

# Study reveals the paths of Ontario secondary students to their post-secondary destinations

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A new study by researchers at Queen's University looking at the transitions young people make from secondary school to university, college, apprenticeship and the workplace found that over 60 percent of first-year college enrollees do not come directly from secondary school, but that within one or two years after secondary school, a substantial number of youth enroll in college from the workforce.

The study, based on information from about 750,000 secondary school students, shows that it's not always a smooth transition to post-secondary education (PSE).

The study, which was commissioned by Colleges Ontario, found that at the end of five years of secondary school, 60 percent of students were enrolled in post-secondary education programs: 34 percent in university, 20 percent in college, and 6 percent in apprenticeships.

"Once students are in the workforce, they realized the importance of higher education," says Queen's emeritus professor Alan King, leader of this study. "But when they were in high school they were not confident that they could pursue a post-secondary education and were unsure about career directions. Going directly to PSE seemed to have more risks than benefits for many young people."

When students were asked why they did not go on to post-secondary education, factors included concern about financing a college education, uncertainty about career direction, lack of academic success, lack of

support from teachers and guidance counsellors, and lack of involvement in school life. "Being dissatisfied with their school experience was a major factor," adds Dr. Wendy Warren, one of the study's authors. "High school leavers who did not apply to university or college tended to be drawn to the workforce; their part-time jobs often lead to continuing to work after secondary school."

While it is well understood that admission requirements vary across universities, offers in response to applications to similar programs also vary across Ontario colleges. The majority of college applicants prefer to stay close to home and often apply only to the closest college, but since program offer rates differ across colleges, some students are less likely than others to be accepted into their program and/or college of choice. This issue of college capacity is particularly acute in Toronto and the Ottawa-Carleton region.

The transition of young people from secondary school into apprenticeships was especially problematic. Difficulty in finding training placements and a lack of continuity in the programs were a concern.

Other findings of this comprehensive study include:

- Students from Catholic District School Boards were more likely than students from Public District School Boards to graduate from secondary school and go on to university or college.
- A relationship was evident between achievement, secondary school graduation and transition to post-secondary education as early as Grade 9. For example, one failed course in Grade 9 reduced the [high school](#) graduation rate by over 20 percent, and students in Grade 9 with marks between 50% and 59% were less than half as likely to graduate as those with marks over 75%.

- Females achieved higher than males on average in all but one secondary school English, Mathematics or Science course, and more females (57.7 percent) than males (42.3 percent) registered in university directly from secondary school. Three times as many males (74.7 percent) as females (25.3 percent) took up an apprenticeship directly from secondary school.
- First Nation, on-reserve students were far less likely than other students to complete an OSSD, to enroll in university, and to enroll in college.
- The transition to university directly from secondary school is relatively efficient in that most university-bound students go right after they graduate, but less than 40 percent of college enrollees come directly from [secondary school](#).

The report concludes with recommendations including:

- The transition of [young people](#) who go directly to college be improved by developing strategies to respond to ineffective secondary school-to-college programming, and creating timely exposure to career options as circumstances affect students' career aspirations.
- Ensure that all colleges have the capacity to provide equitable opportunities for access.
- A comprehensive study be undertaken on apprenticeship training to provide clear directions on the restructuring required to produce an effective apprenticeship system.

- Further research be undertaken on the factors that affect the educational achievement of on-reserve First Nation [students](#).

Source: Queen's University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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