

December 8, 2005

TRANSFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS: ONTARIO'S STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGY

Before the new high school curriculum was introduced in 1998 by the previous government, the high school graduation rate was 78 per cent. By 2004-05, the rate had dropped to 68 per cent and over 51,000 students were dropping out of high school without enough credits to graduate. While the stakes for leaving school without a diploma are high for individual students, they are also critical for Ontario's economy and competitive advantage.

Shortly after taking office, Education Minister Gerard Kennedy wrote directly to high school students to assure them that extra help was underway to give them every opportunity to succeed. The McGuinty government announced its intention to create a new role for Ontario's publicly funded high schools to improve student achievement and dramatically reduce the unacceptably high drop-out rate through a \$1.3 billion three-phase Student Success Strategy.

The Student Success Strategy is based on the belief that every student deserves a good outcome from his or her education and that the outcome should:

- Be the best fit possible with each student's potential
- Instil willingness and capacity for further learning
- Have a core of common knowledge, skills and values

The McGuinty government has set a target to increase the graduation rate to 85 per cent of all students, resulting in over 90,000 more graduates and simultaneously cutting the drop-out rate in half through the Student Success Strategy by 2010.

Each phase of the strategy is led by five goals:

1. Better learning
2. Healthier attitudes and expectations for student success
3. High schools that are caring and engaging places for all students
4. Clear workplace-with-learning, apprenticeship, college and university outcomes
5. Targets for success

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 for student success

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 different kinds of potential each student may have.

3. High Schools that are caring and engaging places for all students

We will compete for all students by making sure everyone views education and training as their best option to reach their full potential. Additional staffing, training, programming and resources will combine with special student engagement programs to ensure students get the personalized attention and encouragement they need.

4. Clear Workplace-with-Learning, Apprenticeship, College and University Outcomes

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

5. Targets for success

For the first time, there will be targets set by the government for student success in completing high school. Within all schools, starting in Grade 7, new crucial indicators on success will be kept and a new information system will allow schools, boards and the Ministry of Education to track student progress and identify problems more readily.

{70%}

*Canadian parents that expect
their children are headed for university*

{33%}

*Ontario high school students
who go on to university*

“We believe that every student should have the opportunity to participate in co-operative education, and in many shorter-term work experience activities.... This clearly gives employers, unions, and post-secondary institutions a central role in educating high school students.” V.2, p.91

Royal Commission on Learning

THE STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGY PHASES 1-3

PHASE ONE

The first phase of the Student Success Strategy was introduced in 2003 to provide **immediate and remedial assistance** and included:

- Revisions to the Grade 9 and 10 applied math curriculum
- An investment of \$45 million to support the improved delivery of technological education through new and upgraded facilities

- An investment of \$51 million to fund a student success leader in every school board and resources for principals and teachers to deliver local action plans to meet the specific needs of students in communities across the province
- Six new locally developed compulsory credit courses to provide greater choice for struggling students in grades 9 and 10
- \$18 million investment for 105 lighthouse (Learning to 18) projects aimed at increasing credit accumulation, reducing drop-out rates, linking more programs with colleges and encouraging students who left school to return and complete their diploma requirements

PHASE ONE RESULTS:

- A three per cent rise in the high school graduation rate from 68 percent in 2003-04 to 71 per cent in 2004-05.
- Over 82 per cent (or 14,000) of students enrolled in the lighthouse projects successfully acquired their course credit.
- Technological education funding helped boards start over 200 new courses, including hospitality and health care, while over 500 upgrades were made to existing programs, including new robotics equipment in computer engineering programs and digital cameras and editing suites in communications technology programs, for over 300,000 students.
- Ontario students' scores on provincewide Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) reading, writing and math tests have improved for the past two years. Results for Grade 3 and 6 students have jumped to an average of 62 per cent overall. That is an eight point improvement or 15 per cent increase in just two years — compared to no increase from 2000 to 2002.

PHASE TWO

In May 2005, the McGuinty government launched phase two of the strategy, expanding on the success of phase one and further intensifying the effort to re-engage students and improve the graduation rates through **resource and program development:**

- \$18 million to expand 99 existing projects and add 26 new lighthouse projects – successful projects are now being made available through the Ministry of Education website at www.edu.gov.on.ca
- \$89 million for 1,300 high school teachers this school year, including 800 new or designated Student Success teachers, dedicated to helping struggling students. These teachers work with students to track their progress, help students catch up on missing credits and support the development of better programs and services
- Class size limits for some key courses

PHASE THREE

Phase three outlines an ambitious program to increase the educational attainment of all Ontario high school students through greater **coordination and legislation**. This phase includes:

- Adding a new Specialist High-Skills Major to the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) that will allow students to complete a minimum bundle of course

in specific high-skills areas of concentration that lead to employment, apprenticeships or postsecondary destinations

- Introducing legislation that will, if passed, require students to keep learning in a classroom or workplace training program including apprenticeship until age 18 or until they graduate
- Expanding co-operative education programs through increased partnerships with business and community organizations
- Creating new dual credit programs to allow students to earn several credits toward an OSSD through postsecondary and apprenticeship courses
- Introducing a new coordinated effort and formal links between high schools and postsecondary destinations to help students reach higher

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