



Specialist High Skills Major Program Update

The Specialist High Skills Major programs provide students with an opportunity to focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests while meeting the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. The SHSM programs help prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow and are key to increasing awareness of and exposure to technology, skilled trades, and apprenticeship pathways. Students receive the SHSM seal on their diploma when they complete a specific bundle of 8-10 courses in the student's selected field, earn valuable industry certifications, and gain important skills on the job with employers. The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario is currently running 25 Specialist High Skills Major programs in nine different approved sectors.

Specialist High Skills Major Consultant Tammy Bovaird, presented an overview of the CDSBEO SHSM programs to the Board, including information on program statistics, current initiatives, and future planning.

"Each of our ten secondary schools has a minimum of two programs in each school and next year we will be adding two new programs. St. John Catholic High School in Perth, upon approval from the Ministry, will offer the Construction SHSM program, and at St. Mary Catholic High School the Health and Wellness SHSM program will be added," noted Bovaird.

"St. Mary is looking to add a fitness facility for students at the school. They have a very robust athletic program, and a very active athletic council at the school. They would like to focus on improving student's physical fitness, coaching and leadership opportunities in this program."

This year, there are 476 students enrolled in SHSM programs, which is up slightly from 461 last year.

"Recruiting new students has been a challenge with the pandemic, but lead teachers, guidance counsellors and administration have worked very hard to find creative ways to encourage program enrolment."

There are five requirements for each SHSM program which include a defined bundle of credits (including cooperative education credits), sector-recognized certification and training courses, experiential learning and career exploration activities, learning experiences connected with the learner's postsecondary plans, and sector partner experience (industry partners design real challenges for students to facilitate collaboration, critical thinking and teamwork).

"This past year we have had to adapt and do things a little differently during the pandemic. Certifications and training have moved online, and the Ministry of Education has made some accommodations to the SHSM program requirements. Experiential Learning and Reach Ahead activities have been modified so that students are participating in virtual tours and online interviews, and there will be an upcoming virtual event on March 25 for the sector



partner experience where Amazon and FedEx will host an Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship day," explained Bovaird.

"Thank you so much for joining us tonight Ms. Bovaird to share these great updates. It is encouraging to see that these programs have continued and flourished despite the challenges that have been presented by the pandemic," concluded Chair Lalonde.

Rethinking School Registration During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about many changes, and for the Board and its schools, it has created an opportunity to rethink the way engagement with parents and the community happens. For students registering with the CDSBEO, this means that in-person school visits, open house events, and even the registration process had to be carried out in a COVID-safe way. In response, the Board and schools have implemented several creative strategies to facilitate the registration process virtually.

Executive Assistant to the Director of Education Leah Finley, provided an overview of the new registration processes, including examples of how schools hosted virtual open house events and modifications which were made to the registration process.

"With the need to engage and inform prospective new students and their families, our schools hosted virtual open house events, and were very creative in using various social and web-based platforms for delivery," explained Finley.

Some of the formats implemented by schools included YouTube videos, interactive websites with virtual tours, and Facebook live events. Several examples of projects created by schools were shared with Trustees.

To promote registration across all grades and let parents know that it is now time to register for the 2021-2022 school year, Board Communications did a paid online campaign. A sister campaign was also run to highlight secondary virtual open house events, which took place in January and February for students entering grades 7 and 9.

"Lastly, our website was updated to reflect the need for parents to register using our online pre-registration tool," noted Finley.

"Schools will follow up with families through a virtual appointment to verify documentation to complete the registration process."

"Thank you so much for sharing this information with us this evening. It is certainly encouraging to see how our schools and the Board are adapting and successfully engaging with our parent community," concluded Chair Lalonde.