

Stakeholder Summary

Adult learners overwhelmingly plan to attend college, but far fewer actually enroll

Like many school boards, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) offers continuing education options to assist adult learners as they develop the necessary skills and knowledge to pursue postsecondary education (PSE). A new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) finds that more than half of TDSB continuing education students expect to attend college, and one-quarter plan on going to university. However, less than 20% actually enroll in college and only 2% enroll in university.

While the authors say the negative correlation between plans and confirmations is “troubling,” they also point out that most adult students have only studied full-time for a very short period and seeing one-fifth of all students enroll in a postsecondary institution can be considered a “remarkable achievement.”

Project Description

Non-Traditional Postsecondary Education Pathways of Adult Learners in the Toronto District School Board: Evaluating the Influence of Individual and Neighbourhood Characteristics uses data from the 2011 TDSB Continuing Education Survey, which includes 640 students taking Grade 12 English, a required course for university or college admission. The TDSB administrative data set was also used to show student behaviour, examining all 12,861 students who attended any of the five adult day schools between September 2008 and June 2009.

Findings

The survey data showed three-quarters of the adult learners surveyed were foreign-born. While a student’s region of origin had no significant impact on PSE plans, it did appear to have an impact on confirmations of acceptance. Approximately 22% of African and Asian students confirmed college, compared to just 12% of non-English speaking Europeans and 13% of Caribbean and Latin Americans. No students of Caribbean or Latin American origin confirmed acceptance to university.

Females were more likely to confirm offer of admission, as were younger students. Interestingly, adult learners who arrived in Canada after age 14 were also more likely to attend PSE. The study attempted to examine neighbourhood impact on PSE pathways, but found that comparing neighbourhoods among continuing education students was inconsequential as virtually all came from lower-income neighbourhoods.

Further Research

Interviews with former continuing education students could help shed light on the negative correlation between plans and acceptance to PSE and determine at what point and why, education goals are abandoned. Also, additional comparisons between adult learners and the general high school

population could provide clarity on the impact of socioeconomic status, neighbourhood and cultural factors that would be valuable for developing policies and practices to increase PSE participation.

Non-Traditional Postsecondary Education Pathways of Adult Learners in the Toronto District School Board: Evaluating the Influence of Individual and Neighbourhood Characteristics was prepared by Paul Anisef, York University, Robert Brown, Toronto District School Board, and Karen Robson, York University in collaboration with Lisa Newton, Toronto District School Board.