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Navigating De-Streaming

**OTF and Affiliate Feedback
on the Ministry of Education's**

*A Guide to De-streaming
for Board Leaders,
January 2021 Draft*





The Ontario Teachers' Federation is the advocate for the teaching profession in Ontario and for its 160,000 teachers. OTF members are full-time, part-time and occasional teachers in all the publicly funded schools in the province—elementary, secondary, public, Catholic and francophone.



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Navigating De-Streaming: OTF and Affiliate Feedback on the Ministry of Education's *A Guide to De-streaming for Board Leaders*, January 2021 Draft

Preamble

This submission is grounded in the objects and mandate of the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF). As such, it does not address matters germane to collective bargaining or any other areas that are the exclusive purview of OTF's four Affiliates: l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF).

Introduction

OTF and its Affiliates (AEFO, ETFO, OECTA, and OSSTF) welcome the opportunity to provide constructive feedback on the draft version of the Ministry of Education's *A Guide to De-streaming for Board Leaders*, January 2021 Draft (Guide). Feedback contained in this submission is not focused on the *principles* behind the move to de-streaming but rather on concerns and considerations with respect to the *process* for its achievement. The submission concludes with a list of six recommendations.

OTF and its Affiliates remain committed to advocating for and advancing policies, structures and practices that sustain the ability of their members to effectively support all their students. Thus, we believe that systemic policies, structures and practices, which perpetuate inequalities and have a disproportionately adverse impact on certain student demographics, are an anathema to a healthy and inclusive publicly funded education system.

Context: The De-streaming Strategic Framework

The purpose of the Ontario's *De-streaming Strategic Framework* (Framework) is to prepare for the adoption of de-streaming and to provide direction to school boards regarding implementation. The Framework articulates the following three objectives:

- Phase out Grade 9 Academic and Applied (streamed) courses and phase in Grade 9 de-streamed courses and support students to be successful in de-streamed courses.
- Dismantle the systemic discrimination associated with streamed Grade 9 courses that has contributed to the marginalization of some students, including Black, Indigenous and racialized students, students from low-income households and students with disabilities and other students with special needs.

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- Remove barriers and support more students to graduate from secondary school and pursue post-secondary education pathways of their choice.

The Framework also sets out three goals followed by a series of complementary targets framed as ‘immediate next steps and actions’ (p. 7) for school boards

1. Cultural Shifts in Schools and Boards to identify and dismantle systemic discrimination and structural inequalities

- 1.1 Establish Targets for Reducing and Eliminating Demographic-based Disproportionalities
- 1.2 Engage Stakeholder Communities
- 1.3 Develop Anti-Racism Training Plans for System Leaders and School Staff

2. Increased Educator Capacity for effective culturally-responsive instruction, assessment and evaluation in de-streamed, multi-level classrooms

- 2.1 Strengthen Instructional Programs in De-streamed Classes
- 2.2 Develop Professional Learning Plans for Educators and Education Workers

3. Increased Student Engagement, Achievement and Well-Being

- 3.1 Leverage Existing Supports for Students in New Grade 9 Math in 2021-22
- 3.2 Strengthen Transition Planning Processes
- 3.3 Provide Guidance for Individual Student Focused Timetabling
- 3.4 Strengthen Course Selection Review Processes

Policy into Practice: Implementation Considerations

OTF and its Affiliates have consistently underscored the fact that the gap between policy *announcement* and policy *actualization* is bridged when implementation planning is multi-layered and multi-faceted and respects the lived experiences and realities of frontline teachers and educational support workers.



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To effect the desired changes successfully will take time. Identifying and dismantling systemic barriers and structures that have been in place for years, coupled with developing a suite of appropriate solutions, poses real challenges. Authentic consultation among the Ministry, school boards and other key education stakeholders remains an essential part of both collaboratively identifying systemic barriers and co-developing feasible and appropriate solutions to overcome those barriers.

We remain concerned about the trajectory and timelines for the rollout of the de-streamed Grade 9 mathematics curriculum, scheduled for mandatory implementation in September 2021. In 2.2., the Guide states that Ministry-developed supports “will be released with or soon after the release of the de-streamed [math] course” (p. 11).

Recent experience with the mandatory implementation in September 2020 of the revised mathematics (Grades 1-8) curriculum gives us pause as we look ahead at the launch of a de-streamed Grade 9 mathematics curriculum that has not yet been released. More particularly, with respect to the former, the Ministry’s promise of just-in-time, wrap-around supports (Ministry-developed or -funded) being available to teachers and educators was not realized. Consequently, we are not confident that the Ministry has accurately planned for the complexity of the systemic changes facing teachers and educational workers in both elementary and secondary schools brought about by the move to de-streaming. In fact, the specter of an uneven or fragmented implementation process remains a distinct possibility.

School boards must ensure that they have the necessary plans and resources in place to build the capacity of all teachers and educational workers who will be among those on the ground tasked with operationalizing the policy. Robust and sustained training for teachers and educational workers will be necessary for them to implement and deliver an effective de-streamed mathematics program. Thus, it is imperative that the Ministry and school boards provide all teachers and educational workers both with appropriate training during the instructional day and access to fully developed resources well before they are expected to implement a new mathematics curriculum in de-streamed classrooms. These resources must help teachers and educational workers to support the diverse strengths, needs and interest of their students.

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De-streaming needs to proceed in concert with other transformations. These include, but are not limited to

- additional resources and time for teachers and education workers to acclimatize to de-streaming,
- sustained teacher and education worker training in anti-discrimination and culturally competent education,
- development of accessible and inclusive curricula,
- dedicated time for transition planning between elementary and secondary panels,
- support for differentiated instruction, including assessment practices,
- fostering cultures, climates and conditions that support high-quality teaching and learning opportunities for all students, and
- open communication and consultation with key education stakeholders.

Gauging Progress: Benchmarks, Baselines and Data Collection

To be clear, there are myriad factors that potentially contribute to disadvantaging and disenfranchising students. While some reside within the locus of control of boards and schools, others are outside their sphere of influence. The latter may include students' prior academic preparedness, learning styles and previous schooling experience; parents' and guardians' educational experiences and expectations; and household income, among others. Effective de-streaming initiatives must take these factors into account and attempt to mitigate or eliminate their effects.

Immediate action item 1.1 in the Guide requires school boards to measure de-streaming outcomes by setting targets aimed at reducing or eliminating demographic-based disproportionalities. It remains unclear about the nature and scope of teachers' anticipated responsibilities with respect to data collection and reporting to inform school boards' charting of implementation plans and progress. In the interests of transparency in this regard, the Ministry should make available the De-streaming Implementation Readiness Assessment Tool referenced in the Guide (p.7).

Furthermore, the Ministry lists EQAO results from Grades 3, 6, and 9 as key touchstones to help set and measure established targets. OTF and its Affiliates contend that census-based, standardized assessments, like those administered by EQAO, are not accurate reflections of the full range of students' abilities. As such,

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EQAO results should not be used as a key indicator or measure of progress toward achievement of Goal 1.

Lastly, given both broad aggravating factors and more specific impacts caused by frequent migrations between face-to-face and emergency remote teaching and learning during the pandemic, it is inappropriate to harness data from the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years as baselines for monitoring, evaluating or reporting on progress toward the Ministry's goals related to de-streaming.

Funding and Resourcing

Education funding has not kept pace with existing needs, let alone with new initiatives such as de-streaming. In 3.1 of the Guide, the Ministry advises boards to leverage existing funding, e.g., Learning Opportunities Grant, Grants for Student Needs, to develop 'wrap-around' supports (pp. 13-14). The real implication is that boards are being directed to divert monies earmarked for other priorities and to re-allocate those pockets of existing funding to develop supports for de-streaming.

Without access to additional funding, boards will have to make decisions that short-change other important programs, many of which also support and contribute to student achievement, engagement and wellbeing. More specifically, Black, Indigenous and racialized students, students from low-income households, English-language learners, students with disabilities and other students with special needs may be inadvertently and disproportionately disadvantaged by funding decisions at the school board level.

Instead, the Ministry must flow additional funding to effect the substantial changes and shifts that will be required to address systemic discrimination, to help break down structural impediments for marginalized students and to ensure de-streaming takes root successfully. One source of funding is the re-allocation of funding currently used to support the development and administration of EQAO's annual assessments.

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Conclusion

De-streaming of Grade 9 mathematics represents only one mechanism, among many others, to dismantle systemic and structural inequities in Ontario's publicly funded education system.

De-streaming alone is neither a panacea nor a quick fix for ending discriminatory policies and practices. The initiative must be propelled by cultural shifts, operating in tandem both within and also outside schools. In the end, to be effective and successful, the process of de-streaming cannot sacrifice efficacy in the interests of expediency and exigency.

Recommendations

We urge the Ministry of Education to adopt the following six recommendations.

1. Schedule ongoing, meaningful and inclusive opportunities for engagement and consultation with OTF and its four Affiliates.
2. Make available the De-streaming Implementation Readiness Assessment Tool referenced in *A Guide to De-streaming for Board Leaders, January 2021 Draft*.
3. Earmark additional dedicated funding to support resource development and deployment related to de-streaming.
4. Forego the use of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school year data and EQAO assessment data as benchmark and baseline data for the assessment and reporting of progress toward achievement of the Ministry's three goals set out in the *De-Streaming Strategic Framework*.
5. Re-allocate funding from EQAO's assessment program to the development and provision of resources and training for teachers and educational workers.
6. Earmark additional dedicated funding to support timely training and in-service, during the instructional day, for all teachers and educators involved in the transition to de-streaming.

