



Specialist High Skills Major Update

The Specialist High Skills Major program provides 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. It helps prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow and is 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, earning valuable industry certifications and important skills on the job with employers. The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario currently offers 26 SHSM programs in eight sectors.

Specialist High Skills Major Consultant, Tammy Bovaird, presented information to the board on current SHSM statistics, ongoing initiatives, and future planning for the program, which has experienced a consistent increase in enrolment over the last several years.

"Our SHSM enrolment and number of programs offered continues to grow," noted Bovaird. "The pandemic did have an impact on our completion rate in 2019, however, our lead teachers worked hard in 2020 to bring it back to pre-COVID numbers. Our goal for this school year is to meet a completion rate target of 67 per cent."

The data for CDSBEO SHSM programs demonstrates a completion rate of 63 per cent in 2018-2019, 58 per cent in 2019-2020, and 63 per cent in 2020-2021.

"We are so happy to have students back in our buildings, and we are working hard to help them re-engage and find the joy and excitement in learning again."

Ms. Bovaird highlighted a few of the programs running this year, including four Construction programs, the Agriculture program at Holy Trinity, as well as six Hospitality and Tourism programs. Certifications and training are a valuable part of the SHSM program. Students earn industry recognized training and learn how to work safely on the job. Each sector has its own unique list of compulsory and elective certifications, including but not limited to CPR/First Aid, Infection Control, WHMIS, Project Management, Customer Service.

Other program highlights include the new kitchen which was installed at St. Francis Xavier CHS to host the Hospitality Program, as well as the new SHSM Construction Program which began at St. John CHS this fall.

"We are in conversation with Algonquin College currently to discuss a team-taught dual-credit program for second semester," noted Bovaird.

"Lead teacher, Matt Reil is very excited about the new Health and Wellness program at St. Mary Catholic High School. Much of the equipment has arrived and they are in the process of installation and set-up of the new fitness facility."



For the next three years, the ministry is placing an emphasis on sectors related to Technology and Skilled Trades. Currently, there is a huge shortage of skilled tradespeople in Ontario. Many are at retirement age and the housing market has created an increased demand. According to Buildforce Canada, the industry will need 116,000 additional workers to keep pace with demand growth and retirements. To help increase enrolment in SHSM programs, the ministry provided additional funding for 13 Technology and Trade sectors, and the CDSBEO has submitted proposals to access the additional funding, which was available in three different areas: school courses, school projects, and board initiatives.

"For the CDSBEO, this means that we were able to secure 13 additional sections, some of which are grade nine and ten courses, based on the proposals which were submitted. It is our hope that increased exposure and more opportunity for experiential activities will boost our grade 11 SHSM enrolment."

For school-based projects, nine projects received additional grants which provided funding for additional program supplies and equipment. A board initiative also received \$40,000 to promote awareness of skilled trades and technology through workshops to grade 8 students. Funding will cover transportation, workshop supplies and materials, and consumables. In total, the board has received a total of \$333,000 in additional SHSM funding.

Ms. Bovaird also highlighted the new partnership with St. Lawrence College which provides students the opportunity to engage in hands-on learning through a mobile training lab that brings learning to students in secondary schools throughout the board. The project works to promote and teach welding and construction skills to help promote awareness of these skilled trades.

"Thank you for this presentation. To you and all of our board partners who help to make this learning possible for our students, we are grateful. SHSM programs are certainly an important piece to successful graduation outcomes and viable career pathways and apprenticeships beyond secondary school," concluded Chair Lalonde.

Re-engagement

The Ontario Ministry of Education has provided funding for re-engaging students and reading assessment supports, as part of its provincial effort to support learning recovery and renewal to address the impacts of learning disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Superintendent of School Effectiveness, Heather Gerber, provided information on the CDSBEO re-engagement plan for the 2021-2022 school year. The presentation included the current focus of education as students return to face-to-face learning, as well as how the board is integrating technology, face-to-face best practices, and outdoor education to ensure student engagement.



The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario is committed to helping students re-engage with their learning and providing a learning lift to combat any learning loss that may have occurred due to disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As educators greet their students at the door, they have to understand that learning loss is not the first priority, the first priority is mental wellness and ensuring that students know and feel like they belong," began Superintendent Gerber.

"I would like to start off tonight by saying that there is no magic wand or formula to re-engage learners - we have to keep in mind that all learners are different and that their individual needs are different as well, so the real trick lies in figuring out what each child needs and ensuring those needs are supported."

Superintendent Gerber noted that to support a healthy return to school, staff were provided with professional development that included such topics as contextual data on COVID-19 and mental health in a Canadian context, the impact of pandemic on Ontario families, trauma, sensory, social, and emotional reconnection, as well as various resources for both staff and students. Additionally, quality learning has an important role in re-engaging learners through ensuring students have a voice, by providing relevant and engaging lessons, and by offering a safe, welcoming learning environment.

When students become dysregulated it can often be because they do not feel safe. The appropriate response of a caring adult can help restore a student's sense of safety and help support the student. Board staff have received training and tools on how to best support students when they don't feel that sense of safety and become dysregulated.

"When our students feel safe, they are ready to learn. We all know the importance of life-long learning, making goals and putting the right steps in place to achieve those goals. Modelling our love of learning, how we struggled, the pride we feel when overcoming those struggles is important. Many students have experienced struggles during the course of the pandemic. Their resilience has been challenged, their spirits may have sometimes been defeated and they may have experienced some "learning loss" because of their inability to access technology or because they were struggling with their mental wellness and quickly became disengaged," explained Superintendent Gerber.

"By ensuring open ended questions with multiple entry points, by getting them excited about the content they are learning about, by ensuring they have a voice and choice in what they are learning and in how they are showing their learning, in making that learning fun at times but challenging, in showing them love, compassion, in celebrating with them, and in accepting them, we begin the re-engagement process."

All CDSBEO educators were asked to submit their re-engagement plans and ideas to their administrators following the training sessions in August, and schools have been asked to reflect and take stock on this plan throughout the school year.



CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF EASTERN ONTARIO

Board Meeting Highlights
From the meeting held October 5, 2021



"As educators, we have an amazing responsibility, and one thing we know for sure is that we are going to work hard to re-engage learners. It is social connectedness that will give students the energy for cognitive engagement, which in turn leads to student engagement and success."