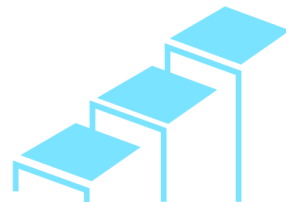# Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education's Student Success / Learning to 18 Strategy
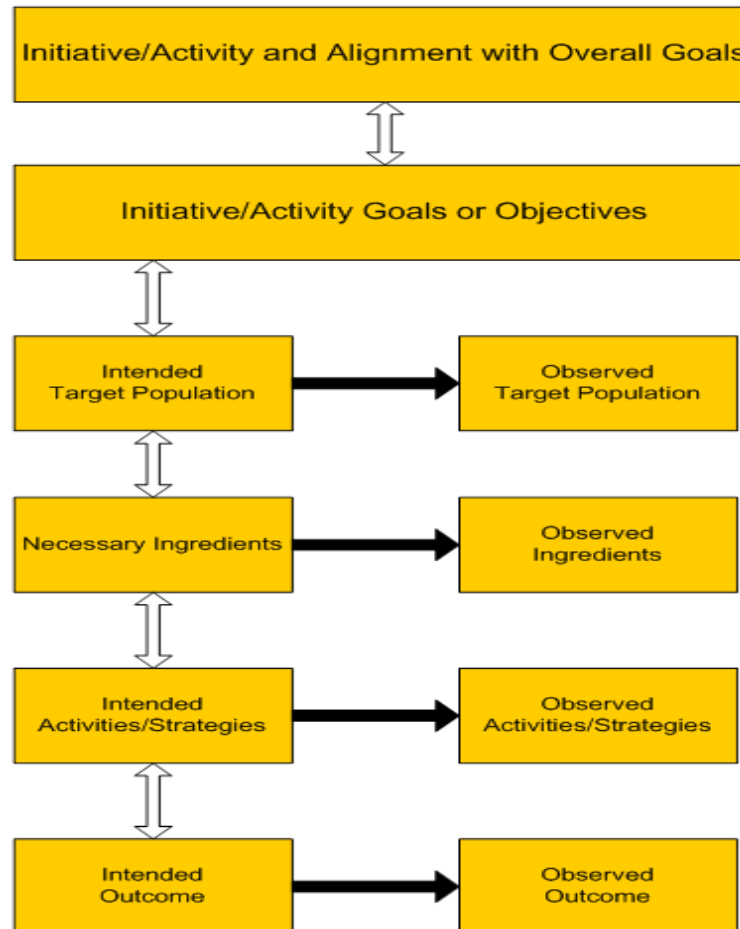
Charles Ungerleider, Ruth Baumann, Julie Bélanger, Fernando Cartwright, Isabelle Eaton, Sonia Guerriero and Tracy Lavin

Purpose of the strategy

- to improve secondary school success by
  - Increasing graduation rate and decreasing the drop-out rate;
  - Supporting a good outcome for all students;
  - Providing students with new and relevant learning opportunities;
  - Building on students' strengths and interests; and
  - Providing students with an effective elementary to secondary school transition.

directions

Evaluation Framework

Initiative/Activity and Alignment with Overall Goals	
Initiative/Activity Goals or Objectives	
Intended Target Population	Observed Target Population
Necessary Ingredients	Observed Ingredients
Intended Activities/Strategies	Observed Activities/Strategies
Intended Outcome	Observed Outcome

directions

Qualitative data sources

- In-depth, semi-structured field interviews and focus groups with
  - Ministries of Education and of Training, Colleges and Universities,
  - 40 school boards,
  - 50 schools and
  - 10 colleges across the province.

- Key informants
  - senior managers from both ministries,
  - education officers,
  - consultants to the Minister of Education,
  - directors of education, Student Success Leaders (SSLs),
  - superintendents of programs,
  - school trustees,
  - college presidents and vice-presidents,
  - school principals,
  - members of school Student Success Teams (including several Student Success Teachers (SSTs)),
  - teachers who were not members of their school's Student Success Team,
  - parents, and
  - students.

directions

Quantitative data sources

- responses from online surveys developed by the evaluation team to which more than 14,000 secondary students and school staff responded

- student achievement data provided by the Ministry
  - student biographic and achievement data for students in Grades 9 to 12 stored in the Elementary/Secondary Data Warehouse (ESDW) for the academic years 2000-2001 through 2004-2005
  - student biographic and achievement data from the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) for the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic years, and
  - individual student records from the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic years on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT)

directions

What changed between 2003 and 2007 in Ontario's secondary schools to help students succeed?

- shift from an *implied or presumed* focus on the learner to an *explicit and highly intentional* focus on the learner as the focal point for the work of schools.

- improved communication among different system actors,

- increased flexibility in meeting diploma requirements,

- increased focus on a caring school culture,

- increased focus on tracking and monitoring individual students, and

- expanded program choices and flexibility for students.

directions

What were the main benefits arising from these changes?

- human-related benefits
  - improved internal communication within schools,
  - increased student engagement, and
  - improved teaching practices.

- Measurement and accountability-related benefits
  - Improved student monitoring and tracking, and
  - Improved use of data.

- Resource-related benefits
  - an increased number of program options,
  - increased scheduling flexibility, and
  - increased access to human resources—primarily teaching staff and Student Success Teachers.

directions

What were the main benefits arising from these changes?

- Academic-related benefits
  - smoother transitions from secondary school to postsecondary education and/or work and between the elementary and secondary levels,
  - improvements in test results, and improvement in graduation rates and
  - a decrease in drop-out rates.
- Systemic benefits
  - change in the school's expectations of students and
  - an improved professional culture.

directions

Which elements of the SS/L18 Strategy and actions that were implemented yielded improved student success?

- Elements
  - expanded cooperative education,
  - apprenticeships,
  - Student Success Teachers,
  - Credit Recovery,
  - School-College-Work Initiatives,
  - Dual Credit programs, and
  - Specialist High Skills Majors
- Elements of the Strategy were complementary and worked to meet the diverse needs of students.

directions

What specific support mechanisms enabled the strategy to progress?

- targeted funding,

- the designation of dedicated student success staff in each school and of Student Success Leaders in each board,

- increased scheduling and funding flexibility,

- the provision of professional development opportunities,

- improved information sharing about individual students,

- increased focus at key transition points of students' educational trajectories,

- specific components of the SS/L18 Strategy that have acted as foundations or rallying points for the development of supportive pedagogical practices and alternative means of assessing student progress and success,

- the increased availability of previously-established programs such as cooperative education and apprenticeships, and

- the development of innovative offerings such as SHSMs and dual credits.

directions

What barriers to increased student success were encountered?

- Relative lack of student awareness of the Strategy and its components
- Human-related challenges
  - staff perceptions and student dispositions,
  - the needs of specific student subpopulations (especially students with persistent or marked behavioural difficulties), and
  - inadequate or underdeveloped pedagogy in specific areas of practice.
- Resource-related challenges
  - insufficient human resources,
  - limited funding,
  - lack of (programmatic) flexibility, and
  - issues related to transportation and/or school location .

directions

What further strategies and actions were suggested to further increase secondary student success?

- human-related improvements
  - capacity building,
  - communication with primary stakeholders and
  - meeting the diverse needs of learners.
- resource-related improvements
  - meeting staffing needs,
  - increasing or permanently securing existing funding to offer suitable program options and conditions, and
  - Increasing flexibility for program and course delivery.
- Systemic improvements
  - the need to continue reinforcing a system-wide culture shift from teacher-centred to learner centred,
  - increasing awareness of the value of different educational pathways, and
  - fostering a climate of planning certainty at all system levels.

directions

Was there evidence that graduation rates increased and drop-out rates decreased?

- Provincial graduation rates increased from 68% in 2003-04 to 75% in 2006-07, and

- A corresponding decrease in drop out rates

directions

The Change Process in Ontario Secondary Schools

- The Premier and Ministers of Education have used their leadership positions to articulate broad outcomes for the changes:
  - increasing graduation rates,
  - ensuring higher levels of knowledge, and
  - ensuring that students leaving school are prepared for the opportunities available to them.
- Government gave prominence to the individual and societal benefits of persistence and success in secondary schooling.
- Government also signalled to students, their parents and the surrounding community that it was prepared to use its legislative authority to make it more difficult for students to leave school prior to graduation

directions

The Change Process in Ontario Secondary Schools

- Government mobilized three important ingredients:
  - social pressure for change,
  - the articulation of the benefits of change, and
  - Penalties for the maintenance of the status quo.
- Government removed many of the principal barriers to change.
  - Most important, the SS/L18 Strategy was predicated on respect for the persons responsible for carrying out the mission of Ontario's secondary schools and for their professional judgement.
- Government was also strategic in allowing for the accommodation of alternatives where such alternatives are aligned with and capable of producing the desired outcomes.
  - Experimentation, permitting people to practice, apply and assess the effectiveness of the change, and has encouraged the modification of practices that have not produced results or the abandonment of practices and initiatives that proved unworthy of modification.

directions

Thank you!

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