector-specific bundles of courses leading to the OSSD. Within the new Farming and Rural Major, students will have the option of bundling 6 to 12 farming and related courses to receive the specialist designation on their diploma. While maintaining the same academic core, the Specialist option allows students to pursue sector-specific credits in a way that will be recognized by future education programs or workplaces.

Rural and agriculture-related cooperative education courses are also being developed – or expanded – to encourage farm-based co-op experiences. Students are now able to count up to two co-op credits toward the compulsory credit requirements of the OSSD (see "Co-Op Credits: New Pathways to Student Success" in this issue of Curriculum Update).

In addition, consideration is being given to ministry recognition of programs such as 4-H, which may enable students to gain up to two credits toward the OSSD through participation in external programs. All students, including rural students, will also be able to obtain credit

for college, university, or apprenticeship while completing their high school diploma, as part of the ministry's dual credit provisions.

e-learning for rural students

E-learning can provide a powerful means for rural schools to broaden access to a wide variety of course options for students. The new e-learning pilot projects, many of which are being undertaken by rural schools, were launched in the second semester of the 2005-06 school year, and will continue in 2006-07 (see "e-learning: Powerful new tools for teachers and students" in this issue of Curriculum Update).

“ Rural schools in many cases play an expanded role in the community, and contribute significantly to the overall quality of community life. ”



IN PROFILE: Lighthouse projects explore innovative solutions

Supporting Aboriginal Students with Alternate Learnings

Creation of alternative learnings with curriculum emphasis on Aboriginal literature, music, and art, incorporation of workshops to help build confidence, and the creation of an Alternative Learning Centre.

With this project, we're working on building Aboriginal students' self-esteem, by honouring and acknowledging their culture, bringing it into the school, and giving them a sense of belonging, at the same time as we provide more opportunities for learning. We're incorporating more curriculum that has Aboriginal roots, including music, art, reading, literature, and history...and actively bringing all of that into the classroom. Students will attend schools that genuinely serve their needs. That's what this program is all about.

Michelle Leigh

Principal of Student Success Initiative
District School Board of Ontario North East

Technological Studies in Construction and Communication

A new model for course delivery and programming for technological studies in construction and communication.

In part, this initiative involved upgrading our technological education facilities, which is very important in attracting students to the school, and providing experiences that are relevant to them. But as a rural school which buses students every day, we have a second issue to address: our students have limited time at school each day, and they want to spend that time in the shops, taking advantage of this technology. So we are developing web-based courses that will allow them to focus on their compulsory subjects whether they are at school or at home. It's proving particularly valuable for at risk students who can now see a meaningful place for themselves at school, and see the relevance of education to their own lives.

Suzanne Moncion

Surintendante de l'éducation
Conseil scolaire de district des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario

Specialization Program in Manufacturing Welding

A new study program for students who want to specialize in manufacturing welding, and pursue local workplace opportunities.

We're addressing a number of key issues with this program. The first is that this community offers students some very specific learning and workplace opportunities in manufacturing welding. It's clearly in the interest of students to provide a pathway into this career, and at the same time ensure that we retain skilled people in the community. It's also critical that we – like many French-language schools – are able to provide the educational opportunities our students need right here, without leaving home. This program accomplishes both aims, and helps to build a sound future for our students and our community.

Johanne Boisvenu-Blondin

Coordonnatrice de l'Éducation coopérative
et autres formes d'apprentissage par l'expérience
Conseil scolaire de district catholique du Nouvel Ontario

De la terre à la table

A program which gives students the opportunity to gain specialized knowledge and skills in the field of agriculture.

Often, students need to see a connection between education and their own lives, their own futures and aspirations. That's what makes education meaningful and relevant for them. In our local community, there are many opportunities for cooperative education and apprenticeship in the agricultural field. And we have a large group of students who are highly motivated to take advantage of them. So by offering very specialized educational experiences, and bringing these two opportunities together, we're able to benefit our students, our community partners, and our community.

Gina Michaud

Conseillère pédagogique
Conseil scolaire de district des écoles catholiques du Sud-Ouest

Synchronous e-learning Strategy

Development and implementation of a synchronous e-learning model that would connect all rural schools in Grand Erie, and create a virtual campus with open accessibility and support for all students.

The virtual campus is giving our kids a huge advantage in terms of both course offerings, and timetabling flexibility. Essentially, by connecting all six of our rural schools, and providing a virtual learning lab in each, we've created one large school that not only offers more courses, and the potential for more sections, but that also leverages the subject expertise of our teaching staff, and allows all students to benefit. To be sure, there is a great deal of coordination and planning involved in making this a reality, and many technical considerations. But the reward is that we're opening new doors for kids, and that's been very gratifying.

Andy Nesbitt

Principal Leader
Grand Erie District School Board

Student Success Resource Centre

Creation of dedicated spaces for computers and resources with a focus on e-learning and independent learning delivery models.

Our Student Success Resource Centres are designed to provide greater opportunity – particularly to students at risk – by tapping into e-learning and providing access to a wider range of course offerings. In part, this has to do with addressing the issue of resources, and the ability of small rural schools to deliver all of the programming students may need or want. But more important, I think, is what that range of choices means to kids in terms of offering more relevance and more opportunities for success. The statistics on student dropout rates show that there are a significant number of students not completing high school. This represents a very significant effort to retain kids in the system, and give them the choices they need to enjoy success.

Frank Allan

Principal, Curriculum Services
Ottawa Carlton District School Board

Lighthouse Wireless Access

Development of a high-speed wireless network which provides the capability for video conferencing with feeder schools, fellow students in urban centres, and peers in rural areas throughout North America.

One of the challenges of living in a rural community is that, in many cases, we don't enjoy the infrastructure of a larger urban centre. This new wireless network is a very cost-effective way to give our students the same access to the benefits of technology – such as e-learning – that they would enjoy anywhere else in the province. That's critical. We're also very excited to have integrated videoconferencing facilities in each of our schools, which opens up a whole range of opportunities for interaction between teachers and students, for hosting a variety of virtual learning experiences, and building improved communication with the rural feeder schools. It's a very exciting development for the entire system.

Greg Reeves

Student Success Lead Superintendent of Schools
Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington
Catholic District School Board

Beedaban

Creation of a Student Success Centre which will provide an alternative environment for tutoring, remediation, assistance with literacy/numeracy and exposure to the arts.

The Student Success Centre is a very important initiative that allows us to provide an alternative environment for our struggling students to receive tutoring, or remediation, or to get some assistance with literacy and numeracy skills. It's also a place where they can feel comfortable, feel at home, connect with someone. So the physical space is one important element. We're also upgrading library resources, developing First Nations inclusive curriculum, and upgrading our technology, which means a great deal to us as a community. Given the distances and weather we deal with, this will have a huge impact on our ongoing effort to build, and be part of, the community.

Anna Maria Barsanti

Student Success Leader
Rainbow District School Board

Development of a Commercial Grade Kitchen

This program places emphasis on creating pathways for students entering careers in hospitality and culinary arts, with the development of a commercial grade kitchen, and variety of initiatives including development of a hot breakfast program.

If we're going to retain students, we need to have the programs in place that genuinely match their needs and interests. We have very good technology programs in the traditional areas, but really felt there was an untapped need for opportunities in hospitality and food-service. We're hoping to accomplish a variety of things with the new kitchen facilities, providing both the academic and the experiential learning students need to move toward post-secondary schooling, or the workplace. But just as important, I think, we're providing experiences that are meaningful for kids. We're retaining students, and showing them how education fits into the bigger picture of their lives.

Ian Simpson

Student Success Leader
Rainy River District School Board

Additional Pathway in Personal Service

Creation of new opportunities for female students interested in pursuing cosmetology including creation of a salon to offer hands-on experience.

We've always had difficulty – as many schools do – in attracting girls into our technology programs. Cosmetology is offered at only one other school in our board, so this is a very exciting opportunity to create a pathway that our female students will find appealing. We're creating facilities on-site that will allow students to gain hands-on experience, and the response has already been overwhelming, even with the very minimal amount of communication we've done so far. Rural schools like Norwell D.S.S. have to be a one-stop shop to serve the needs of the entire rural community. This is a major step in that direction.

David Euale

Superintendent of Education
Upper Grand District School Board

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