MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
                Director of the Provincial Schools Branch
                Supervisory Officer and Secretary-Treasurer of James Bay
                Lowlands

FROM: Richard Franz
      Director (A)
      Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategic Policy Branch

Ginette Plourde
Director
French-Language Policy and Programs Branch

DATE: January 5, 2009

SUBJECT: Specialist High Skills Majors 2008-09

We are pleased to provide you with an update on how implementation of the Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) program is proceeding across the province, and to include a set of the current sector guides for your information and for use with your program department.

Now in its third year of implementation, the SHSM program is being offered in all school boards, and over 330 schools are participating to make more than 480 SHSMs available to increasing numbers of students. Last year saw approximately 700 students graduate with an OSSD with the SHSM red seal, having met all the requirements of this ministry-approved specialized program within the diploma. We anticipate and look forward to significantly more graduates in the coming years based on the enthusiastic response by all boards and more and more schools to offer the SHSM in 2008-09.

This year schools are offering SHSM programs in the following fourteen sectors:

Agriculture  Arts and Culture  Business
Construction  The Environment  Forestry
Health and Wellness  Horticulture and Landscaping  Hospitality and Tourism
Manufacturing  Mining  Transportation
(new) Community Safety and Emergency Services  (new) Information and Communication Technology

…/ 2
Due to your efforts, we are making significant progress on our ministry focus of deeper implementation through continued growth in opportunities for students to access engaging, quality programs with four strong pathways. In this connection, communication to parents and students affirming the value of all program pathways and building broader awareness of innovative programs continues to be a priority. It is important to ensure that students and parents are aware of programs like the SHSM and your role in this communication is critical so that students can make informed decisions about programs that best meet their needs.

To this end, we are pleased to provide for your reference, a set of all available sector guides. These guides explain the advantages of the program in a specific sector, as well as the steps necessary to ensure that the program meets the standard expected for a high quality learning experience for students. Each guide provides information about the five required components for these specialized, career-focused programs, sample timetables for the four postsecondary pathways, examples of postsecondary programs in the sector, possible careers relating to the sector and a list of sources for electronic materials and information. If you require more copies, please download them from the ministry website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/specialist.html. Please note also, that we have distributed sets of sector guides to all secondary school principals in order to support their planning. We have included the memo to principals as an attachment for your information.

You will be interested to know that many educators and employers have told us that the individual components of the SHSM are valuable and enriching experiences for students in general, whether enrolled in the SHSM or not. Contextualized Learning Activities provide relevance through real-world application and insight to economic sectors. Experiential learning and “reach ahead” activities offer all students the chance to explore the next step in their career planning. We trust the attached sector guides will be a resource to you, your program department and your schools when exploring these possibilities for enriching the learning for all students. An SHSM Fact Sheet is also available on the ministry’s website and may be of interest to you and your staff as an easy reference for parents and students. (http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentsuccess/pathways/shsm/shsm_fact_sheet.pdf)

It is our hope that even more schools will consider the benefits of initiating or adding to their SHSM offerings. You will be receiving information later this month inviting SHSM applications for the 2009-10 school year. Our commitment to these programs includes an ongoing obligation to ensure their quality. To that end our staff will be available to confer with your board leads to support their planning and implementation processes. If you have any
questions regarding this initiative, please contact Audrey Cartile (416-326-0552) at audrey.cartile@ontario.ca or Aldo Cianfrini (416-325-2669) at aldo.cianfrini@ontario.ca. Both are Education Officers in this branch and would be pleased to support your work.

We thank you and congratulate you on all of your efforts on behalf of Ontario students, your support of Student Success, and your implementation of the Specialist High Skills Majors.

________________________________________  __________________________________________
Richard Franz                  Ginette Plourde

Enclosure: Memorandum to Principals of Secondary Schools and Principals of Provincial and Demonstration Schools

cc  Sue Durst, Director, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch
   Paul Anthony, Director, Teaching Policy and Standards Branch
   Marg Connor, Director (A), Leadership Development Branch
   Kirsten Parker, Director, Student Success/Learning to 18–ITEB
   Don Young, Director, Information Management Branch
   Barry Finlay, Director, Special Education Policy and Programs Branch
   Alayne Bigwin, Director, Aboriginal Education Office
   Kit Rankin, Director, Field Services Branch
   Regional Managers, Field Services Branch
   Regional Office Leads for SHSM
   Board Leads for SHSM
   Student Success Leaders