

## **Ontario has seen improvement in postsecondary participation of low-income students, study finds**

A cross-Canada comparison of student financial aid policies over 20 years found that relative to other provinces (excluding Quebec), Ontario was one of only two provinces to have seen substantial improvements in postsecondary attendance rates of students from all income levels. Ontario also experienced the highest postsecondary attendance rate among students from the lowest income households.

“While there is still room for improvement and other explanations cannot be fully ruled out ... Ontario appears to have created one of the more favourable environments in Canada for supporting the postsecondary education of its high school graduates from lower-income families,” the report concludes.

The study, *Postsecondary Participation and Household Income*, was conducted by researchers at the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation and is published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. It assesses how well high school graduates from lower-income families have fared relative to higher-income students in their ability to access postsecondary education over 20 years. The results shed light on policy efforts to improve postsecondary affordability.

The report details the changes in federal and provincial student financial aid programs and related supports for students from lower-income families from 1995–96 to 2015–16. It includes a review of major changes to student financial assistance programs and tuition fees across jurisdictions. The programs underwent substantial revision over the two decades aimed at improving postsecondary access for students from lower-income families. The study then examines the relationship between family income and postsecondary access for the nine provinces using micro-level Census and National Household Survey data from the same period.

Ontario was one of only two provinces to experience substantial improvements in postsecondary education attendance of high school graduates during that time. The adjusted attendance rates of students from the lowest income families rose to 51% in 2015 from 46% in 1995, while the adjusted rates of students from average income households rose to 56% from 51%.

Across all provinces, the university attendance of high school graduates was related to household income, while attendance at colleges and other postsecondary institutions was so to a lesser degree, the study found.

*Postsecondary Participation and Household Income* was written by Reuben Ford, Taylor Shek-wai Hui and Cam Nguyen, Social Research and Demonstration Corporation