

CA Ontario, Canada: Equity, Pathways, and Land-Based Learning

Segment Focus

The Ontario segment, hosted by the **Ontario Principals Council (OPC)** president **Jeff Maharaj**, links global challenges (rapid change, technology, equity, belonging) to three Ontario examples:

1. **Indigenous land-based learning** in Durham DSB.
2. **Pathways & experiential learning** (30 Credits My Way, SHSM) in Durham DSB.
3. **Black excellence & industry partnerships** in Peel DSB.

The **OPC** represents $\sim 5,000$ principals and vice-principals in Ontario's publicly funded schools and focuses on advocacy, professional learning, and resources.

1. Indigenous Land-Based Learning (Durham District School Board)

Core Philosophy

- Work is grounded in the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**, especially articles on **land, culture, language, and self-determination**.
- There is an emphasis that **territorial acknowledgements must be tied to action**, not just scripted words.
- This approach is connected to Elder Albert Marshall's **"Two-Eyed Seeing"**: bringing together Indigenous and Western knowledge systems so Indigenous students can access education that honors their rights under UNDRIP.

Programs for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Students

- **Land-based learning programs** (e.g., Akinomaag- / "Akin" programs) where students learn on the land with Indigenous knowledge holders, build relationships with self, others, and place, and connect Ontario curriculum to Indigenous ways of knowing.
- **Student circles** in schools connect culture, land, and language.
- **Dual-credit / alternative pathway programs** blend secondary school credits, college/university credit, and learning from and with the land.

- The goal is **Indigenous education sovereignty**: creating **safe spaces for Indigenous paradigms** inside public systems, centering local nations (e.g., **Mississaugas of Scugog Island**), and preparing “future ancestors”.
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2. Pathways & Experiential Learning (Durham DSB)

Monique Mueller, System lead for Student Success, notes that the traditional view of success as a straight line is wrong; real pathways include **detours, setbacks, and re-routes**, and schools must help students navigate that.

2.1. “30 Credits My Way”

- This is a DDSB initiative based on Ontario’s diploma requirement of 30 credits.
- It is a **one-stop, interactive roadmap** where students and families see **all pathway options**: co-op, paid co-op, SHSM, OYAP, dual credits, e-learning, alternative education, etc..
- Students can **customize** their high-school journey (part-time, night school, online, co-op, etc.) and acknowledge three credential pathways (OSSD, Certificate of Achievement, OSSC).
- DDSB is integrating this roadmap with **MyBlueprint** and building an **AI assistant** to give students tailored course and program combinations based on their typed goals.

2.2. Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)

- **SHSM** is a province-wide Ontario program where students “major” in a **sector** (e.g., Construction, Health & Wellness, Arts & Culture, Business, Energy).
- In DDSB, this involves:
 - $\text{\$19 sectors}$ with **bundles of required courses** and $\text{\$2-credit co-op}$.
 - **Sector-specific certifications** (e.g., CPR/First Aid, infection control).
 - **Reach-ahead experiences** (field trips, workshops, contacts with employers).
- When completed, students earn a **red SHSM seal** on their diploma.
- **Example: Maxwell Heights Secondary School** students (Construction SHSM) partnered with the **Oshawa Zoo** to **design and build animal structures**.

- Overall, SHSM makes pathways **visible, flexible, and experiential**.
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3. Black Excellence & Industry Partnerships (Peel DSB)

3.1. Centre for Black Excellence

- The **Centre for Black Excellence** implements Peel's **Black Student Success Strategy**.
- Philosophy is anchored in the Maasai expression "**Kasserian Ingera?**" – "**How are the children?**": the well-being of children is the measure of community health.
- **Principles:**
 - Black student success is **not accidental** – it requires intentional design.
 - Work is **student-centered**: identity, culture, brilliance, and care are at the core.
 - Equity work must focus on **outcomes**, not just "good processes."
 - Community partnerships are part of a **co-education ecosystem**.
- They design learning experiences that **affirm identity and belonging, build confidence**, and dismantle systemic racism.

3.2. Swirl – Brand-Funded Learning

- **Swirl** is an education-industry partnership platform created to redirect some **corporate marketing budgets** into: work-integrated learning projects in schools and unrestricted funding for districts and programs.
- Corporate money that would normally go to ad agencies instead funds **student learning experiences**.

3.3. Student Projects (Work-Integrated Learning)

- **Rick Hansen Secondary School – "Pelle Pelle" spices project:** Students visited the factory, learned sourcing/production, created their **own spice blends** (used in a cooking challenge), investigated **health benefits**, and participated in a filmed **boot camp / docuseries**. Principal Omari Rhoden highlighted the power of **authentic, community-based learning** and how students were stretched beyond comfort zones.

- **Cawthra Park Secondary School – Arts & Regenerative Farming:** Students at this regional arts school partnered with **Providence Farm** (a regenerative farm) to **co-design a sustainability / environmental stewardship campaign**. They acted as **creative directors**, connecting **arts, environmental science, and global citizenship**. Students not only **learn about sustainability**, they **lead it**.
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Closing Reflections

Lawrence de Mayor (OPC Professional Learning Team) highlights recurring themes:

- Student success defined as **confidence, resilience, and readiness for life**, not only grades.
 - Education as a **living, evolving system**, shaped by community and student needs.
 - Leadership that is **responsive, relationship-centered, and equity-driven**.
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Main Entities & URLs

- **30 Credits My Way** (DDSB initiative): ddsb.ca
- **Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)** (Ontario Ministry program): principals.ca