



Academic Pathways Leading to Student Success

The TDSB [Vision for Learning](#) outlines a commitment to ensure we are intentionally removing barriers for our most underserved students. Setting high expectations and increasing access to programming and supports is critical to the success of all students. The TDSB's Academic Pathways is part of the Vision for Learning. [Academic Pathways](#) is a 3 year plan to have the majority of TDSB's high school students studying academic courses for Grades 9 and 10. Our research tells us that students who choose an academic program of study generally experience more positive outcomes than students who select an applied program of study. Our research also tells us that students in academic courses generally experience higher achievement in courses beyond Grade 10, greater success in post-secondary programs and maintain increased pathway options beyond high school (e.g. college, university, apprenticeship, workplace). We are committed to ensuring that students are not limited in their choices beyond high school, based on the courses selected in Grade 9 and 10.

Some parents worry that the TDSB's Academic Pathways plan will lower the standards of the Academic Program, especially for high achievers. The TDSB does not believe this will happen and that's why we are providing this important information about the goals and outcomes of our plan.

[Why is the TDSB committed to academic pathways?](#)

- When a 13 or 14 year old TDSB student enters the Applied Program of Study (POS) they have a 10% chance of going on to university. When they enter the Academic POS they have nearly a 70% chance of going on to university*
- Less than half of students in the Applied POS confirm a place at either college or university
- Students who received an 80% mark in Grade 9 Applied Mathematics confirmed a post-secondary placement in university or college at the same rate as students that achieved a 50% mark in Grade 9 Academic Mathematics during that time
- While only 14% of students taking Applied Mathematics achieved a mark of 80% or higher, 90% of students taking Academic Mathematics received a mark of 50% or higher
- Traditionally, student factors other than ability have affected placement in the Applied POS. The Applied POS is currently overrepresented by racialized students (over a quarter), by students from low socio-economic status circumstances (almost 70%), and students with special education needs (more than 60%)

This data supports the TDSB's commitment to academic pathways. By working to open opportunities for all students in the Academic pathway at Grade 9 and 10, we are directly responding to the post-secondary education experiences that our students have or do not have when they leave our system.

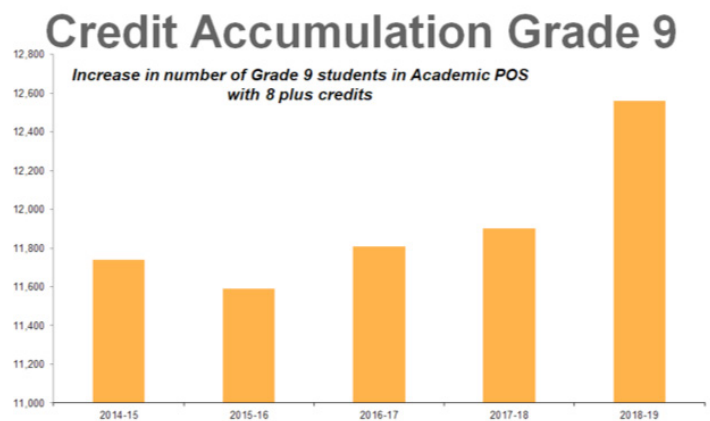
[Education Quality and Accountability Office \(EQAO\) and Academic Pathways](#)

Achievement on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) has increased from 81% to 82% of fully participating first-time eligible students passing the test. We continue to work on improving EQAO Grade 9 Math achievement. Results for 2018-19 indicate that the percentage of Grade 9 students who performed at or above the provincial standard decreased by 6% in Applied Mathematics (28% to 22%) and decreased by 2 percentage points in Academic Mathematics (79% to 77%), compared to 2017-18. It is important to note that although EQAO is one measure of student achievement, it is not the best predictor of post-secondary outcomes. Credit accumulation is a better predictor of post-secondary outcomes for students.

Academic Pathways and Credit Accumulation

Over the past five years, there has been an increase in the number of credits achieved by students in Academic courses. In 2014-15, a total of 11,737 students achieved 8 credits in Grade 9 Academic POS (majority of courses at the Academic level). In 2018-19, the number of students achieving 8 credits increased to 12,560. There are now 823 more students achieving Academic credits.

Although a Grade 12 mathematics credit is not a requirement to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), nearly all university bound students (83%) completed at least one Grade 12 university mathematics course and a student must be in an Academic POS to take these courses.



Relevant Research

The TDSB's work in Academic Pathways is based on evidence informed practice. Below are two recent reports that support efforts to challenging streaming:

[*Raising Expectations and Achievement. The Impact of Wide Scale Mathematics Reform Giving All Students Access to High Quality Mathematics*](#), by Jo Boaler, Stanford University, and David Foster, Executive Director, Silicon Valley Mathematics Initiative

[*Applied or Academic: High Impact Decisions for Ontario Students*](#), by People for Education, 2015.

Next Steps

In the 2018-19 school year, 85% of Grade 9 students took the majority of courses at an Academic level. In Grade 10, 81% of students took the majority of courses at an Academic level. We recognize that we need to support teachers and students so that the majority of students can be successful in an Academic Program of Study. Professional learning to build educator capacity in the following areas continues to be a focus:

- Use of Universal Design for Learning and differentiated instruction to provide multiple entry points in the curriculum
- Instructional and assessment practices to ensure students have expanded ways to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- Learning Coaches and Student Success Transition Counsellors working with staff and students on gap closing strategies

We also understand that students experiencing learning gaps will need appropriate interventions in order to close these gaps. Our commitment to challenging streaming, which starts with our youngest learners, and our commitment to transforming support for students with special needs will also help ensure that we are successful in achieving our goals.

An Academic Program of Study provides more opportunities for students, which is why we are committed to this important work.

**The data presented in this Fact Sheet is drawn from a variety of data sources and reports within the Research and Development Team. As an example, please see the following: Brown, R.S., Newton, L., Tam, G., & Parekh, G. (2015). The trajectories of grade 9 mathematics achievement 2008-2013. (Research Report No. 15/16-05). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board 2013; or, Brown, R. and Tam, G. (2017) Grade 9 Cohort Post-secondary Pathways, 2011-2016; Fact Sheet, Toronto District School Board, August 2017.*