



## CDSBEO Specialist High Skills Major Program Update

Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programs provide an opportunity for students to focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests, while meeting the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Students receive the SHSM seal on their diploma when they complete a specific bundle of 8 to 10 courses in the student's selected field, earn valuable industry certifications including first aid, and CPR qualifications, and gain important skills on the job with employers.

Tammy Bovaird, Specialist High Skills Major Consultant, and Dan Lortie, OYAP Coordinator, presented information to the Board on the opportunities and successes provided through SHSM programs.

"Students in Grade 11 and 12 are able to earn certifications through a Specialist High Skills Major that are valuable to securing employment like First Aid/ CPR and WHMIS," began SHSM Consultant Tammy Bovaird. "It is available to students in all academic pathways and students who successfully complete a SHSM receive a diploma with an embossed red seal and a record card outlining their achievements."

There are currently 19 Ministry approved sectors available in Ontario, and CDSBEO offers nine sectors through 25 programs in its ten secondary schools. Each SHSM includes components including bundled credits (including cooperative education), sector recognized certifications and training courses, experiential learning and career exploration, reach ahead learning experiences, and sector partnered contextualized experiences in partnership with industry partners. For the 2019-2020 school year there are 461 students enrolled, of which 217 (47 per cent) have an individual education plan (IEP).

"Forty-seven per cent of our students in the SHSM program have an IEP, and many of these students traditionally may have had trouble remaining engaged and staying in school. It is our goal to encourage students to participate in SHSM in order to gain the skills and knowledge that will help them transition in meaningful career choices," explained Ms. Bovaird.

Students in the Specialist High Skills Major Transportation Program at St. Joseph's Catholic Secondary School in Cornwall have been provided with some unique opportunities this school year, as the students embark on building two Enduro race cars. The program was highlighted by OYAP Coordinator Dan Lortie, along with some other upcoming special events.

"This year, students in the program are branching out into some welding projects, and students have visited St. Lawrence College for additional learning opportunities," noted Lortie. "Cornwall Toyota has donated two vehicles for the Eduro project. The cars will be raffled off as a school fundraiser, and will be painted with the St. Joe's colours, providing great exposure for the students and the school."

A Women in Trades camp will take place in early July for CDSBEO students in grades 6, 7 and 8, which will include a visit to the woodworking and automotive shops at St. Joseph's, as well



as a tour of St. Lawrence College tech programs. Students will also have the opportunity to attend the Canadian International Car Show and participate in the Automotive Expo taking place on April 30. This event provides an opportunity for students to understand the various career avenues within the automotive sector.

## Virtual Reality Learning Experiences for CDSBEO Students

The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario is taking career exploration to a new level in its Grade 10 Careers classes. This year, students have the opportunity to use CareerLabs VR, a virtual reality program, to explore the skilled trades in an immersive, virtual environment.

Students can choose from virtual reality experiences in an array of programs including welding, residential electrician, robotics technician, HVAC technician, mining engineer, and heavy equipment operator. In each application, students are immersed in a virtual worksite, performing tasks that would be expected in that sector. For example, in the HVAC program, users are prompted on how to fix a broken fan, troubleshoot defective compressors, and fix broken wires. In the electrician program, users are challenged to test voltage levels in outlets and replace broken wires.

Experiential Learning Consultant, Liz McCormick, presented information about the new virtual reality learning opportunities for students, and how students benefit from the program.

"Using virtual reality really allows students to assess various career pathways and presents an opportunity for them to explore careers and make informed choices about their futures through a deeper understanding of skilled trades," noted McCormick.

"As educators, one of our duties is to provide opportunities for students to discover what careers are out there and what careers would be right for them. Virtual reality simulations of job sites are a fun and engaging way to explore opportunities."

Students are also completing pre- and post-activities in MyBlueprint to complement the virtual reality experience. Students build a digital portfolio unique to the CareerLabs VR experience and complete a feedback form to CareerLabs VR once they have used the tool. Plans are underway to expand the options to include process engineer, equipment operator, pipefitter and robotic welding operator.

"For the last 15 years, the CDSBEO has been active in the promotion of skilled trades and apprenticeships through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship with excellent results. This new technology will allow us to reach a broader audience and attract new students to the apprenticeship pathway," noted Dan Lortie, CDSBEO Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Coordinator.



From the meeting held March 3, 2020

Next steps for the program include gathering feedback to inform future practice, developing links with labour market information, and to continue to develop strong partnerships with local employers and employment agencies. Currently, CDSBEO is one of only four school boards in Canada using virtual reality to inform student career pathways planning.

"It is amazing that students have this opportunity to explore, learn, and discover a variety of career options through the immersive power of virtual reality," explained Board Chair Todd Lalonde. "This virtual reality (VR) system puts students in the driver's seat to see, hear, and experience the job itself, without ever leaving the classroom and we are extremely excited to have partnered with CareerLabs VR to offer this learning experience."