

Stakeholder Summary

Report calls for a focus on K-12 levels to improve postsecondary access for underrepresented groups

Not everyone will choose to pursue a university or college education. However, for the vast majority of those who do, the first step along that pathway begins with successfully completing high school. As a result, interventions to support at-risk and disengaged students need to be implemented at the K–12 level, recommends a new report by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

To ensure that more underrepresented students successfully graduate from high school and make it to postsecondary, high schools in the province should end the practice of streaming students in Grades 9 and 10 into academic and applied tracks of study, the report argues.

The report, *Early Supports for Accessing Postsecondary Education: Good, Bad or Indifferent?*, notes that while high school graduation rates in Ontario have increased significantly over the past decade, many young people are still not pursuing postsecondary studies. The proportion of those between the ages of 25 and 34 who had completed high school as their highest level of education was 22% in 2016 and the proportion of those who were without a high school diploma was 8%.

“A high school diploma is an important stepping-stone on the road to higher education,” it states. It is in high school where young people make important decisions about whether to apply to postsecondary programs. Academic performance and course selections in Grades 9 and 10 will affect decisions made in later years, as well as postsecondary options and career choices beyond.

To smooth the pathway, the report also recommends that governments and institutions better fund and promote postsecondary transition and bridging programs that allow those who didn't complete high school to move directly into college or university, as well as existing community-based early-intervention programs for vulnerable youth. In addition, it recommends that governments make enrolment in debt-repayment assistance plans for students and postsecondary savings plans for low-income families automatic rather than putting the onus on students and parents to apply for the programs. It suggests that governments evaluate existing supports to ensure they are effective, and it calls for a continued expansion of the use of the Ontario Education Number to identify those who are struggling and the obstacles that stand in their way.

“We must acknowledge that access to PSE starts very early in the educational pathway, and that the PSE system itself has limited capacity or mandate to affect equity of access,” the report concludes. “Rather, we should look to the role that the K–12 system plays in supporting equity of access to postsecondary and do a better job of measuring the effectiveness of existing programs.”

Early Supports for Accessing Postsecondary Education: Good, Bad or Indifferent? was written by Fiona Deller and Rosanna Tamburri, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.