

Stakeholder Summary

Foreign-born students more likely to pursue postsecondary education

A new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) finds that students born outside of Canada are more likely to pursue college and university than Canadian-born students. *Understanding the Gaps in Postsecondary Education Participation Based on Income and Place of Birth: The role of high school course selection and performance* found that foreign-born students, especially those from higher-income neighbourhoods, were also far more likely to register at a university than a college.

Project description

The study uses a longitudinal data set from the Ministry of Education of more than 135,000 students who were enrolled in Grade 9 in 2005–2006. The data include information on academic and applied course credits attempted and earned, grades, graduation status and if students applied to or registered in any publicly funded Ontario postsecondary institution following high school. Demographic information was also provided including gender, birth year, place of birth and home postal code. Postal code information was linked to 2006 Census data to determine neighbourhood income levels. The study also had access to cohort information on Grade 6 standardized math and reading scores.

Findings

Canadian-born students living in lower-income neighbourhoods are least likely to register in college or university. Close to 45% do not pursue any postsecondary education. Foreign-born students living in lower-income neighbourhoods register for postsecondary education at rates similar to those of Canadian-born students from higher-income neighbourhoods.

The authors also raise the question of whether students are utilizing the flexible aspects of the high school curriculum in Ontario. Most high school courses are offered at either academic (university or college path) or applied (college path) levels, but despite the option to mix and match courses from both paths, most students stay in only one path.

Regardless of place of birth, course selection and academic performance in Grade 9 courses are major factors driving postsecondary participation. Students can still switch between academic and applied paths in Grades 9 and 10. The authors say this raises a critical question for parents, schools and government: “If students do not perform well in the first year of high school, how can we help them recover and overcome early challenges?”

Authors of *Understanding the Gaps in Postsecondary Education Participation Based on Income and Place of Birth: The role of high school course selection and performance* are Martin D. Dooley, A. Abigail Payne and Leslie Robb, McMaster University.