



# CASE FACT SHEET AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## What is academic streaming?

Academic streaming is the practice of separating students into distinct and unequal educational pathways based on perceived ability, leading to academic and non-academic courses beginning in Grade 9 in Ontario.

## Why is streaming harmful?

The research is clear: streaming students into lower-track courses leads to worse learning outcomes and limited postsecondary options. Ontario is the **only province in Canada** to stream students starting in Grade 9. According to data on high school course selections in 2014, 62% of students in Ontario who selected applied math took three or more applied courses, and only 11% of them were taking no other applied courses.<sup>1</sup> These numbers point to the existence of **separate learning tracks** that begin in Grade 9. Community advocates have long been calling for the end of this practice, as its harmful impact has affected marginalized students at the highest rates.

**62%** of students in Ontario who selected applied math took three or more applied courses



**11%** of them were taking no other applied courses.<sup>1</sup>

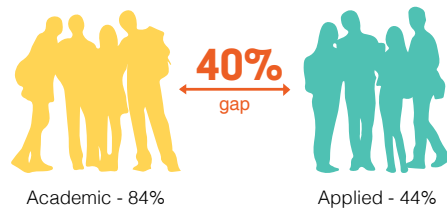


<sup>1</sup> People for Education. (2015) Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools. Toronto, ON: People for Education.

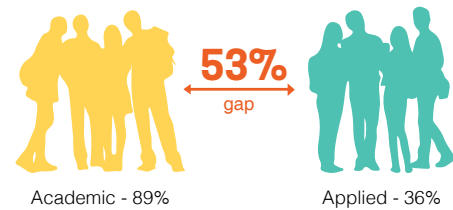
## Learning outcomes

Academic streaming widens **the gap in achievement** between students. The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) results from 2018-19 show a troubling gap of 40% in math (84% vs. 44%) and 53% in literacy (89% vs. 36%) between students in academic and applied courses meeting the provincial standard.<sup>2</sup> When comparing students who failed to meet provincial standards for the EQAO in Grades 3 and 6, those who went on to take academic courses performed better on the Grade 9 EQAO than those who took applied courses.<sup>3</sup>

### EQAO Math Results



### EQAO Literacy Results



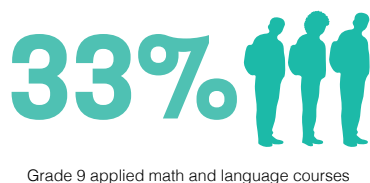
## Graduation rate

Students streamed into applied courses in Grade 9 **graduate at lower rates** than their peers in the academic stream.<sup>4</sup> While only 5% of students in academic don't graduate within five years of entering high school, over a quarter (26%) of students in applied don't meet the requirements for graduation in that time frame.

## Post-secondary enrolment

As post-secondary has become increasingly important for today's job market, students enrolled in applied are **more limited in their options post-graduation**. Just 33% of students who take applied math and language courses in Grade 9 make it directly to post-secondary education, compared to 73% of those in academic courses.<sup>4</sup> The disparity in university enrolment is even more stark, with only 3% of students who take applied in Grade 9 making it to university.<sup>4</sup>

### Percentage of students who make it directly to post-secondary education



<sup>2</sup> Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2019) Provincial Secondary School Report. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

<sup>3</sup> Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2012) An analysis of questionnaire and contextual data for Grade 9 students in academic and applied mathematics courses. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

<sup>4</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education. (2017). Ontario Education Equity Action Plan. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer of Ontario.

## Equity outcomes

Marginalized students are much more likely to be streamed into applied courses:

- Students in low-income communities are about **1.5 times more likely** to be in applied courses, making it more difficult for younger generations to escape generational poverty.<sup>4</sup>
- In the Toronto District School Board and the Peel District School Board, Black students are **twice as likely** to be streamed into applied courses.<sup>5,6</sup>
- Indigenous students and English Language learners are disproportionately enrolled in Grade 9 applied math. In the 10% of schools with the highest levels of Grade 9 applied math enrolment, Indigenous students made up 4.8% of enrolment, compared to 2.9% province-wide. Similarly, English Language Learners made up 9% of enrolment, compared to 3.9% province-wide.<sup>1</sup>

**Students in low-income communities are:**

**1.5 times**

more likely to be in applied courses

**Black students are:**

**2 times**

more likely to be in applied courses

## Ontario's announcement on ending academic streaming

In July 2020, Minister Lecce announced that the province is committing to ending streaming in Grade 9. De-streaming efforts will begin with the introduction of a foundational Grade 9 math course that will be offered in fall of 2021. For Ontario's full press release, [click here](#).

<sup>4</sup>James, C.E. & Turner, T. (2017) Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area. Toronto, ON: York University.

<sup>6</sup>Chadha, E., Herbert, S., & Richard, S. (2020) Review of the Peel District School Board. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer of Ontario.



## CASE recommendations on de-streaming

Recent evidence from the Toronto District School Board indicates that their de-streaming efforts are **producing positive results**, with enrolment in applied courses falling by 50% over the last four years and Black, Latin American and Middle Eastern students moving to academic programs at the fastest rates.<sup>7</sup> However, the TDSB's experience underscores the need for appropriate support, training and community engagement to successfully implement a classroom model with wider ranges of student readiness and manage any negative attitudes toward de-streaming.

<sup>7</sup> Toronto District School Board. (2019). Implementation of Academic Pathways. Toronto, ON: Toronto District School Board.

### CASE is offering six recommendations that are critical to effectively ending Grade 9 academic streaming in Ontario:

1. **Class Size**
2. **Supports for Full Inclusion**
3. **Professional Development**
4. **Community Engagement**
5. **Task Force**
6. **Collaborative Implementation Plan**

# CASE recommendations on de-streaming

## 1. Class Size

The government should invest in reducing class sizes, especially for Grade 9 de-streamed courses to maximize the impact of differentiated instruction. Research indicates that lower-achieving students at the secondary level benefit more from smaller class sizes with additional individual attention and engagement in learning.<sup>8</sup> The Ministry and school boards should also ensure that this transition does not have the effect of decreasing staffing levels and increasing average class size in Grade 9.

## 2. Learning Supports

Supporting inclusion of some students with significant learning gaps from elementary school will come with additional needs. Targeted new investment in resource teachers, educational assistants and special education supports will enable school boards to develop appropriate support and recovery programs.

## 3. Professional Development

Our aim should be to effectively develop a K-12 culture of universally high expectations, differentiated instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy within an anti-racism and anti-oppression framework, responsive to anti-Black racism in particular. This can be facilitated by:

- dedicating PA days;
- training for trustees, superintendents, principals, teachers, guidance counselors, education workers and teacher candidates;
- requiring school boards and schools to develop plans to end academic streaming

## 4. Community Engagement

There is a need for community engagement and consultation with parents, students and community partners to inform the local implementation of effectively ending academic streaming. This should include supports for parent councils, as well as the collection of student identity and race-based data to inform the effort.

---

<sup>8</sup>P. Blachford, P. Bassett & P. Brown. (2011). Examining the effect of class size on classroom engagement and teacher-pupil interaction: Differences in relation to pupil prior attainment and primary vs. secondary schools. *Learn. Instruct.* 21, 715–730. doi: 10.1016/j.learninstruc.2011.04.001

## 5. Task Force

Ending streaming is a complex task that will require a multi-year plan. The Ministry should establish a representative multi-stakeholder task force to help inform and monitor its implementation, including measurable, transparent outcomes.

## 6. Collaborative Implementation Plan

This task force should be responsible for informing and developing a collaborative implementation plan, including:

- an expansion of the Ministry's efforts to at minimum include Grade 9 English and Science (and French in French-language boards) as changes to Math alone is insufficient to end streaming;
- a plan to ensure streaming is not simply postponed to Grade 10;
- a critical analysis of existing streaming structures in elementary schools, such as special education processes, that exacerbate learning gaps; and
- mechanisms to inform and monitor implementation at local school boards, including the potential of local planning tables.

## 7. Implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action on Education

Education equity for all students in Ontario can only be achieved by implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action. In partnership and collaboration with Residential School Survivors, Indigenous peoples, and educators, the provincial government must:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive K-12 culturally responsive curriculum with mandatory content on Indigenous history and the legacy of residential schools;
- Provide funding to train and educate teachers on integrating Indigenous knowledge within classrooms; and
- Ensure Indigenous language courses are available in elementary and secondary schools.

The federal government must:

- Eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves and end the funding backlog for First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education;
- Draft new Indigenous education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Indigenous peoples; and
- "Develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians."

## How can I help?

The Ontario government's commitment to end streaming is a result of the hard work of community leaders and advocates who have been calling for this change for years. As the province begins the de-streaming process, it is critical that we all stay engaged and hold the government and school boards accountable throughout the transition. To make your voice heard, consider writing to the Minister of Education, your local MPP, and/or local school board trustee. Below you can find a template letter that reiterates the CASE recommendations, however we encourage you to customize it with your own thoughts and perspectives.

**To contact the Minister of Education, [click here.](#)**

**To find your MPP, [click here.](#)**

**To find your school board, [click here.](#)**

