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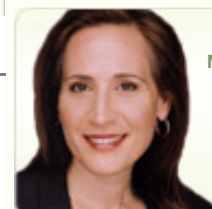
Policy/Program Memorandum No. 129

Date of Issue: July 6, 2001

Effective: Until revoked or modified

Subject: **PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION (PLAR): IMPLEMENTATION IN ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Application: Directors of Education
Secretaries of School Authorities
Principals of Secondary Schools
Principals of Provincial and Demonstration Schools
Principals of Inspected Private Schools
Principal of the Independent Learning Centre


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INTRODUCTION

This memorandum provides direction to school boards¹ and schools concerning the implementation of *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999* (OSS), section 6.6: Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition, for regular day school students² who are enrolled in Ontario secondary schools, including Provincial Schools, Demonstration Schools, the Independent Learning Centre, and inspected private schools that choose to implement Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition.

This memorandum does not apply to mature students.³ Mature students who return to secondary school before the beginning of the 2003–4 school year will continue to have their placement determined according to the requirements set out in *Ontario Schools, Intermediate and Senior Divisions (Grades 7–12/OACs): Program and Diploma Requirements, 1989*, rev. ed. (OSIS), section 6.14: Equivalent Standing for Mature Students.

¹ Unless otherwise specified, the term *board(s)* in this memorandum refers to school boards, school authorities,



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Provincial and Demonstration Schools, the Independent Learning Centre, and inspected private schools that choose to implement PLAR.

² Regular day school students are students, other than mature students, who are enrolled in a regular day school program.

³ For purposes of determining further required credits for a diploma, a mature student is a student who is at least eighteen years of age (i.e., an adult) and who is returning to school to earn a diploma after being out of secondary school for at least one year.

THE PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION PROCESS

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is the formal evaluation and credit-granting process whereby students may obtain credits for prior learning. Prior learning includes the knowledge and skills that students have acquired, in both formal and informal ways, outside secondary school. Students may have their knowledge and skills evaluated against the expectations outlined in provincial curriculum policy documents in order to earn credits towards the secondary school diploma. The PLAR process involves two components: "challenge" and "equivalency".

The "challenge" process is the process whereby students' prior learning is assessed for the purpose of granting credit for a Grade 10, 11, or 12 course developed from a provincial curriculum policy document published in 1999 or later.

The "equivalency" process is the process of assessing credentials from other jurisdictions.

All boards are responsible for developing and implementing PLAR policies and procedures that are consistent with provincial policy (OSS, sections 6.6 and 8.2).

All credits granted through the PLAR process – that is, through either the challenge process or the equivalency process – must represent the same standards of achievement as credits granted to students who have taken the courses.

In accordance with the *Education Act*, publicly funded boards will not charge students fees for undergoing the challenge or equivalency process. Subsection 32(1) of the act enables a person who is "qualified to be a resident pupil" of a board to attend school "without payment of a fee". Clause 170(1)(6) of the act requires boards to "provide instruction ... for the pupils who have a right to attend a

school under the jurisdiction of the board".

This memorandum contains direction to boards and schools concerning both the challenge process and the equivalency process.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PLAR CHALLENGE PROCESS

Responsibilities of Boards

All publicly funded boards, as well as inspected private schools that choose to implement PLAR, must develop and implement policies and procedures related to the challenge process that are consistent with provincial policy (OSS, sections 6.6 and 8.2). In accordance with the implementation schedule given in OSS, appendix 1, all publicly funded boards must implement these policies and procedures for Grade 10 courses in the 2001–2 academic year, for Grade 11 courses in the 2002–3 academic year, and for Grade 12 courses in the 2003–4 academic year. Inspected private schools that choose to implement PLAR, however, may implement these policies and procedures in accordance with the times specified in this schedule or at any time following the times specified in this schedule.

Boards must also ensure that a clear statement is published in the school course calendars outlining when

students can challenge for credit and what opportunities for challenge are available (OSS, section 5.3.1).

It should be noted that a board is not obliged to provide opportunities for students to challenge for credit for courses based on provincial curriculum policy documents that are not actually taught in schools operated by the board. Such a board may make arrangements with other boards to provide opportunities for eligible students to challenge for credit for courses that are not offered by the board.

Boards must use the forms entitled "PLAR Challenge for Credit: Cumulative Tracking Record" and "PLAR Challenge for Credit: Interim Tracking Record" provided in the appendix to this memorandum for recording student results. No changes of any kind may be made to these forms. (See also the section "Record Keeping" on page 6 of this memorandum.)

Boards may use the sample application form and the sample form for recording assessment that are provided in the appendix, or they may develop their own. Any forms developed by boards, however, must include, at a minimum, what is on the sample forms.

Boards will report to the ministry in the

School September Reports the number of all challenges for credit that were completed – that is, all challenges for which students earned a final percentage grade, whether a passing or a failing grade. For semestered schools, this information will also be submitted in the School March Reports.

Responsibilities of School Principals

PLAR procedures will be carried out under the direction of the school principal,⁴ who grants credits.

The principal will:

- ensure that students are informed that they are responsible for initiating the challenge process and for satisfying all of the requirements, and ensure that students who are not adults (i.e., students who are under the age of eighteen) are informed that they need parental approval before applying to challenge for credit for a course;
- ensure that every prospective applicant and his or her parents, if he or she is not an adult, are informed about policies and procedures related to challenging for credit, including policies on and procedures for recording results in the Ontario Student Record (OSR) and on the Ontario Student Transcript (OST) (see the section "Record Keeping" on

page 6 of this memorandum);

- ensure that every prospective applicant is provided with an application form (see the form in the appendix to this memorandum), as well as materials that indicate what is expected in the course (i.e., the curriculum expectations) for which the student wishes to challenge for credit;
- evaluate each application in consultation with the student's parents (or with the student if the student is an adult) and appropriate school staff (i.e., guidance counsellor, teacher-adviser, and subject teacher) to determine whether reasonable evidence for success exists and whether the challenge should occur;
- develop formal tests and other assessment strategies;
- conduct the testing (i.e., the use of formal tests and of other appropriate assessment strategies);
- evaluate and report on the student's performance.

For the purposes of this memorandum, the principal of an inspected private school that chooses to implement PLAR is the person who has responsibility for the daily operation of the school.

⁴Principals will ensure that students who do not have suitable documentation owing to extraordinary circumstances (e.g., students who are refugees) will receive counselling concerning the gathering of evidence.

Principals of schools operated by publicly funded boards must ensure that only teachers certified by the Ontario College of Teachers conduct the PLAR challenge process.

Policies Governing the Challenge Process

The challenge process is an evaluation process and may not be used as a way for students to improve their mark in a course for which they have already earned a credit, nor as a way to obtain a credit for a course they have previously failed.

Students may challenge for credit only for Grade 10, 11, and 12 courses in provincial curriculum policy documents. (See OSS, section 6.6.)

Students may earn no more than four credits through the challenge process, including a maximum of two credits in any one discipline.⁵ (See OSS, section 6.6.)

Students may challenge for credit for a course only if they can provide reasonable evidence to the principal

that they would be likely to be successful in the challenge process, in accordance with criteria established by the ministry in OSS, section 6.6, and in this memorandum, and to policies and procedures established by the board. In cases where a student who is an adult or the parent of a student who is not an adult disagrees with the decision of the principal about whether or not the student should challenge for credit, the parent or adult student may ask the appropriate supervisory officer to review the matter.

Students may use certificates or other records of accomplishment earned outside Ontario classrooms as reasonable evidence of eligibility to challenge for credit for a related course within the Ontario curriculum, if they wish to earn credit for the course without taking the course. Students with music certificates that are accepted for credits in OSS, appendix 4, Music Certificates Accepted for Credits, however, are not required to challenge for credit for the appropriate music courses, but are granted credits in accordance with appendix 4 and section 6.8.6.

A student must challenge for credit for an entire course, whether it is a full-credit or a partial-credit course.

⁵The term *discipline* refers to the subject area covered by any one curriculum policy document. All courses in that document are considered to belong to that discipline

Credit will be granted only for the specific course for which the student has successfully challenged for credit.

Students cannot be granted credits through the challenge process for any of the following courses:

- a course in any subject if a credit has already been granted for a course in that subject in a later grade either as a single credit or as part of a block equivalency
- a course for which credit has already been granted or for which there is significant overlap with a course for which credit has been granted (e.g., a student cannot challenge for credit for an academic course if he or she has already earned a credit for the applied course at the same grade level, and vice versa)
- a transfer course
- a locally developed course
- a cooperative education course
- a course in English as a second language (ESL), English literacy development (ELD), or Anglais

pour débutants (APD), if the student has one or more credits in English from the curriculum policy documents for English for Grades 9 to 12 under OSS (i.e., the documents for English-language schools or the documents for French-language schools) or from the curriculum guidelines for English or Anglais/English for Grades 9 to 12/OACs under OSIS

- a course in French as a second language (FSL), Actualisation linguistique en français (ALF), or Perfectionnement du français (PDF), if the student has one or more credits in Français from the curriculum policy documents for Français for Grades 9 to 12 under OSS or the curriculum guideline for Français for Grades 9 to 12/OACs under OSIS

A student will be permitted to challenge for credit for a specific course a second time after a reasonable interval, if the student can provide reasonable evidence to the principal that he or she is likely to be successful after having benefited from additional study and experience during the interval.

In publicly funded schools, students' requests to challenge for credit will be entered in their annual education plans as part of their plans for fulfilling their educational goals.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation through the PLAR process will be based on the curriculum expectations and the achievement charts in the Ontario curriculum policy documents.

Assessment and evaluation must be based on all the strands in a course and on all categories of knowledge and skills and the descriptions of achievement levels given in the achievement chart that appears in the curriculum policy document for the discipline. A student's level of achievement will be recorded as a percentage grade on the OST in the same way as achievement in other courses.

Assessment and evaluation strategies for the challenge process must include formal tests (70 per cent of the final mark) and a variety of other assessment strategies appropriate for the particular course (30 per cent of the final mark). The formal tests must have a balance between written work and practical demonstration that is appropriate for the subject/discipline. Other assessment strategies may include evaluation of written assignments, demonstrations/performances, laboratory work, and quizzes, and observation of student

work. The principal is responsible for developing and administering the formal tests and for determining which assessment strategies are most appropriate for each course for which a student is challenging for credit.

Record Keeping

Boards will ensure that a "PLAR Challenge for Credit: Cumulative Tracking Record" form is maintained and included in the student's OSR. This form is intended to track the number of credits earned and the disciplines in which credits have been earned through the challenge process, as well as failures and withdrawals.

A "PLAR Challenge for Credit: Interim Tracking Record" form will be maintained for credits earned through the challenge process in a school *outside* the student's regular school (the regular school is the school that maintains the student's OSR). The principal of the school outside the student's regular school will use the "Interim Tracking Record" form to communicate the results of the student's challenges for credit to the school that maintains the OSR. The principal of the student's regular school will enter this information onto the "Cumulative Tracking Record" form in the student's OSR. Only the "Cumulative Tracking Record" form will

be maintained in the student's OSR. (If it is necessary to use more than one "Cumulative Tracking Record" form to record a student's attempts to challenge for credit, the additional form (s) should be attached to the original form.)

The following entries must be made on the student's "Cumulative Tracking Record" form and the "Interim Tracking Record" form, as applicable:

- *For challenges for credit for Grade 10, 11, or 12 courses:* The student's passing percentage grade, failing percentage grade, or withdrawal from the challenge process must be entered on the appropriate tracking record form (s).

The following entries must be made on the student's OST:

- *For challenges for credit for Grade 10 courses:* Only passing percentage grades will be entered on the OST. If the student subsequently takes the Grade 10 course, only the higher percentage grade will be recorded on the OST. No notation will be entered on the student's OST if the student withdraws from or receives a failing grade in the challenge process.
- *For challenges for credit for*

Grade 11 and 12 courses:

Passing and failing percentage grades will be entered on the student's OST. No notation will be entered on the OST if the student withdraws from the challenge process.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PLAR EQUIVALENCY PROCESS

Responsibilities of Boards

Boards must develop and implement policies and procedures related to the equivalency process that are consistent with provincial policy (OSS, sections 6.6 and 8.2). They must also ensure that information on the equivalency process is included in their school course calendars (OSS, section 5.3.1).

Responsibilities of School Principals

Students who are eligible for equivalency credits are those who transfer to Ontario secondary schools from non-inspected private schools or schools outside Ontario. Equivalency credits are granted for placement only. The principal of the receiving school will, in the process of deciding where the student should be placed, determine as equitably as possible the total credit equivalency of the student's previous learning, and the number of compulsory and optional credits still to be earned.

To ensure provincial consistency in

establishing equivalency for students for placement purposes, principals will use as a guide the table entitled "Requirements for the OSSD Under OSS" in OSS, appendix 8: Equivalent Diploma Requirements, to determine the number of credits, including compulsory credits, that the student must earn, as well as other diploma requirements that the student must satisfy, in order to qualify for the secondary school diploma. In cases where a student who is an adult or the parent of a student who is not an adult disagrees with the principal's placement decision for students transferring to an Ontario secondary school from a non-inspected private school or a school outside Ontario, the adult student or the parent may ask the appropriate supervisory officer to review the matter.

Principals will note that OSS diploma requirements apply to all students who do not have Ontario credits who enter or are placed in Grade 11 in 2001 and Grade 12 in 2002, as well as to those who entered or were placed in Grade 9 in 1999 and Grade 10 in 2000.

Record Keeping

Principals will ensure that equivalency is recorded in accordance with *The Ontario Student Transcript (OST): Manual, 1999*.

APPENDIX

The following forms are included in the **appendix**: (18K -  Adobe Acrobat file)

- PLAR Challenge for Credit:
Cumulative Tracking Record
- PLAR Challenge for Credit:
Interim Tracking Record
- Application to Challenge for
Credit for a Course
- Record of Assessment of
Challenge for Credit for a Course

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