

COMMUNITY- CONNECTED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Your voice matters. Please share your thoughts to help inform a new policy. Consultations with community and business organizations will take place between January and May 2016.

Making a difference in a student's life is a rewarding experience. Learn more about how experiential learning inspires students today to become successful and engaged citizens of tomorrow.

Students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 will benefit from opportunities both inside and outside of school that are compelling and contribute to their success. These are some of the goals of *Achieving Excellence: A renewed vision for Education in Ontario*. Creating more relevant, applied and innovative learning experiences helps spark students' curiosity and inspires them to follow their passions.

Critical to the success of these goals are the partnerships with community organizations and businesses – designed to provide students with more experiential learning opportunities.



What is community-connected experiential learning?

The phrase “community-connected experiential learning” is defined as an approach to learning that provides students with opportunities to actively participate in experiences connected to a community outside of school. This “community” could be local, national, or global. In addition, this connection can involve being physically present (an *on-site* experience), being present through the use of various communication technologies (a *virtual* experience), or a combination of the two (a *blended* experience). Students reflect on their experiences to learn from them, so they can apply their learning to decisions and actions in various aspects of their lives.

Benefits to the community

There are significant benefits to community organizations and businesses in providing experiential learning opportunities for students. Community partners will take pride in knowing that they are contributing to the education of children and youth, and to Ontario’s future workforce.

- Involvement in experiential learning enables community partners to develop new networks, and build bridges between their organization and the school community.
- Students will bring energy, enthusiasm and fresh ideas to community organizations and businesses.
- By including students in the operations of their business or non-profit, that organization positively contributes to their brand as an organization dedicated to community building.
- Experiential learning provides an opportunity for organizations to both mentor and learn from students, and for existing staff to develop and grow their leadership skills.

What are the goals of community-connected experiential learning?

Community-connected experiential learning opportunities enhance the already rich learning environments of our schools. As such, we want to give students experiential learning opportunities that assist in:

- deepening their understanding of the knowledge and skills within the curriculum and of their life experiences beyond the curriculum;

- acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to make informed education and career/life choices;
- developing their capacities for deeper learning, including transferring their learning to their everyday life, and helping them to acquire important 21st century competencies¹ (such as critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, and collaboration) so that they have the talent and skills they need to succeed and lead in the global economy; and
- contributing to a local, national, or global community and developing a sense of their identity as individuals and as members of their community, society, and the world.

2016 Consultations

To help inform the **Community-Connected Experiential Learning** policy in Ontario schools, we are looking for your participation in the consultations that will take place **January until May 2016**. Consultations will also be held with educators and post-secondary institutions. The success of this new policy depends on your involvement and the commitment of community organizations and businesses that will in turn, influence students' lives.

Your voice matters

We ask you to consider the following questions and provide your feedback:

- What are some innovative opportunities for experiential learning that might be possible within your organizations under the proposed policy framework?
- How can you support students, during their experiential learning opportunity, in developing the skills needed for success in the future, such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration?
- What are some of the challenges or barriers to your participation in providing these experiential learning opportunities? What are the solutions?
- As a business or community organization, how can the ministry support your efforts in providing experiential learning opportunities for all students, as outlined in the policy framework?

1. Ontario's renewed vision for education and plan of action, as outlined in *Achieving Excellence*, commits the ministry to defining higher-order skills for the 21st century and developing measures for assessing them.

To establish and maintain strong partnerships, it is essential for schools and boards to work collaboratively with their community partners so that there is common understanding of the goals and benefits of experiential learning. This will ensure that all partners are supported throughout their participation, and that their contributions are valued and recognized.

Types of experiential learning opportunities to involve community and business organizations

Opportunities for elementary and secondary school students

Community-connected project-based learning gives students the opportunity to engage with community partners, who share their expertise, to research real-world questions, pose solutions to real-world problems, and design real-world products.

Similar to project-based learning, **problem-based learning** focuses learners on solving problems in a real-life context.

Service learning provides the opportunity for students to participate in experiential learning with a focus on service in the community. In this approach, students focus on an authentic need within the community and seek to provide a service, such as researching, developing, and/or implementing solutions to address that need. Service-learning experiences, developed in partnership with a community, are intended to benefit both the provider and the recipient of the service (Furco, 2010, p. 229)².

Job shadowing and job twinning provide short-term opportunities for students to observe a worker at a place of employment, or a cooperative education student at a placement, respectively. An annual example of job shadowing is Take Our Kids to Work™, when Grade 9 students are able to accompany parents, friends, relatives, or volunteers to their workplace.

Work experience or virtual work experience is a planned learning opportunity within any course that provides students with a short- to medium-term experience at a work placement, either on site or through an electronic or web-based connection.

2. Furco, A. (2010). The community as a resource for learning: An analysis of academic service-learning in primary and secondary education. In H. Dumont, D. Istance, & F. Benavides (Eds.), *The nature of learning: Using research to inspire practice* (pp. 227–49). Paris: OECD.

Opportunities for secondary school students as part of the Ontario curriculum

In addition to the opportunities described above, students in secondary schools may participate in longer-term opportunities for secondary school credits through cooperative education. Cooperative education may follow a traditional workplace model or as envisaged in this policy framework, a student-constructed model that allows them to pursue experiences in the broader community and related to other types of career/life goals, such as athletic or artistic development; innovation; and entrepreneurship. They may also support students in developing the knowledge and skills that will better prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow.

The basis of cooperative education programs is a partnership between a student, a teacher, and a community partner. Cooperative education allows students to apply and extend their classroom learning in a community or workplace setting and learn more about themselves and the opportunities available to them as they plan their pathways through secondary school to their initial postsecondary destination (apprenticeship training, college, community living, university, or the workplace).

Opportunities for secondary school students beyond the curriculum

The ministry is introducing a way for students to earn secondary school credits that recognizes significant learning when experiences are independently pursued by students in the community beyond their home school at the local, national, or global level. Examples of these types of opportunities might include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit heritage activities, international exchanges, and/or volunteer activities (not including the 40 hours of community involvement activities required to obtain the Ontario Secondary School Diploma). This new process could be known as Experiential Learning Assessment and Recognition (ELAR), and allows students to earn a maximum of two Grade 11 Experiential Learning optional credits towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). The involvement of a teacher responsible for experiential learning is an integral part of this program.

Next steps

Finalize the policy for Community-Connected Experiential Learning based on feedback from the consultations for rollout to schools across the province for the Fall 2016.

More information

Community-Connected Experiential Learning Policy Framework –
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/job/passport/index.html>

Achieving Excellence: A renewed vision for Education in Ontario – ontario.ca/edu/education

ADDENDUM:

Examples of Community-Connected Experiential Learning Opportunities for Students

- In the Waterloo Region District School Board, students in Grade 11 and 12 computer studies or communications technology courses developed and created a “mobile” educational app to meet the needs of Grade 5 and 6 student “clients.” Community industry mentors shared their expertise in project management, developing quality applications, and satisfying client needs. The project focused on the application of the curriculum in an authentic learning experience as well as on development of 21st century competencies, including skills and knowledge in collaboration; communication; critical, entrepreneurial, and creative thinking; and problem solving. In addition, students explored entrepreneurial careers and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers. Both elementary and secondary students were able to document and record their Apps4Learning journey in their “All About Me” portfolio or Individual Pathways Plan (IPP), using digital portfolios, blogs, videos, and journal writing. Student learning culminated in an Apps4Learning Convention where the apps developed by students were presented and shared with community partners, parents, and educators.
- As part of their school’s enrichment program, Grade 7 and 8 students from the Limestone District School Board conducted inquiries into current local issues that reflected their own interests and involved learning

related to the curriculum areas of language, math, science and technology, health and physical education, and geography. In partnership with South Frontenac Community Services and a variety of other local community organizations, students worked to improve food security in their area. Under the guidance and mentorship of a professional market gardener, students grew seedlings, transferred them to the greenhouse and garden for further study, and processed the produce for the local food bank and community centre.

- In the Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est, Grade 11 and 12 students in communications technology courses prepared televised programs and broadcast them in collaboration with a local television production company. Depending on the specific content of the show, students from various discipline areas (e.g., science, technology, literature, history) contributed to the research and the preparation of interviews with guests from the community. Episodes highlighted people and events from the local francophone community. The students' involvement promoted the francophone culture and helped strengthen students' awareness of its local presence.
- Since 2010, the Foundation for Student Science and Technology (FSST) has been partnering with co-op teachers in more than twelve school boards to deliver the Ontario Student Science and Technology Online Research Co-op. This program explores the principles and practices of independent, inquiry-based research. FSST matches secondary school students with top researchers to work on research projects and be immersed in professional online communications and work environments. The one- or two-credit co-op program is a collaborative development between the FSST and the federal Science and Technology Cluster to prepare emerging scientists, researchers, managers, and leaders for future careers in science and technology. The online format of the learning makes it accessible to all students, including those who require more flexible schedules and those living in remote areas. The research is reviewed, edited, and published in the *Journal of Student Science and Technology*.

