

Chapter 2

Responding to the Modern Culture of Education: Providing a New Structure

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ABSTRACT

A study conducted by Dr. Alan King in the early 2000s exposed low secondary school graduation rates and a variety of indicators of a student's likelihood of success in graduating. Premier Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government responded with a reform aimed at changing educational practices through the Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy (SS/L18) in 2003 and Policy/Program Memorandum No. 137 in 2005. This drove a province-wide effort to support students 'in-risk' of not graduating with a multitude of new resources and policies. Ontario's secondary school graduation rates have since increased to 82 percent, however, a variety of barriers to student success remain both socially and culturally in Ontario schools. The absence of student social and cultural capital can diminish educational opportunities for students which is problematic for an equitable system. This chapter explores the history of Student Success initiatives, the unique role played by Student Success Teachers and L.E.A.D. teacher candidates, and further areas of need to be addressed in closing the gap in education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a field of study that, like many others, undergoes continuous scrutiny and reform in response to a continually changing world. Traditional systems and approaches to teaching cease to be optimally effective as the educational environment changes simultaneously with the background of students, which have become more diverse and varied across cultural family life and socio-economic domains. The journey to our modern educational environment has been one driven by past legislation, an understanding of which provides the context for the current educational climate and recent problems faced in education. The objective of this chapter is to examine how past legislative changes through the Ontario Ministry

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of Education have led to both further compounded issues as well as solutions to such issues concerning student success in Ontario secondary schools.

BACKGROUND

During the 2003-2004 school year in Ontario, almost one-third of students were not completing their high school education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). In 2003, a four-year study on the double cohort class was conducted by Dr. Alan King and cited a 68% graduation rate in 2003-2004. This study identified a variety of specific indicators of the likelihood of a student to successfully graduate secondary schools, such as grade nine and ten credit accumulation (King, Warren, Boyer, & Chin, 2004). As a result of these startling findings, Premier Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government introduced a new method of school reforms in 2005 designed to reshape educational practices at both the school and classroom level, but to also positively engage teachers and acquire the support of Ontarians regarding public education (Ungerleider, 2014). This would lead to vast improvements in the rates of successful completion of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (O.S.S.D.) for students.

Defining the Problem and Developing Solutions: The Role of Dr. Alan King

In 2004, Dr. Alan King completed a four-year study using the double cohort class of 1999-2003. Initially, one of its primary purposes was to predict the volume of double cohort secondary school graduates that would apply to post-secondary education in Ontario in 2003 (King, 2001). The reason for this interest occurred when the provincial government was under the leadership of Premier Mike Harris of the Progressive Conservative Party from 1995-2002, and several reformatory changes were made to Ontario's education system (Thompson, 2017). One example of such changes made by the Harris government was the elimination of the Ontario Academic Credit (O.A.C.) year of high school, which was the fifth year of secondary school after grade 12 that was developed to prepare students for post-secondary education. Consequently, the 2003 round of graduates consisted of two school systems merged from both a newly restructured program by the liberal government, the graduating class of 2003 of the very first four-year secondary school system, and the previous conservative program in place, the graduating class of 2003 of the final five-year secondary school system (Ungerleider, 2014).

This study also aimed to investigate the impact of executing this restructured program by establishing a cohort-based graduation rate that could be tracked each year (King et al., 2004). King et al. discovered that the rate of graduation for students from the final two cohorts of the five-year program was 78%, while the graduation rate from the four-year reorganized program was 57%, followed by a graduation rate of 70% for students who opted to stay for a fifth-year (King et al., 2004). These rates were significantly lower than those of other provinces. In addition to its findings regarding graduation rates, this study also found that if students even missed one grade 9 or 10 credit, they were placed 'in-risk' of not graduating. This report showed that 27% of grade 9 students at the time of the study were missing one credit, and that value was growing to 40% by grade 10. A significant reason attributed to this observation was the notion that schools in Ontario were highly focused on preparing students for university rather than providing courses that mirrored a wide enough range of student abilities, interests, or ambitions. Dr. King also found that only 33% of high school graduates were attending university, while 19% were

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