



## Policy Paper

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### Early Outreach Programs: Reaching Out to Reach Higher

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This paper outlines the necessity of developing a post-secondary early outreach and retention strategy in the Province of Ontario. A significant portion of students will decide to pursue post-secondary education (PSE) before age nine. Therefore, OUSA recommends that the provincial government take a leading role in supporting successful community-based initiatives that direct youth to pursue PSE. These programs can benefit all students in Ontario but could be especially vital to the success of under-represented groups in PSE. OUSA has recognized the following concerns regarding under-represented students<sup>1</sup>:

### **Difficulties in getting to PSE:**

- Students from under-represented groups are often at risk for lower levels of academic achievement in elementary and secondary school. Subsequently, these students experience significant barriers in accessing PSE.
- Students are not adequately supported during transition periods throughout their educational pathways and there is insufficient information available to students, families and communities regarding 1) educational pathways, 2) the cost of education and 3) available student financial aid.

### **Difficulties in getting through PSE:**

- Students from under-represented groups often experience barriers to accessing appropriate social and academic supports upon entering PSE.

To address these concerns, OUSA recommends that the provincial government implement an early outreach and retention strategy to foster increased participation in all types of post-secondary education. Vital to this strategy are the following components:

- An arms-length not-for-profit foundation with an endowment large enough to sufficiently fund early outreach programs across Ontario
- Funding for universities to implement and strengthen social and academic support programs targeted for, but not limited to, under-represented students
- Encourage the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) to expand its research and priorities into broader issues related to early outreach and retention

Existing models of early outreach programs, such as Pathways to Education in the Regent Park area of Toronto<sup>2</sup>, show that they have more success when community support is committed to them. Given this, Ontario's early outreach and retention strategy should contain the following components:

- Funding approval criteria for the aforementioned foundation must include a commitment to funding community-based and community-tailored early outreach programs
- Early outreach programs should strive to build cultural capital through mentorship, leadership opportunities, and social integration

Ontario can become a leader in early outreach and retention if the provincial government recognizes a responsibility for funding such programs. However, funding should not be provided on a "one-size-fits-all" basis. In fact, programs such as these are more likely to succeed if they are community driven. Providing not-for-profits, higher education institutions, community groups and school boards the opportunity to find the best solution for their community is imperative to success. The creation of community-driven, provincially funded early outreach and retention programs can ease barriers faced by these students and make Ontario a leader in this area.

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<sup>1</sup> Under-represented students include: Aboriginal, low-income, rural, northern and first-generation students (students who are the first in their family to attend PSE).

<sup>2</sup> See APPENDIX: EARLY OUTREACH PROGRAMS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

## INTRODUCTION

Early outreach is the active pursuit and engagement of youth in a dialogue about education, its purpose to better inform future students, their parents and communities as a whole on the benefits and outcomes of post secondary education and the world of opportunities it offers. The notion of early outreach is an idea that has been thrown around by policy makers for sometime. The need to develop policy on early outreach programs is based on the awareness that students decide their “educational pathways” at an early age. Some studies cite that in Ontario, approximately three-fourths of all students make the decision to attend university before age 15; while one-third decide before they turn nine years old.<sup>3</sup>

There are a number of reasons, then, for OUSA to develop a series of recommendations around “early outreach”. First, given the importance of a post-secondary education, from university to college to the skilled trades, in the knowledge-based economy, it has become increasingly important that students assess the pathway that fits their needs and interests sooner rather than later. In addition, given OUSA’s concern with the accessibility of post-secondary education, it is essential that we begin to examine groups that typically do not receive attention when discussing access. These are not students who have decided to leave university or who are graduating with heavy debt burdens; these are students who are not even considering PSE in the first place. There are a number of groups that qualify as under-represented, including Aboriginal students, students from low-income backgrounds, rural and northern students and first-generation students. There are a number of sociological reasons why these groups of students are not thinking about post-secondary education. They range from lack of opportunity to lack of support from parents and the community as well as academic, financial and interest/motivational barriers.<sup>4</sup> In the discussion of early outreach it is essential, however, that any focus and attention towards the establishment of these programs should not obscure the debate about the significant cost barriers associated with a post-secondary education, especially attending university. All of these barriers will be addressed in more detail throughout the paper.

As previously noted, in addition to targeting students who are traditionally under-represented, the aim of this policy is to suggest ways in which early outreach programs can be developed to help all students decide on pathways that are best for them, whether in the skilled trades, college or university. In addition, early outreach should also focus on reaching out to parents, families and their communities. Communities should be seen in a number of ways. In relation to the student, the term ‘communities’ refers to the support system surrounding students that influence decisions around educational pathways. ‘Communities’ in other contexts in this paper refers to the broader community including but not limited to the third-sector (not-for-profit), businesses, especially those that use skilled labour and attract apprentices to other associations.

This paper seeks to address all Ontario students in different ways. First, to address accessibility for under-represented groups, early outreach at the elementary school level should help show students the pathways available, followed by the appropriate supports at the high school level to help students define the pathway they will take. Second, early outreach should be done for all students at the high school level using various methods discussed in this paper to help address pathway choices.

Any recommendations that come out of this paper are not a panacea, but rather a starting point. Early outreach is about starting the conversation around future pathways with students, their parents, their schools and communities. How a person chooses his or her future and the elements that influence those decisions are complex and cannot be fully known. This is an attempt to try to identify some of the guiding principles that should inform early outreach programs, concerns with existing programs and a vision for what some programs should look like. This is not an implementation plan, but rather a series of values and possible program models and characteristics that should inform a provincial strategy on early outreach.

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<sup>3</sup> Council of Ontario Universities, *Applicant Survey Highlights* (Toronto: COU, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Alex Usher and Sean Junor, *The Price of Knowledge* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2002).

## PRINCIPLES

The creation of early outreach programs in Ontario should be informed by the following principles.

**Principle One: All willing and qualified students in Ontario must be able to access and excel within Ontario's system of post-secondary education.**

While participation rates in post-secondary education have been increasing over the last decade, participation rates of groups traditionally under-represented in post-secondary education have not followed suit.<sup>5</sup> OUSA recognizes the individual and collective benefits of a higher education, especially from an economic and social perspective. In economic terms, the oft-quoted statistic that within the next 10 years, 70 per cent of jobs will require some form of post-secondary education or training sheds light on this principle of the individual benefits of higher education.<sup>6</sup> Canada will not be able to meet the challenges of the new "knowledge-based economy"<sup>7</sup> with a declining birth rate and the demographic pressures of an aging and retiring workforce. Aside from the social justice argument that all students should have equal access to education as a basic right of citizenship, the economic need to engage under-represented groups in post-secondary education is clear.<sup>8</sup>

From a social perspective, many students from under-represented groups face barriers related to socio-economic status, systemic discrimination based on race or ethnicity, and other such barriers that without proper social measures will continue to grow and disadvantage already disadvantaged populations. The societal benefits of a highly educated population range from relief from the poverty cycle, to reductions in crime rates, to increased citizenship in community and social affairs.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of under-represented groups, Aboriginal students, rural and northern students, low-income students, and first-generation students are particularly at risk for not attending post-secondary. In addition, while there is not a significant amount of literature about early outreach programs and initiatives for students with disabilities and students with dependants, these groups of Ontarians are also under-represented in post-secondary education.<sup>10</sup>

**Principle Two: Early outreach should assist students to choose the post-secondary pathway that best suits their skills and interests.**

Given that post-secondary education has become somewhat of an expectation, at least in the context of economic competitiveness, students should be given the resources, information and support to make decisions that make the most sense for them. Ontario has a history of favouring university over college, a history that is currently being challenged and should continue to be challenged. Early outreach programs should provide neutral, fact-based information to illustrate possible career paths and benefits of various educational pathways from university to college

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<sup>5</sup> Andrea Rounce, *Access to post-secondary education: does class still matter?* (Saskatoon: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Louise Brown, "What will bring students to university?" *Toronto Star*, February 8, 2006; accessed online at [http://www.thestar.com/NASApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article\\_Type1&c=Article&cid=1139352619838&call\\_pageid=968350130169&col=969483202845](http://www.thestar.com/NASApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article_Type1&c=Article&cid=1139352619838&call_pageid=968350130169&col=969483202845).

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas J. Courchene, *Citistates and the State of Cities: Political-Economy and Fiscal-Federalism Dimensions* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2005), for more discussion on the nature of the knowledge-based economy (KBE).

<sup>8</sup> Presentation by Norman Riddell, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, August 2006.

<sup>9</sup> TD Economics, *Investing in higher education delivers a stellar rate of return* (Toronto: TD Economics, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> OUSA, *Open Doors: University Access for Disabled Students* (Toronto: OUSA, 2004); Graeme Stewart, *Investing for generations: ensuring university access and success for students with dependents* (Toronto: OUSA, 2005).

to the skilled trades. Across Canada, there is growing concern that the labour market will not be ready to accommodate for changes in demographics, especially in the areas of the skilled trades.<sup>11</sup>

**Principle Three: Early outreach programs should be community-based and supported by various provincial government Ministries and co-ordinated with existing community programs.**

In the few models that exist, it appears that the more community support that is committed to early outreach projects and programs, the more successful they will be.<sup>12</sup> In developing solutions that address local concerns, it is important that a model be developed that is flexible and can adjust to fit unique community needs, not “one-size-fits all”. In addition, successful programs like Pathways to Education in Toronto’s Regent Park have used integrated approaches that acknowledge the interconnectedness of social issues such as the connection between poverty, health and education. In working to develop these programs, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities should look to engage the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Community & Social Services and the Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration through funding commitments and the leveraging of resources and community links.

**Principle Four: The provincial government should play the leading role in funding early outreach programs.**

Addressing access to post-secondary education is the responsibility of the provincial government. In order to fully address access, the concept must be re-defined. Currently, access tends to be discussed within the context of increased student financial aid. This understanding does not address the serious questions about access that begin at a much earlier age for students than grade 12. Students should be presented with financial support through a variety of programming options including, but not limited to, summer opportunities as early as elementary and high school. The provincial government has the resources, community links and mandate to deal with these issues at an earlier stage.

**Principle Five: Early outreach should be included as part of the larger student financial aid system.**

In order to affect access throughout the system, access needs to be recognized as an issue that starts earlier. The language around student financial aid should be broadened to include financial barriers and non-financial barriers experienced by students from under-represented groups. For a more detailed discussion about the ways in which early outreach should be integrated in the larger student financial aid system, see OUSA’s paper *Building the Third Pillar: Reforming Ontario’s Student Financial Aid System*.

## CONCERNS

**Concern One: Students from under-represented groups experience significant barriers in access to post-secondary education.**

There are a number of groups that experience barriers in access to post-secondary education. OUSA has identified that in addition to Aboriginal, low-income, rural, northern and first-generation students, students with dependants and students with disabilities also experience significant barriers. However, due to lack of research regarding general early outreach and specific early outreach targeted for these students, the focus on under-represented groups in this paper does not include these two groups.

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<sup>11</sup> See for example the *Trends, Opportunity and Priorities* report from the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Local Training Board at <http://localboard.on.ca/localboard/english/newsPubs/tops/TOPS2006.pdf> .

<sup>12</sup> Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond, & Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2003), 4.

## Aboriginal students

While participation rates of Aboriginal students within Canada's post-secondary education system have significantly increased over the past 20 years, these students are still far less likely to move on to higher education when compared to other non-Aboriginal students. The importance of accessibility and participation for these students will only grow in the next six years, when the Aboriginal 20 to 24 age group is expected to peak.<sup>13</sup> There are a number of factors that could contribute to lower participation rates for Aboriginal Ontarians. In 2000, the total cost of education was roughly one third of median family income for Aboriginal households in Ontario.<sup>14</sup> This proportion has increased in the past five years of reported data, despite a proportional increase in median income for Aboriginal families when compared to the rest of Ontario.

Given these statistics, it is not surprising that inadequate financial resources, or the need to work to pay for higher education, have been cited as primary reasons for the inability to complete post-secondary studies. One in three Aboriginal Canadians cited financial reasons such as the requirement to work, as a reason for not completing their post-secondary schooling.<sup>15</sup> However, financial difficulties were not the only factor – family responsibilities were cited as another major reason for inability to complete post-secondary studies.<sup>16</sup>

Culture and cultural preservation may also play an important role in the ability of young Aboriginal Ontarians to move into and advance through higher education. Like many Ontarians from predominantly rural backgrounds, Aboriginal students who complete higher education may be tempted to remain in urban regions where their earning power is significantly enhanced. This is particularly true of graduates who have accrued student debt. Consequently, this presents challenges for non-urban Aboriginal communities in retaining their university-educated members. This is a serious problem for communities that are struggling to stimulate economic development and maintain the integrity of their culture. Thus, this may act as a disincentive for many potential students in the pursuit of higher education.

In 2001 the average household income was 51 per cent higher where the primary income earner had a university degree, compared to households where the primary income earner had only a high school diploma.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, the average household income of Aboriginal families is 65 per cent of the average Ontarian household.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, successful completion of post-secondary education could help eliminate this huge disparity. Beyond strict economics, there is a well-defined relationship between continued education and social well-being and citizenry. University participation rates reflect the health and well being of communities. If Aboriginal students are unable to equitably access higher education, the economic and social viability of these individuals and Ontario as a whole will be compromised.

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<sup>13</sup> David Holmes, *Embracing Differences: Post-secondary Education among Aboriginal Students, Students with Children and Students with Disabilities* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada, "Household Income Groups (24) in Constant (2000) Dollars and Selected Demographic, Educational, Cultural, Language and Labour Force Characteristics of Primary Household Maintainer (87) for Private Households, for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1995 and 2000 - 20% Sample Data," *2001 Census* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, November 2003); Richard Van Loon, *Report from the COU Task Force on Student Assistance* (Toronto: Council of Ontario Universities, October 2001), 10.

<sup>15</sup> Statistics Canada, "Commonly reported reasons for not completing post-secondary schooling by sex, Aboriginal identity non-reserve population aged 25 to 64, Canada, 2001" *Aboriginal Peoples Survey* (2001).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada "Household Income Groups (24) in Constant (2000) Dollars and Selected Demographic Educational, Cultural and Labour Force Characteristics of Primary Household Maintainer (87) for Private Households, for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1995," *2001 Census* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003). In 2000, a two income family with university degrees earned \$86454 per annum. In contrast, a family with two income recipients with a high school diploma earned approximately \$53802: a 60.6 per cent difference in earnings.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

## **rural and northern students**

Students from rural and northern parts of the province are also under-represented in the university system. Scattered across Ontario are 18 universities. Of these, 15 are concentrated in Ontario's largely urban southern areas. For the 15 per cent of Ontarians who live in rural or northern regions, the question of attending higher education goes far beyond a simple question of high school grades. These students face unique social and economic barriers to university access. In order to attend school, they must live away from home, thus incurring higher transportation and living costs. Moreover, average incomes in rural areas tend to be lower, as are the education attainment rates. When these factors are combined with steadily rising tuition fees and student debt levels, it seems almost logical that these students do not participate in post-secondary education nearly as much as their urban counterparts. Ontario's rural and northern students are trapped in a cycle of facing high costs with relatively low resources. There are, however, degrees of barriers for rural and northern students. The student living in a rural community that is just outside of a major urban area faces less barriers than the student living in a rural, northern and remote community, for instance. Given these differences, the approach to supporting rural and northern students must be sensitive to these differences in order to be effective.

## **students from low-income backgrounds**

Often Aboriginal and rural and northern students are also challenged by the additional systemic barrier of being low-income. A study from the Canadian Policy Research Networks reveals that students from high-income families are two to three times more likely to go on to university than youth from low-income families.<sup>19</sup> The study concludes that while financial considerations play a role in determining access, parental education and expectations along with geography have a strong impact on the decision-making related to educational pathways. In addition to these overlapping barriers, Canadians from low-income families are more likely to overestimate the cost of undergraduate university tuition and significantly underestimate the average salary of a university graduate.<sup>20</sup> To illustrate this point, Alex Usher notes that while the average annual income differential between high school and university graduates is \$27,191, Canadians in general and low-income Canadians specifically, underestimate the differential as being \$4,885. Other studies confirm the suggestion that students from low-income families are under-represented in post-secondary education and that this barrier in access has remained constant from 1993 and 2001.<sup>21</sup> According to Usher and Junor in the *Price of Knowledge*, "low-income students, on average, suffer from a family environment that is unsupportive of education – a by-product of economic insecurity (the unequal environment theory, which is closely related to cultural capital theory)."<sup>22</sup>

## **first-generation students**

A fairly new term in higher education, first-generation is generally understood as students whose parents' highest level of education is high school or less.<sup>23</sup> Parental education, when controlling for other factors, has a very strong impact on university and college participation or non-participation. 45 per cent of students whose parents went to university attended university. In contrast, 21 per cent of students whose parents only completed high-school went to

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<sup>19</sup> Patrice De Broucker & Katherine Mortimer, *Getting There and Staying There: Low-income Students and Post-Secondary Education* (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, March 2005), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Alex Usher, *A Little Knowledge is a Dangerous Thing: How Perceptions of Costs and Benefits Affect Access to Education* (Toronto: Educational Policy Institute, July 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Marie Drolet, *Participation in post-secondary education in Canada: Has the role of parental income and education changed over the 1990s?* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Alex Usher and Sean Junor, *The Price of Knowledge* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2004), 99.

<sup>23</sup> Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2003), 23.

university.<sup>24</sup> Family background and level of educational attainment of parents appears to continue to affect decisions of students to attend post-secondary education even among students who appear to be equally qualified and motivated.<sup>25</sup>

**Concern Two: Students from under-represented groups are often at risk for lower levels of academic achievement in elementary and secondary school.**

While more research still needs to be conducted on the impact of systemic barriers and academic achievement, some studies suggest that low-income youth have lower measured achievement during high school, perhaps as a consequence of lower parental support, reducing the probability of university acceptance.<sup>26</sup> These lower levels of achievement often lead students to “self-select” themselves out of the pathway towards university or college.<sup>27</sup> Also contributing to lower academic achievement levels is the fact that often students from under-represented groups, especially students from low-income backgrounds, are required to take on part-time employment while they are in high school in order to help support their families, resulting in less time to focus on academics.

For students whose parents did not pursue post-secondary education, there is also the added barrier of parental attitudes towards higher education opportunities based on a lack of awareness and experience which can then contribute to a lack of support from the home environment for strong academic achievement levels. The concept of “cultural capital” also plays a significant role in access to post-secondary education for students from under-represented groups.

**Concern Three: Students from under-represented groups often experience barriers to accessing appropriate social and academic supports once they do attend university.**

The transition from high school to university is a significant change for all students. For students from under-represented groups, that transition and their social and academic life at university can be even more challenging. The barriers faced by these groups – Aboriginal, low-income, first-generation, rural and northern – when in elementary and high school do not disappear and often intensify when surroundings and support systems have altered or disappeared altogether.

While some programs do exist at most universities, they are often not adequately funded to support the level of student need. For example, the University of Western Ontario provides personal counselling services for students to address personal concerns and to help facilitate the transition from high school to university and other social needs.<sup>28</sup> Despite the provision of these services, adequate funding is not available which has meant up to three-month waiting times for students to meet with a counsellor.<sup>29</sup>

**Concern Four: Students are not adequately supported during transition periods throughout their educational pathways and there is insufficient information available to students, families and communities about educational pathways, the cost of education and available student financial aid.**

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<sup>24</sup> Mylene Lamber, Klarka Zeman, Mary Allen and Patrick Bussiere, *Who pursues post-secondary education, who leaves and why: Results from the Youth in Transition Survey* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Finnie, Ross, Lascelles, Eric & Arthur Sweetman, *Who goes? The direct and indirect effect of family background on access to post-secondary education* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Michael Coelli, “Tuition Increases and Inequality in Post-Secondary Education Attendance”, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Economics Association, University of Toronto, 4-6 June, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Alex Usher and Sean Junor, *The Price of Knowledge* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Personal Counselling, Student Development Centre website, accessed online at <http://www.uwo.ca/sdc>.

<sup>29</sup> Cigdem Iltan, “Stressful shortage – students face long wait for counselling services” *The Gazette*, 25 October 25 2006; accessed online at <http://www.gazette.uwo.ca/articles.cfm?section=FrontPage&articleID=781&month=10&day=25&year=2006>.

The ability of students to make decisions about their educational pathways relies on many factors. In elementary school, students are required to make choices about their future educational “streams” at the high school level, and many students lack effective guidance to assist in that transition. Ineffective guidance counselling at the high school level also creates another unnecessary barrier for students. In the mid-1990s, elementary and high school education was dramatically reformed. Part of these reforms included funding cuts that had many impacts, including the loss of guidance counsellors at high schools exclusively dedicated to counselling students. As a result, counselling that does exist does not properly prepare students for educational pathways.<sup>30</sup>

**Concern Five: Research on early outreach programs and various issues related to outreach is insufficient.**

Despite the importance of access for under-represented groups and the need to address educational pathways, there is currently an insufficient amount of research being conducted to gain insight into these issues. This is, unfortunately, consistent with the general lack of research conducted around post-secondary education in Canada.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation One: The provincial government must implement an early outreach strategy to foster increased participation in all types of post-secondary education.**

The need to support students, families and communities with the information and resources to help students make informed decisions about their educational pathways is clear. The need to target students from under-represented group in order to increase participation, retention and completion rates for these students is also clear. The methods, however, are multi-faceted and multi-focused. In the United States, where many early outreach programs exist on a state-wide basis, many approaches to early outreach are employed, from academic and informational support services, to financial incentives to parental involvement activities to mentoring to personal/social integration and enrichment to summer activities.<sup>31</sup> All of these methods are valid and have the potential to positively impact the targeted groups. Programs should be designed with the purpose of combining some or many of these elements, but do not need to address all elements of early outreach.

**Recommendation Two: Early outreach programs must be tailored to the unique needs of a community and co-ordinated to ensure that community plans effectively support the programs of early outreach.**

While the provincial government has the obligation to fund and provide the broad infrastructure for early outreach programs, programs that will be the most successful will be those created, supported and administered by the local community. Post-secondary education institutions, not-for-profit groups and school boards all have a vested interest in supporting improved higher educational outcomes for their youth.<sup>32</sup> Working in a co-ordinated way with various Ministries – the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Community & Social Services - at the local level will allow the programs to address many community needs at the same time.

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<sup>30</sup> People for Education, *The Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools* (Toronto: People for Education, 2006), 12; accessed online at <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/OPSReports/annual06.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond & Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2003).

<sup>32</sup> University of Toronto, “Appendix D: Access and Outreach Programs at the University of Toronto”, in *The Choice for a Generation: Investing in Higher Education and Ontario's Future* (Toronto: UofT, 2004); accessed online at [http://www.raereview.utoronto.ca/UTresponse\\_19\\_appendixD.html](http://www.raereview.utoronto.ca/UTresponse_19_appendixD.html).

However, it must also be recognized that different communities have varied capacity to create and support programs of this nature. The provincial government, through its various Ministries has an obligation to help build capacity where it does not exist and create the supportive infrastructure to ensure the success of programs focused on early outreach. Also, higher education institutions have an obligation to the community to take the leadership co-ordination role in the development and support of early outreach programs within their communities.

**Recommendation Three: The provincial government must establish an arms-length not-for-profit Foundation with an endowment to sufficiently fund early outreach programs across Ontario.**

Early outreach is a complex and multi-faceted solution and therefore requires a flexible funding model. The creation of a foundation that would function in a similar way to the current Ontario Trillium Foundation would be an appropriate way to provide this support. In developing “granting principles” this early outreach foundation would be able to set out broad program expectations while allowing communities to innovate and support their own programs.<sup>33</sup> Programs already in existence like Pathways to Education in Toronto’s Regent Park would be able to apply for maintenance funding while at the same time initiatives being undertaken by a university and college in a particular city could also be supported. This would ensure that a large number of diverse and multi-faceted programs could be running throughout the province to address the challenges that students, under-represented and not, face. The Foundation would be able to provide predictable cash-flow to community early outreach programs to encourage long-term planning and results.

Recently, the McGuinty government committed \$19 million dollars over four years to Pathways to Education in recognition of its success (beginning in 2007).<sup>34</sup> OUSA commends this investment by the provincial government and recognizes it as a positive step toward increased investment in early outreach. Future investment in an arms length Foundation should have several areas of focus. Early outreach programs funded by the Foundation should equally encourage participation in all types of post-secondary education including university, college and the skilled trades. In addition, programs should promote student mobility, choice in institutions and a variety of career paths.

Funding should be allocated with sensitivity to community capacity where smaller communities without infrastructure should be supported appropriately but at a higher level than to maintain existing programs. In addition, where capacity does not currently exist in communities to create and implement programs of early outreach, the Foundation, with support from various Ministries of the provincial government should provide personnel and appropriate resources to help build capacity and community infrastructure. To ensure maximum use of the Foundation’s funding allocation, the application process should not be overly onerous to complete.

Furthermore, the Foundation should actively endeavour to identify regions with high need for early outreach, but a deficit of the social entrepreneurship needed to initiate such programs. In these cases, efforts should be made to work with communities to develop capacity and programs in a more active manner.

The creation of a foundation should include comprehensive consultation of stakeholder groups, particularly the groups and associations representing high school and post-secondary students. Students should be included in the governing structure of the Foundation. In addition, the foundation should provide an annual report as well as audited financial statements. The Foundation should be arms-length from the provincial government, but under the purview of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

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<sup>33</sup> Ontario Trillium Foundation (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 2006); accessed online at <http://www.trilliumfoundation.org>.

<sup>34</sup> Office of the Premier, “Helping more students stay in school, graduate and find success,” 6 November 2007 (Toronto: Queen’s Park, 2007); accessed online at <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/Product.asp?ProductID=1725&Lang=EN>

**Recommendation Four: Early outreach programs must provide information and resources to students, families and communities to assist in making better informed decisions about educational pathways, including but not limited to guidance counselling, parental involvement activities and curriculum changes.**

Presently, the provincial government is engaged in an information campaign to better educate Ontarians about the availability of student financial aid through television commercials in an effort to provide more information to parents and students. This is not nearly enough. Outlined below are some areas where the provincial government should take meaningful steps towards providing relevant information and resources to students and their parents.

*Guidance Counselling* – In addition to the re-establishment of at least one guidance counsellor at every Ontario high school, the provincial government must also provide the support for professional development to ensure that counselors, and for that matter all teachers, are accurately informed about developments in student financial aid and about various post-secondary options. Through one-on-one counselling and group presentations, guidance counsellors and teachers, if armed with the right information and enough information, would be able access students throughout high school.<sup>35</sup> In addition to support for students in high school, effective counselling and support is needed at the elementary level for students beginning the transition to high school.

*Parental Involvement Activities* - All early outreach programs should include an element of parental involvement. From resource manuals with accurate information about both the costs and benefits of a post-secondary education to actively engaging parents with their children in discussing educational pathways, parents are an essential link in the decision-making processes for students.

*Curriculum Changes* - Through the Ministry of Education, curriculum should be introduced at the high school level that provides training on personal financial management as well as information through the Career course on the benefits of university, college and the skilled trades. British Columbia high schools are in the process of piloting one such project with an interactive CD and training programs.<sup>36</sup> Also, the Civics course is an opportunity to engage students in a discussion about the need for outreach programs that target under-represented groups as an obligation of active citizenship. The curriculum should also be altered to integrate information about various career choices and opportunities into all courses.

**Recommendation Five: Early outreach programs need to build cultural capital through mentorship, character education and social integration as well as offer tutoring and bridging programs to help improve students' academic performance.**

Building cultural capital needs to be an essential element of early outreach programs. This can be done in a number of ways including the support of peer mentors and the mentoring of post-secondary education students and graduates. The Women in Skilled Trades & Technology Day at Humber College is an example that connects students in their early years to mentors who can serve as both informational resources and guides through various educational pathways.<sup>37</sup>

Oftentimes, lack of confidence, as a result of a number of life circumstances, can have an impact on students and their tendencies to “self-select” themselves out of post-secondary. Personal enrichment activities through leadership

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<sup>35</sup> Canadian Career Development Foundation, *The role of guidance in post-secondary planning* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, March 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Academica Group Inc., *Perspectives: Getting an Inside look at post-secondary education*, (Toronto: British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and the Canadian Millenium Scholarship Foundation, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Humber School of Applied Technology, “Women in Skilled Trades & Technology Day” (Toronto: Humber College, 2005); accessed online at <http://appliedtechnology.humber.ca/news/womenST.htm>

development conference can help to build up confidence and help identify passions, interests and skills, thus helping to determine pathways.<sup>38</sup>

To help address concerns around lower levels of academic achievement for under-represented groups, early outreach programs can provide tutoring programs to support students. In particular, higher education institutions and local school boards have the ability to take the role of coordinating the development of programs that would support students academically, and would also help increase cultural capital through mentorship. Bridging programs that seek to ensure a smoother transition from elementary to high school and high school to university of college could be linked to broader Ministry of Education curriculum reform.

**Recommendation Six: The provincial government should adequately fund and PSE institutions should implement and strengthen social and academic support and assistance programs targeted for, but not limited to, under-represented students.**

Getting into university or college is already a challenge for students from under-represented groups. In an effort to ensure that support mechanisms are in place to help students from these groups succeed once they do attend, institutions must take the leadership role with adequate funding resources from the provincial government. If post-secondary institutions and government are genuinely interested in early outreach opportunities, the approach to student support and retention must be holistic. Comprehensive support and retention services for under-represented and other students will provide “counseling, tutoring, academic support, career planning and placement services, as well as work to improve the social and racial climate on campus and the cultural competency skills of academic advisors and faculty members”<sup>39</sup>

The College Student Journal, for example, has outlined methods proposed by researchers to attract and retain under-represented individuals. They recommend increasing the role of the academic advisor, faculty, mentor or university representative as this is often the only link the student has with the institution. As the writers note, “contact with a significant person within an institution of higher education is a crucial factor in a student’s decision to remain in college.”<sup>40</sup> One handbook on outreach observes that “the process of becoming socially integrated into the fabric of the university has also been found to be both a cumulative and compounding process.”<sup>41</sup> Peer relations, role models, and mentors all significantly impact the well-being of an under-represented student in university, as well as his or her success.

Other strategies are also feasible. For example, diversity appreciation workshops for students and faculty can improve campus climate and create a more welcoming environment for under-represented students. Student clubs, social groups, and cultural activities can also be organized and funded to promote diversity and integration into the campus community for new students. One study notes that these initiatives have the ability to reduce “experiences of social and cultural isolation and can have a positive effect on [a student’s] personal persistence to succeed academically.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Dumas-Hines as cited by American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, *Minority Student Recruitment, Retention and Career Transition Practices: A Review of the Literature* (Maryland: ASHA, 2007); accessed online at <http://www.asha.org/about/leadership-projects/multicultural/recruit/litreview.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Dana L. Heissere and Phil Parette, “Advising at-risk students in college and university settings,” *College Student Journal* (March 2002); accessed online at [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0FCR/is\\_1\\_36/ai\\_85007770](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FCR/is_1_36/ai_85007770).

<sup>41</sup> Watson Scott Swail, Kenneth E. Redd, and Laura W. Perna, “Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education: A Framework for Success”, *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*, 30 no.2 (2003): vii-ix.

<sup>42</sup> American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, *Minority Student Recruitment, Retention and Career Transition Practices: A review of the Literature* (Maryland: ASHA, 2007); accessed online at <http://www.asha.org/about/leadership-projects/multicultural/recruit/litreview.htm>

Programs already in place in Canada and other countries can act as a template for universities seeking to strengthen support programs for under-represented students. For example, the Cultural Awareness and Resource Center at Kennesaw University (USA) has developed an array of resources such as books, DVDs, VHS audio tapes, magazines and “other minority specific information.”<sup>43</sup> As noted, support centers that provide support, mentorship, tutoring and leadership opportunities are imperative to student success.

For Aboriginal students, support programs such as these are especially essential. Many post-secondary institutions throughout Canada have begun bringing community support onto campuses. This is integral in ensuring that Aboriginal students can successfully achieve their academic pursuits. Services for Aboriginal students on campus should include academic support, student personal support, access to elder support and general space for Aboriginal cultural activity. Although the scope of these services may vary between institutions based on need, the value delivered to Aboriginal students would be immeasurable. At the University of Western Ontario, the First Nations Services program was developed in 1993 and currently has a staff of four. This service provides an orientation program at the beginning of the school year, as well as social and academic support throughout the year. The service supports 150 students, providing a real community for individuals away from their homes.<sup>44</sup>

Other Ontario universities have also recognized the importance of creating appropriate supports for under-represented groups. In their submission to the Rae Review, the University of Toronto describes their commitment to achieving these ends.

If the goal is to provide access to students who might not otherwise have been able to come to the University, it is likely that to some extent their needs will not be met by current curriculum, pedagogy, services and supports ... Thus our outreach initiatives need to be connected to discussions about the student experience at the University of Toronto from the perspective of the students for whom we are providing access and outreach. It is important to note that just as these students enrich the university in terms of university and life experience, any “accommodations” we make to support and enhance their educational experience will contribute positively to the experiences of all students. It is also important to note that there will be costs (in terms of both financial aid and people providing necessary support and accommodation) associated with these students.<sup>45</sup>

There are a variety of support services and curriculum design that can and should be effectively targeted at the institutional level to support all students, especially Aboriginal, low-income, first-generation and rural and northern students.

**Recommendation Seven: Regular assessment must be done on any early outreach programs that are implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs.**

In order to ensure that early outreach programs are meeting the needs of the community effectively, evaluation and assessment on the programs and outcomes must be done, with both a short term to longitudinal perspective. To help facilitate this, institutions should develop methods to track under-represented groups to determine entrance, retention and completion rates. In order to determine funding allocations for community-based early outreach programs, this

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<sup>43</sup> Kennesaw State University, *Minority Student Retention Services* (2007), accessed online at [http://www.kennesaw.edu/stu\\_dev/msrs/resource.shtml](http://www.kennesaw.edu/stu_dev/msrs/resource.shtml)

<sup>44</sup> University of Western Ontario, *First Nation Services Website* (London: UWO, 2006); accessed online at <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/firstN>.

<sup>45</sup> University of Toronto, “Appendix D: Access and Outreach Programs at the University of Toronto”, in *The Choice for a Generation: Investing in Higher Education and Ontario’s Future* (Toronto: UofT, 2004); accessed online at [http://www.raereview.utoronto.ca/UTresponse\\_19\\_appendixD.html](http://www.raereview.utoronto.ca/UTresponse_19_appendixD.html).

new foundation must have the ability to assess the value and objectives of the proposed programs. This kind of assessment can and should be done in-house. In addition, regular program reviews and evaluations to track the short-term and longitudinal success of programs should be conducted by independent research bodies. This research will help contribute to an under-developed field in the area of PSE.

**Recommendation Eight: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) should be tasked with investigating broader issues related to early outreach.**

Currently, HEQCO has committed itself to “develop[ing] evidence-based approaches to improving participation among under-represented groups.”<sup>46</sup> It also states that “we would like to know how to improve retention and completion rates generally, and particularly for groups that are traditionally under-represented.”<sup>47</sup> Given the general lack of research available on early outreach, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario can contribute to the discourse on access for under-represented groups and in particular, how to effect meaningful programs of early outreach. For example, future research could evaluate the age at which students should be exposed to early outreach programs and to which programs they should be exposed.

## CONCLUSION

It is time for the provincial government to take the lead in introducing a system to support early outreach programs. Commercial that make students aware of changes in the student financial aid system are not sufficient and neither are one-size-fits all models for all communities and under-represented groups. Ontario has the potential to become a leader in Canada and the world in the area of early outreach, and in so doing increasing participation rates of under-represented groups from Aboriginal, low-income, rural, northern and first-generation students. There are a number of principles that should guide the implementation of early outreach programs, particularly the responsibility of the provincial government to fund such programs. But there also ought to be a great deal of openness for not-for-profits, higher education institutions, community groups and school boards to develop and implement solutions that will work most effectively in their communities. The creation of early outreach programs across Ontario will help alleviate some of the barriers in access to a post-secondary education.

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<sup>46</sup> Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), *Review and Research Plan* (Toronto: Queen’s Printer, 2007), 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*; 18.

## Early Outreach Policy Statement

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**WHEREAS** all willing and qualified students in Ontario must be able to access and excel within Ontario's system of post-secondary education.

**WHEREAS** early outreach should assist students to choose the post-secondary pathway that best suits their skills and interests.

**WHEREAS** early outreach programs should be community-based and supported by various provincial government Ministries and co-ordinated with existing community programs.

**WHEREAS** the provincial government should play the leading role in funding early outreach programs.

**WHEREAS** students from under-represented groups experience significant barriers in access to post-secondary education.

**WHEREAS** students from under-represented groups are often at risk for lower levels of academic achievement in elementary and secondary school.

**WHEREAS** students from under-represented groups often experience barriers to accessing appropriate social and academic supports once they do attend university.

**WHEREAS** students are not adequately supported during transition periods throughout their educational pathways and there is insufficient information available to students, families and communities about educational pathways, the cost of education and available student financial aid

**WHEREAS** research on early outreach programs and various issues related to outreach is insufficient.

**BIRT** the provincial government must implement an early outreach strategy to foster increased participation in all types of post-secondary education.

**BIFRT** early outreach programs must be tailored to the unique needs of a community and co-ordinated to ensure that community plans effectively support the programs of early outreach.

**BIFRT** the provincial government must establish an arms-length not-for-profit Foundation with an endowment to sufficiently fund early outreach programs across Ontario.

**BIFRT** early outreach programs must provide information and resources to students, families and communities to assist in making better informed decisions about educational pathways, including but not limited to guidance counselling, parental involvement activities and curriculum changes.

**BIFRT** early outreach programs need to build cultural capital through mentorship, character education and social integration as well as offer tutoring and bridging programs to help improve students' academic performance.

**BIFRT** the provincial government should adequately fund and PSE institutions should implement and strengthen social and academic support and assistance programs targeted for, but not limited to, under-represented students.

**BIFRT** regular assessment must be done on any early outreach programs that are implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs.

**BIFRT** the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) should be tasked with investigating broader issues related to early outreach.

## APPENDIX: EARLY OUTREACH PROGRAMS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

The following are some of the successful early outreach programs in practice:

### Pathways to Education, Toronto

The Pathways to Education program was founded by the Regent Park Community Health Centre in 2000, aiming to break the cycle of poverty in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the province by increasing the rate of young people attending post-secondary education. The broader long-term goal is that the children of Regent Park will become doctors, nurses, administrators, lawyers, and civil servants, and ultimately return to the community and support its ongoing development.<sup>48</sup>

About 800 Regent Park students participate in the program, about 95 per cent of eligible participants. The program provides mandatory tutoring for students whose marks fall below a certain level, and participants have mentors and support workers who can speak to them, their parents or their school. Participants receive public transit fare (since there is no local high school and many students cannot afford bus fare), and are provided \$1,000 a year towards college or university tuition.<sup>49</sup> Pathways also develops a relationship with parents to ensure that they are playing an active role in their child's education, particularly where there are language and cultural barriers.<sup>50</sup>

The program's annual budget is \$2.9 million a year, and it is funded mainly by businesses, community groups, unions, and individuals. The provincial government provides 15 per cent of its funding. The program has 33 full-time and part-time employees, as well as 200 adult volunteers.<sup>51</sup>

Pathways has demonstrated dramatic results in improving the academic performance and future prospects of its participants:

- The high school drop-out rate has fallen from 56 per cent to 10 per cent;
- There has been an increase in post-secondary enrollment from 20 to 80 per cent.
- There has been a 60 per cent reduction in the number of students with serious attendance programs;<sup>52</sup>
- The proportion of Regent Park youth moving on to college or university has tripled from less than 20 per cent to over 60 per cent since 2001.<sup>53</sup>

### GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), United States

There is a longer history of early outreach programs in the United States, where the federal government has offered matching funding programs for states that offer such programs since 1992. The current federal program is called GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), and funds partnerships between high-poverty middle schools, colleges and universities, community organizations, and businesses.

Projects offer tutoring, mentoring, counselling, parent involvement activities, curricula and staff development. Services include financial aid counselling, information about federal financial aid, college and admission test

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<sup>48</sup> Carolyn Acker, "A Message from the Executive Director," *Pathways to Education*, 8 November 2007; accessed online at <http://pathwaystoeducation.ca/home-executive.html>.

<sup>49</sup> "The Pathways Chance", *Globe and Mail*, 28 September, 2005, A24.

<sup>50</sup> Carolyn Acker, "A Message from the Executive Director," *Pathways to Education*, 8 November 2007; accessed online at <http://pathwaystoeducation.ca/home-executive.html>.

<sup>51</sup> "The Pathways Chance", *Globe and Mail*, 28 September, 2005, A24.

<sup>52</sup> Pathways to Education, "Groundbreaking Results," 8 November, 2007; accessed online at <http://pathwaystoeducation.ca/results.html>

<sup>53</sup> "Pathways students move on", *Pathways Newsletter*, (Toronto: Pathways, 2006); accessed online at <http://pathwaystoeducation.ca/regent/Fall-2006.pdf>.

preparation, advice on college application procedures, and information for parents on helping their children prepare for college. Rather than targeting particular students, the projects are offered to entire cohorts of students at schools serving predominantly low-income communities. Some projects offer scholarships to participants that are funded by the state government.<sup>54</sup> Average grants to projects are US\$1.2 million for partnership projects run by schools and post-secondary institutions in partnership with other community-based organizations, and US\$3 million for state partnership projects.<sup>55</sup>

### **Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), California**

AVID is one of the longest-running early outreach programs, and can therefore illustrate some longer-term outcomes achieved after students complete high school, which are not yet available for most other programs. Participation in AVID involves enrolling in one for-credit class through both middle and high school, where they learn academic survival and college entry skills such as note-taking techniques, time management, research skills, and strategies for writing tests. AVID courses also include tutoring sessions, motivational activities, as well as career and college exploration. The program targets middle and high school students from low-income, first-generation, ethnic minority backgrounds. AVID began in San Diego County in 1980 and has since expanded to more than 800 sites across California as well as 16 states. In 2002, the program served about 65,000 students in the United States.

The pathways of AVID graduates indicate that the program has had a clear long-term impact upon their academic success and post-secondary participation:

- In 1994-95, 98 per cent of AVID program graduates enrolled at California post-secondary institution, compared to 55 per cent of non-participants from the same area.
- AVID graduates were three times more likely to attend four-year colleges than the state average, and they had higher retention rates once enrolled.
- The AVID program also appeared to overcome the negative effect of parental income and education. AVID graduates from lowest-income groups enrolled in colleges in equal or greater proportions to students from higher income groups who had not participated in AVID.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2003), 9-11.

<sup>55</sup> United States Department of Education, "Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)," (Higher and Continuing Education, 2007), 121; accessed online at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/gtepgearup.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2003), 43-44.