



## Implementation of Academic Pathways

**To:** Planning and School Services Committee

**Date:** 3 October, 2019

**Report No.:** 10-19-3728

### Strategic Directions

- Transform student learning
- Provide equity of access to learning opportunities for all students
- Create a culture of student and staff well-being

### Recommendation

It is recommended that the Academic Pathways Report be received.

### Context

The Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) Enhancing Equity Task Force (2018) conducted a comprehensive engagement process and offered a set of recommendations focused on ensuring educational access, experiences, and opportunities for all students in schools. The Task Force Report's description of the detrimental impact of tracking students into non-Academic programs aligned with system data which finds that there are barriers that contribute to differential outcomes and expectations for specific groups of students (for example, students who identify as Black and English Language Learners) studying within the Applied versus Academic Program of Study<sup>1</sup>. It is important to note that in 2015, TDSB began a pilot program, in a small number of secondary schools, focused on providing successful Academic programming for all students Grades 9 and 10 in these schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Students can enroll in courses within various Programs of Study. Program of study refers to courses taken at various levels in Grades 9 and 10 (Academic, Applied, and Locally Developed/Essentials). For the purpose of this report, Program of Study is defined according to the majority of courses taken by a student (three of the five compulsory courses in Grade 9 and 10).

In 2018, through The Director of Education's Response to the Enhancing Equity Task Force Report (Appendix A) and the Multi-Year Strategic Plan – Action Plans defined an enhanced, system commitment to challenging all forms of streaming<sup>2</sup> because of the enormous impact on a student's potential outcomes in secondary, post-secondary education (Parekh, 2013) and beyond. This commitment to challenging streaming is comprehensive and includes several important levers for change. They are as follows:

- Developing a strong foundation of literacy and numeracy skills beginning in Kindergarten,
- Greater inclusion of students with special education,
- The majority of students studying within the Academic Program, and
- Reducing suspensions and expulsions.

This report provides an update of the significant progress made in achieving the goals described in the TDSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan – Academic Pathways Action Plan. Specifically, the plan states: *By September 2021, our goal is for the majority of Grade 9 and 10 students to be successful in all academic level compulsory courses, where there is an Applied, Academic or Locally Developed Program of Study.* The intent of Academic Pathways is to ensure that achievement gaps are closed for those groups of students who have historically faced barriers to accessing Academic level courses and the required supports to be successful.

*Why is a focus on Academic Pathways important?*

Success in an Academic program has been proven to be an instrumental measure of future success. Student experience in secondary school is a critical stepping stone to future post-secondary education opportunities that, in turn, largely influence people's economic and general life chances (OECD, 2018). Students who choose the Academic level program of study in Grades 9 and 10 generally experience more positive outcomes than students who enter an Applied program (Brown and Tam, 2017). Specifically, they are likely to attain higher levels of achievement in courses beyond Grade 10 and have access to a broader range of post-secondary options (e.g., college, university, apprenticeship). Success in a Grade 9 Academic program is an important predictor of post-secondary graduation (Brown, Davies, and Chakraborty, 2018).

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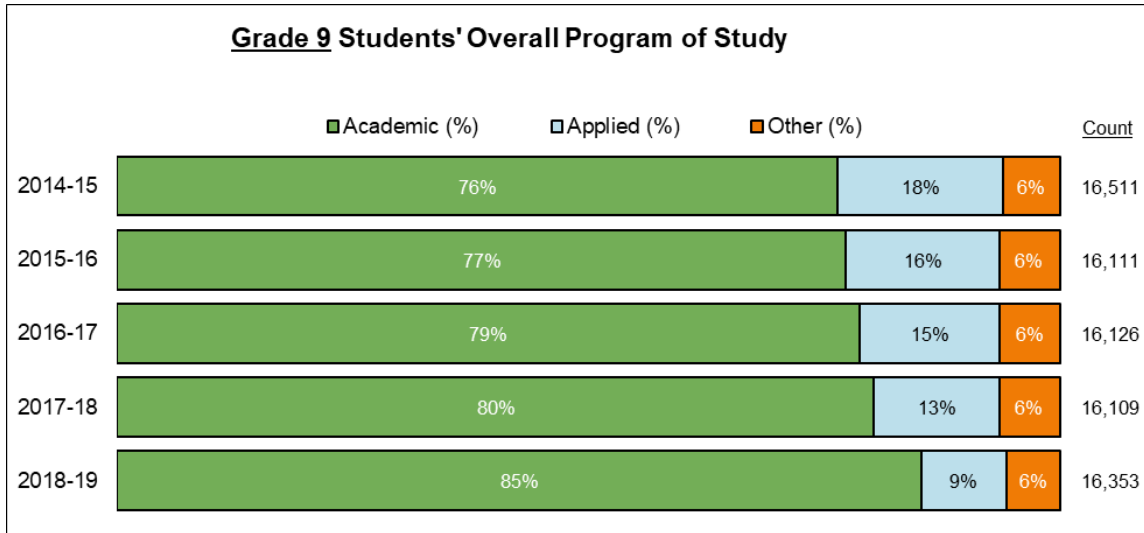
<sup>2</sup> Academic streaming or tracking refers to the practice of assigning students to instructional groups on the basis of ability. (*Director of Education's Response to the Enhancing Equity Task Force Report*, Jan 31, 2018)

Trends

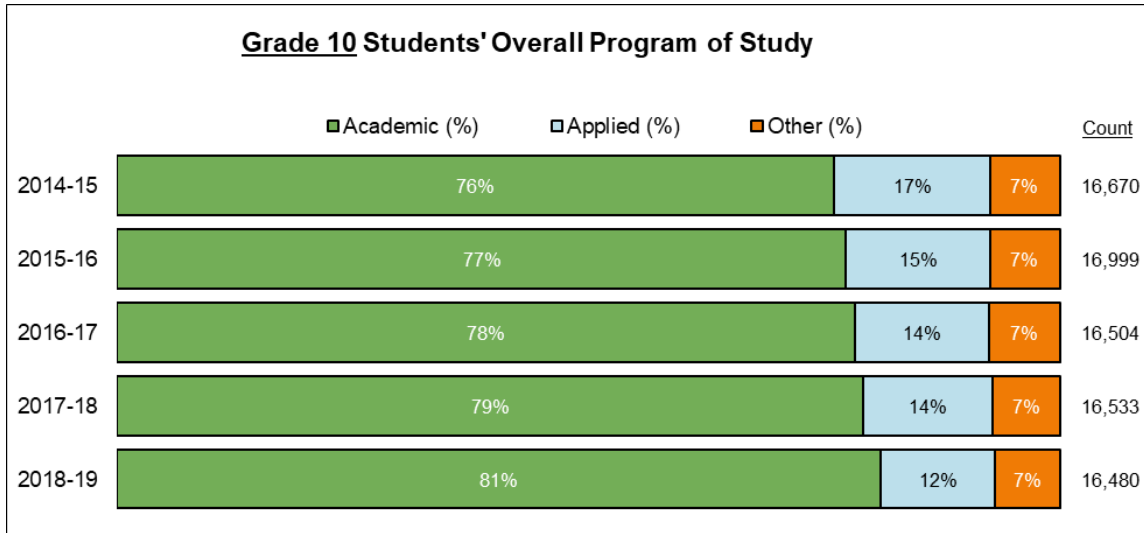
The TDSB is making significant progress in providing Academic opportunities to more students across the system. This is especially the case for the most historically marginalized or underserved students in the board. In the TDSB, 85% of students in Grade 9 and 81% of students in Grade 10 enrol in Academic programs (Figures 1 and 2). This represents an overall increase of 9% and 5%, respectively in Grade 9 and 10 Academic, over the past four years. These improvements can be attributed to the implementation of a focused system strategy, education about the significance of Academic programs, learning about barriers, bias, equity and anti-oppression, greater transparency and accountability and collaborative learning among Grade 8, 9 and 10 teachers at the Learning Network and/or Learning Centre levels.

The proportion of students taking the Applied Program of Study (3 of 5 courses in Applied at Grade 9 and 10) has **decreased** by almost half in Grade 9 and almost a third in Grade 10 since 2014 – 2015 school year. This represents an increased opportunity for more than 1400 students in Grade 9 and nearly 800 students in Grade 10 to participate in Academic programs. Figures 1 and 2 show specific year-over-year improvements.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



*Equity of Access*

As previously, stated the intent of Academic Pathways is to ensure that achievement gaps are closed for those groups of students who have historically faced barriers. The data show marked improvements across all demographic groups and the gap in enrolment in Academic Pathways among students who identify as Black, Latin American and South American students is closing at a rapid rate over the past four years.

**Figure 3**

**Three Year Increase in Grade 9 Student Enrolment in the *Academic POS* by Race**

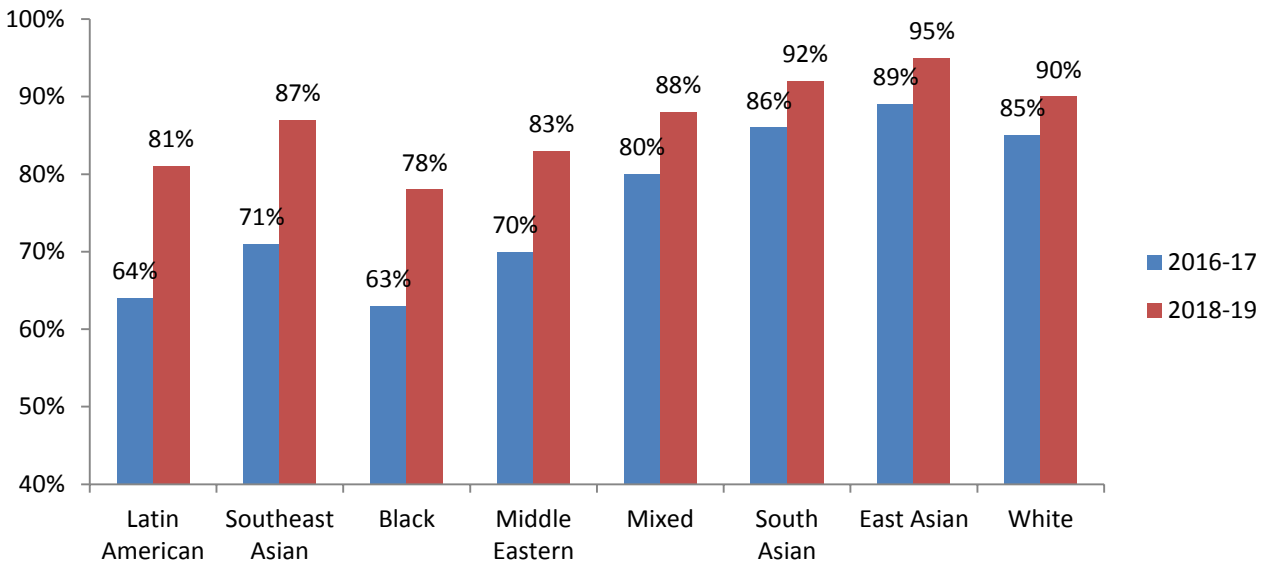
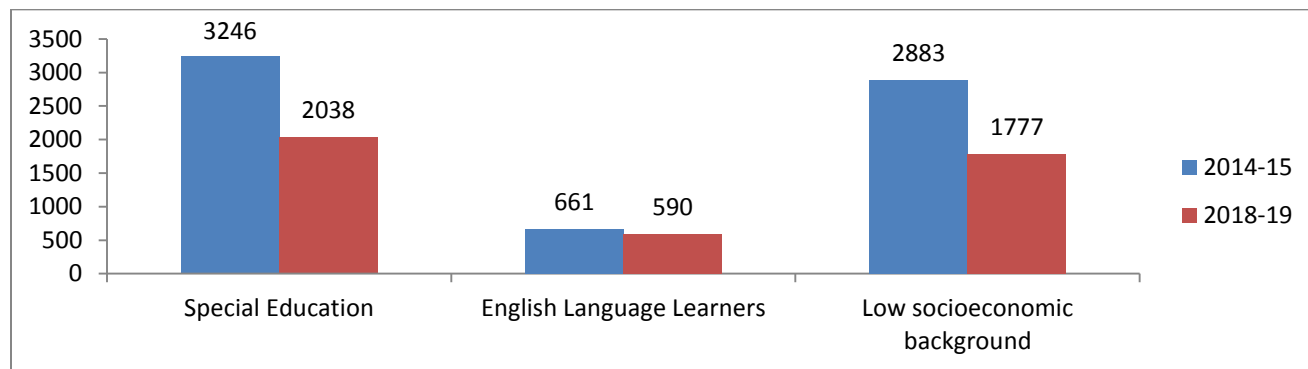


Figure 3 reveals that students who identify as Black, Latin American and Middle Eastern are moving from non-Academic to Academic programs at the fastest rates - 15%, 14% and 16% respectively. The gap is closing. These trends represent significant improvement across some of the most traditionally underserved groups. However, this data also identifies that there continues to be barriers that contribute to a disproportionate gap between the enrolment of Black, Latin American, and Middle Eastern students in Academic programs compared to other demographic groups. This points to the importance of the continued focus on monitoring of course selection patterns at the school level and the need for ongoing training in anti-racism, Anti-Black racism and anti-oppression to disrupt the deficit thinking that results in the disparities shown above. It also underscores the need for parents, educators and students to challenge these inequities and to identify and remove the barriers to accessing Academic programs among these particular groups of students.

But the reduction in the students in the Applied program does represent a significant decrease in numbers of students from the TDSB most significantly marginalized communities of students. Consider the following shifts in numbers for students with special education needs, English Language Learners, and students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds in Figure 4.

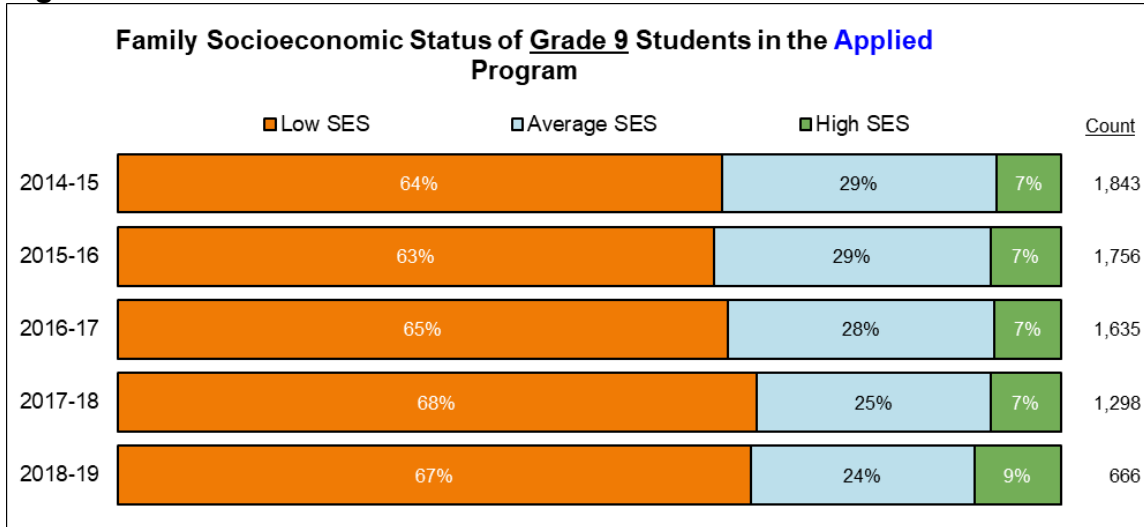
**Figure 4**  
**Reduction in Numbers of Students in the Applied Program of Study**



The decrease in students with Special Education Needs and students from low Socioeconomic Status (SES) backgrounds in Applied programs shown in Figure 4 is associated with a significant potential improvement in life chances for many of TDSB students. A previous cohort comparison study that examined 2006-2011 and 2011-16 secondary school experience in relation to post-secondary destinations for students showed a very significant increase in student confirmation of post-secondary destination from students that came from low SES family backgrounds. For example, there was nearly a 1/5 increase in students whose parents had a *High School education* confirming post-secondary education opportunities in university or college (Brown and Tam, 2017).

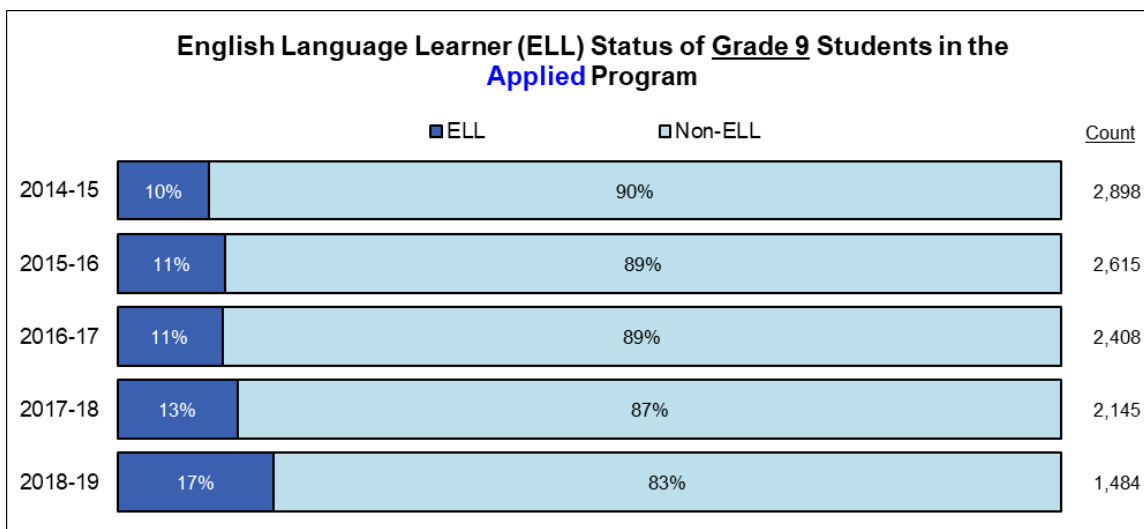
While the number of students in Applied programs are reducing at a rapid rate and the total number of students in Applied programs is small, the representation of students from families with a lower SES family background has increased slightly in Grade 9 as shown in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5**

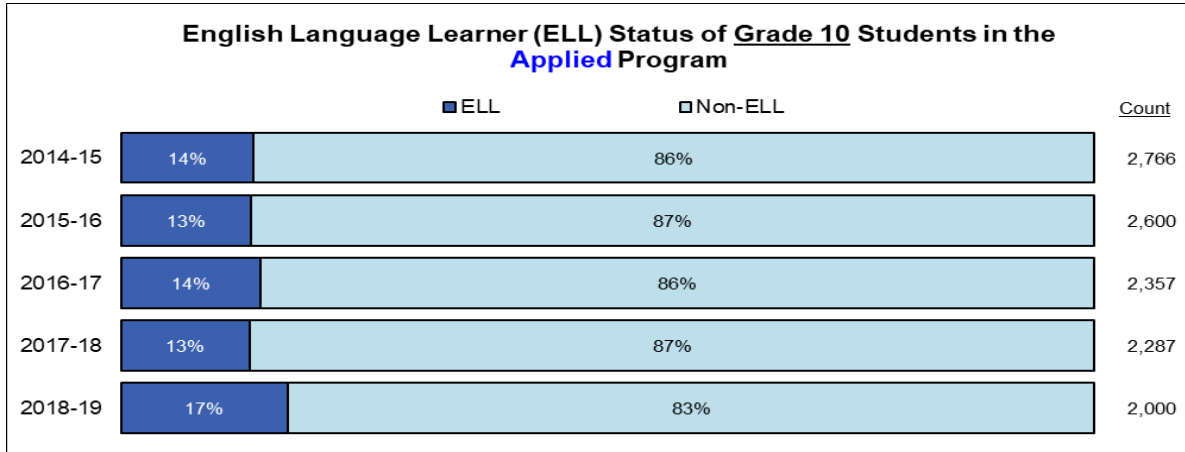


Figures 6 and 7 show this trend is also noticeable for TDSB English Language Learner (ELL) students in both Grade 9 and 10. While the actual number of students in the Applied program decreases rapidly, ELLs are over-represented by percentage in Applied programs. The percentage of students who are ELLs in Applied programs has increased by 7% in Grade 9 and 3% in Grade 10.

**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**

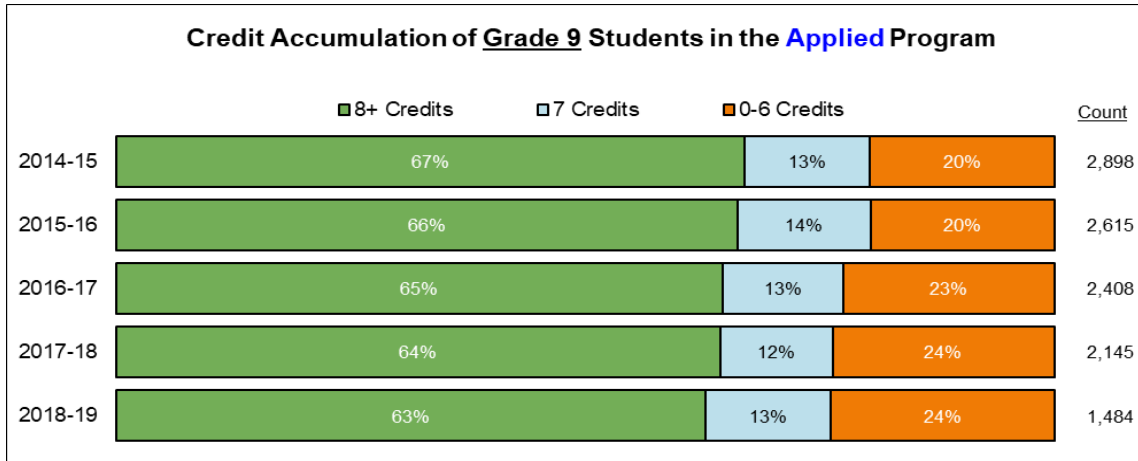


Figures 5 – 7 show as students increasingly enrol in Academic programs in Grades 9 and 10 these shifts are significantly and positively affecting the most historically underserved students. However, the data also show that students who identify as having special education needs, Black, Middle Eastern, English Language Learners and families from low socio-economic background are still over represented in the Applied program albeit there are many fewer students with these social identities enrolled in those courses. It is evident that a sustained focus must be placed on determining additional strategies that will yield the success for these students in the way it has for others who have transitioned to the Academic program.

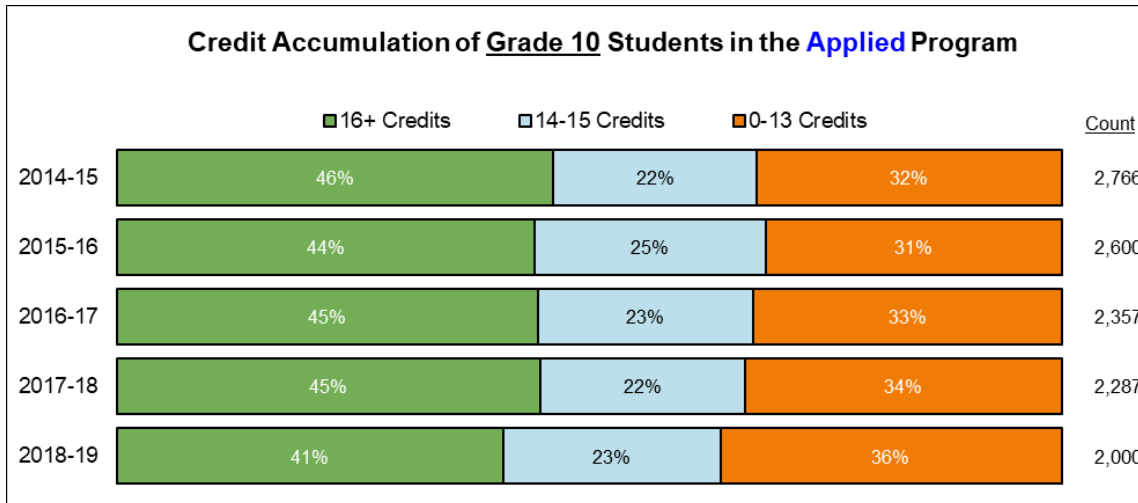
*Credit Accumulation*

The significant shifts in enrolment from Applied programs to Academic programs may be a factor in the slight variations in credit accumulation within both programs, over time, as noted in the charts below.

**Figure 8**



**Figure 9**



The number of students studying at the Academic level has increased substantially and credit accumulation has dropped marginally, between 2% to 4%, over the past three years. TDSB’s commitment to challenging streaming begins in the early years. The goal of Academic Pathways will be fully realized when cohorts of students who have benefitted from a focus on early literacy and numeracy interventions, for example, enter Academic programs in Grade 9 and 10. Data shown in this report are initial indicators of a complicated change so the correlation between achievement and changes in population are unknown. As a system, it is important that we understand the factors influencing the fluctuation and provide the necessary support for students to learn the required content and successfully earn 8 and 16 credits.



### *Challenges to Implementation*

While there has been progress in increasing the number of students enrolled in Academic courses, there are challenges that must be addressed to achieve the goals associated with Academic Pathways. They are as follows:

1. Fixed Mindsets that Create Barriers

Increased numbers of students studying in academic courses shows that mindsets are changing. However, it is still important to acknowledge that there are explicit and implicit biases in schools and society that limit a students' access to a range of post-secondary options. Deficit thinking or biased perceptions of ability must be identified, challenged and changed.

2. Staffing Challenges

As class sizes increase and more students select academic courses it will become more challenging for every secondary school to ensure that LDCC and Applied courses are available for those students who request them. This will require thoughtful planning at the system level and effective local timetabling.

3. Ensuring Effective Supports for All Learners

All students deserve to experience a rigorous and differentiated curriculum that promotes their engagement, well-being and achievement. Additional professional learning opportunities must be offered to assist teachers in refining their practice accordingly.

4. Narrowing the Achievement Gap Prior to Grade 9

TDSB's commitment to de-streaming begins in the early years. Continued focus must be placed on using evidence-based teaching approaches that accelerate and narrow gaps in learning so that transition from the elementary grades to Academic programming in 9 and 10 is smooth and successful. It is equally important for staff to stay focused on meeting the needs of students who are moving from Home School Programs (HSP) to regular classrooms.

### *Summary*

The Pathway data tell an encouraging and positive story of a trend in students moving from the Applied programs to the Academic programs. This movement is currently occurring at a very rapid rate in which students in the Applied program have decreased by 50%. This represents a decrease of around 1400 students. While the proportions of students coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds are roughly the same in

Academic programs over the past five years, significant shifts have occurred in the numbers of students coming from historically underserved groups within the Academic programs. In monitoring our previous graduates as they move to post-secondary experiences, it is proven that this movement of students towards Academic programs represents an increase in potential life chances and economic opportunity that is central to the core purpose of public education in the TDSB.

In 2016, only 1 in every 10 students that participated in the Applied programs at the TDSB entered university while 68% of students coming from the Academic programs in the same graduating class. It is clear that streaming students into specific pathways in Grade 9 limits post-secondary options, at age 14 and 15, which is too early for a life changing decision to be made. We remain committed to ensuring that students are not limited in their choices beyond high school, based on the courses selected in Grade 9 and 10. The outcome of Academic Pathways represents an important step toward interrupting structures that limit academic success and future opportunities.

### **Actions and Timelines**

#### Actions for the 2019-2020 School Year

- Monitor the impact of strategies used to retain and support the success of students (especially those who have been underserved) in the Grade 10 Academic program;
- Determine and implement new strategies to open the access to Academic programs for those groups of students who are over represented in Applied programs;
- Study and remove the barriers causing retention of specific groups of students in non-Academic programs;
- Ensure professional learning integrates equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression and interrogation of the barriers to access for under-represented groups of students studying within Academic programs;
- Continue the capacity building of teachers to serve the needs of students moving from HSP to regular classroom placements and challenge ability biases;
- Continue to provide supports, at the school level, to accelerate and narrow the gaps in learning among students in Grades 4 to 8 who are multiple years below grade level and research the effectiveness of these approaches;
- Effectively monitor the implementation of Academic Pathways at the school, Learning Network, Learning Centre and system levels (e.g., retention rates, credit accumulation, success rates in Academic programs); and

## Resource Implications

**Due to the budget reductions Professional Learning funds have been removed from each central department's budget across the system. Schools will use their school budgets and other grants such as Fundamental Math Strategy, Student Success, Urban Priority High Schools to fund professional learning among staff.**

## Communications Considerations

- Develop communication tools to inform students and families about the importance of Academic Pathways starting in Kindergarten)

## Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

- Multi-Year Strategic Plan – Action Plans

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Presentation of Academic Pathways Report

#### Citations

Brown, R.S. & Tam, G. (2017). Grade 9 cohort post-secondary pathways, 2011-16. Fact sheet 3, November 2017. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board

Brown, R., Davies, S., & Chakraborty, N. (2019). *The University of Toronto-Toronto District School Board (U of T-TDSB) cohort study: An introduction* [Fact Sheet]. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board.

To, J., Lloyd, E., Bacchus, N., & Gaymes San Vicente, A. (2017). Restructured pathways: Addressing streaming from grades 1 to 12 in the Toronto District School Board. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board.

OECD, (2018) A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility Overview of Main Findings. OECD, June 2018, Paris, France.

Simon, F., Malgorzata, K., and Beatriz, P. (2007) Education and Training Policy No More Failures Ten Steps to Equity in Education, OECD, Paris, France.

#### From

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# Academic Pathways Multi-Year Strategic Plan – Action Plan Implementation Report (18-19)

Planning and School Services Committee  
October 3, 2019  
10-19-3728





**Don't tell me the sky's the limit when there  
are footprints on the moon.**

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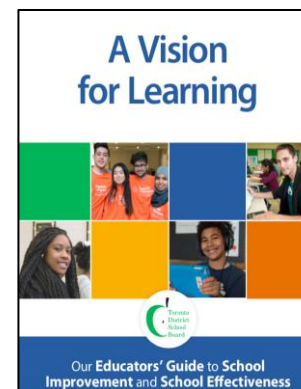
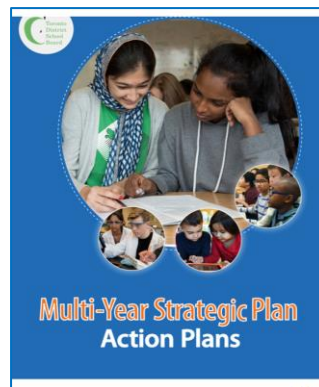
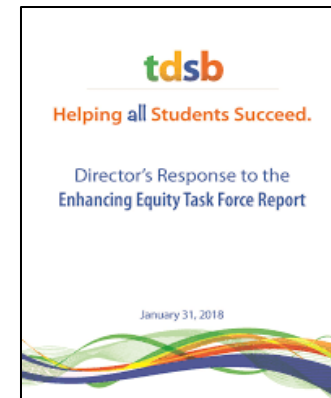
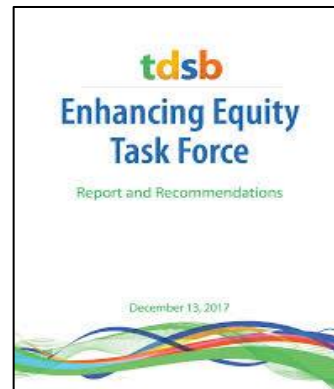
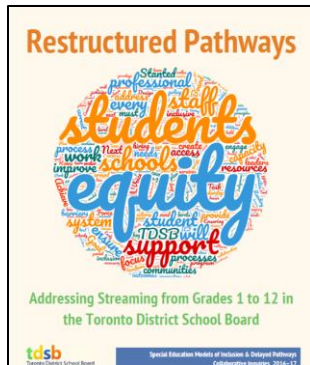
**Paul Brandt**



# The Purpose of this report is to:

- Provide the context for Academic Pathways in TDSB.
- Explain the highlights of the data and ongoing actions.
  - Areas of Improvement
  - Equity of Access
  - Actions

# Evolution of Academic Pathways in TDSB



# Why focus on Academic Pathways?

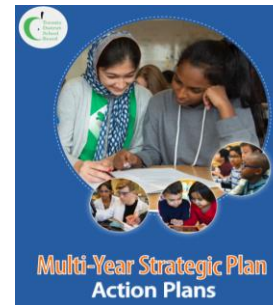
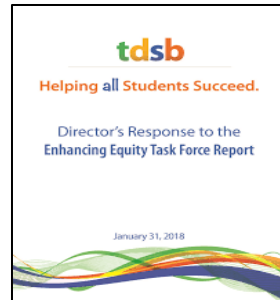
## Students who enter Academic programs:

- Are likely to experience more positive outcomes than those in an Applied Program,
  - Attain higher levels of achievement in courses beyond Grade 10, and
  - Have access to a broader range of post-secondary options (e.g., college, university, apprenticeship).
- 
- Success in a Grade 9 Academic program is an important predictor of post-secondary graduation (Brown, Davies, and Chakraborty, 2018).



# Transforming Student Learning By Challenging Streaming

- Early Years
- Inclusion
- Reducing suspensions & expulsions
- Academic Pathways





# TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan

## Academic Pathways

By September 2021, our goal is for the majority of Grade 9 and 10 students to be successful in all academic level compulsory courses where there is an Applied, Academic or Locally Developed Program of Study (Program)

***The Outcome:*** An increase in the percentage of students applying to post-secondary programs and experiencing success.



# Addressing Systemic Barriers to Student Achievement



“For years, we have collected student data, which indicates high levels of achievement and engagement in many areas and for many students. However, this data also reveals persistent gaps in achievement and well-being for some students despite dedicated efforts to address them. These gaps are strongly connected to demographic factors such as family income, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability, among others. We have also acknowledged that our bias has unintentionally created barriers for many of our most underserved students.”

*TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan, Pg. 1*



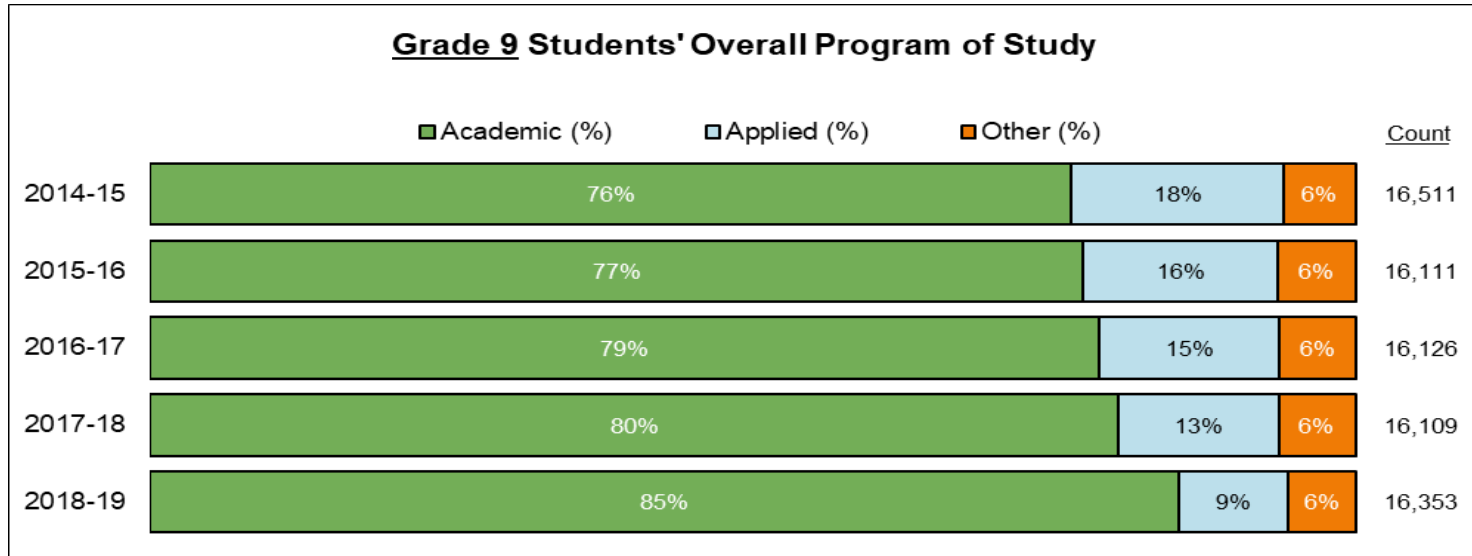
# Three Year Academic Pathway Trend Data:

**TDSB is making significant progress in providing Academic opportunities to more students across the system.**

- 6%  in enrolment in Grade 9 Academic programs
- 3%  in enrolment in Grade 10 Academic programs
- The number of students enrolled in the Applied pathway decreased by almost half in grade 9
- The number of students enrolled in the Applied pathway decreased by a third in grade 10



# Increases in Student Participation in the Grade 9 Academic Program

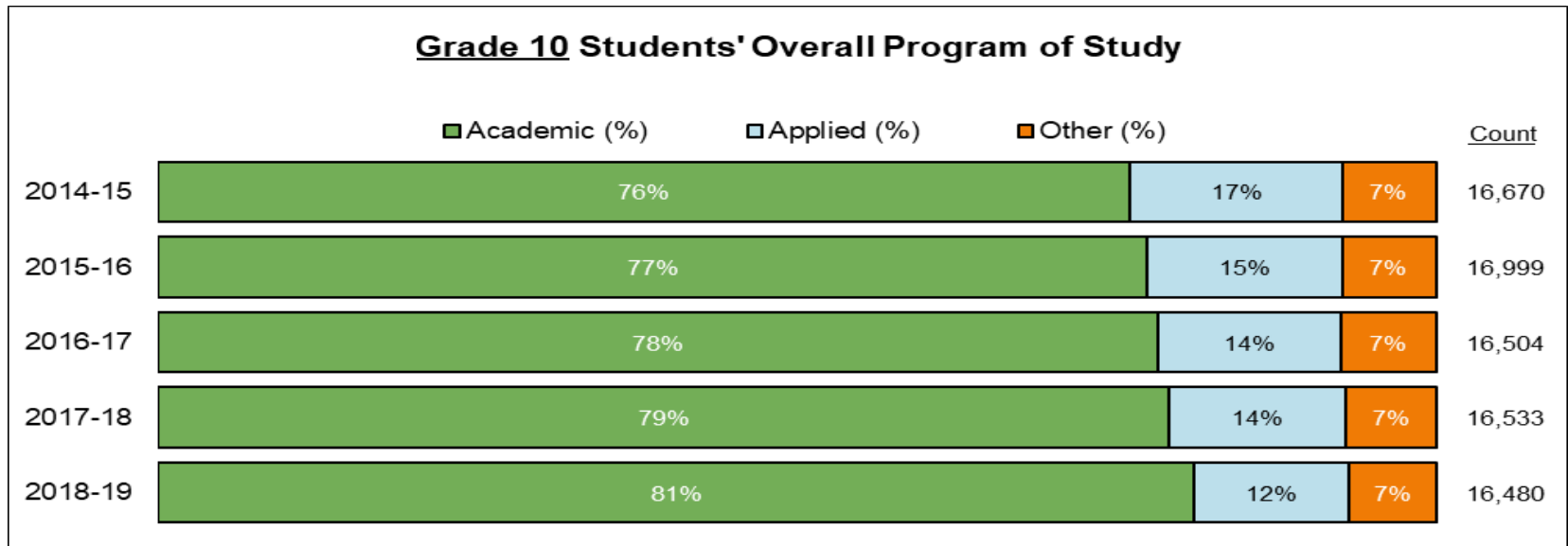


9% increase in Academic Programs since 2014-2015 school year





# Increases in Student Participation in the Grade 10 Academic Program



5% increase in Academic Programs since 2014-2015 school year

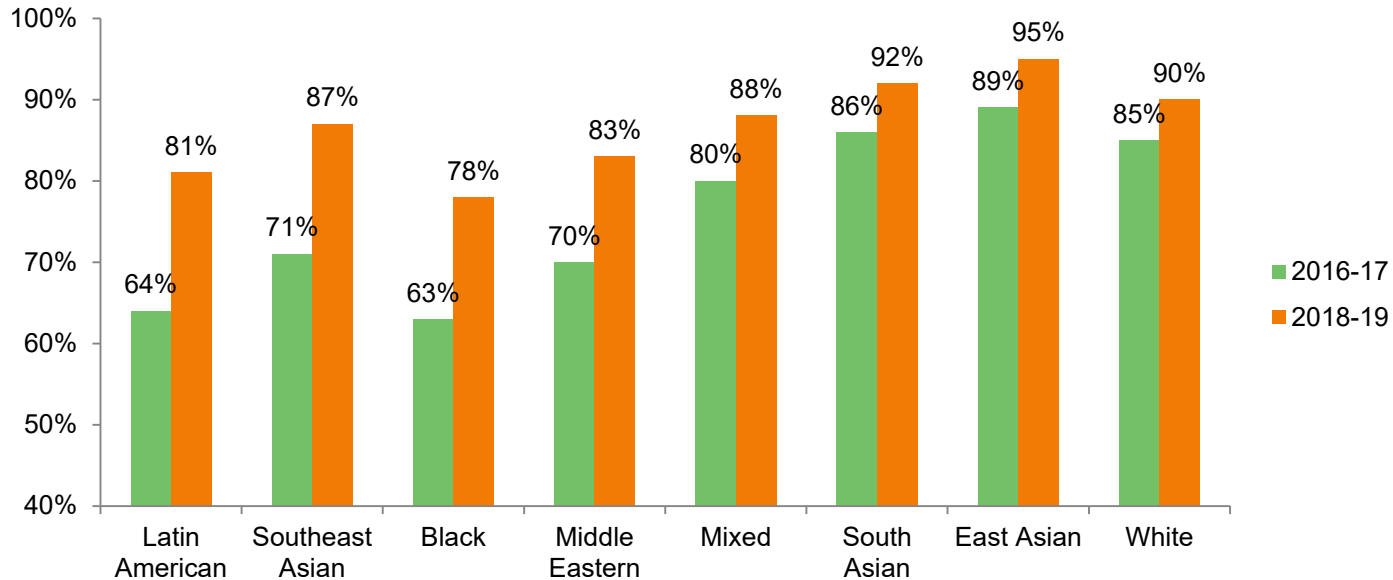


# Equity of Access



# 3 Year Increase in Grade 9 Student Enrolment in Academic Programs by Identity

Figure 3

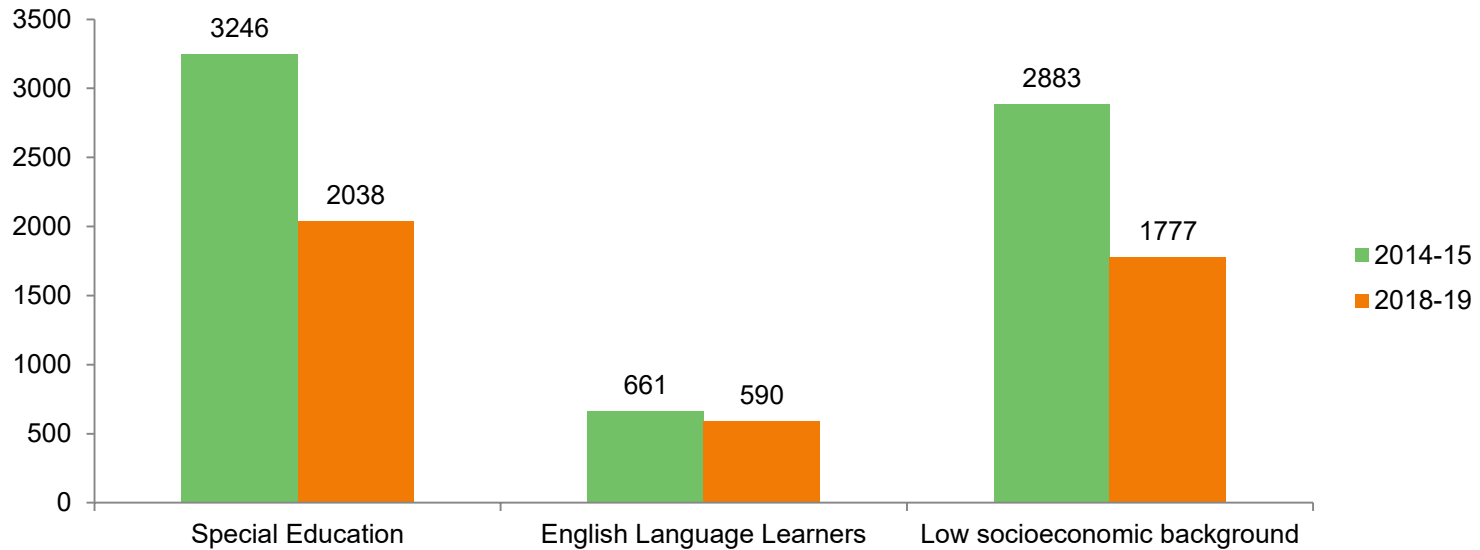


Students who identify as Black, Latin American and Middle Eastern are moving to Academic programs at the fastest rate. All students have benefitted.



# Reduction in Numbers of Students in the Applied Program of Study

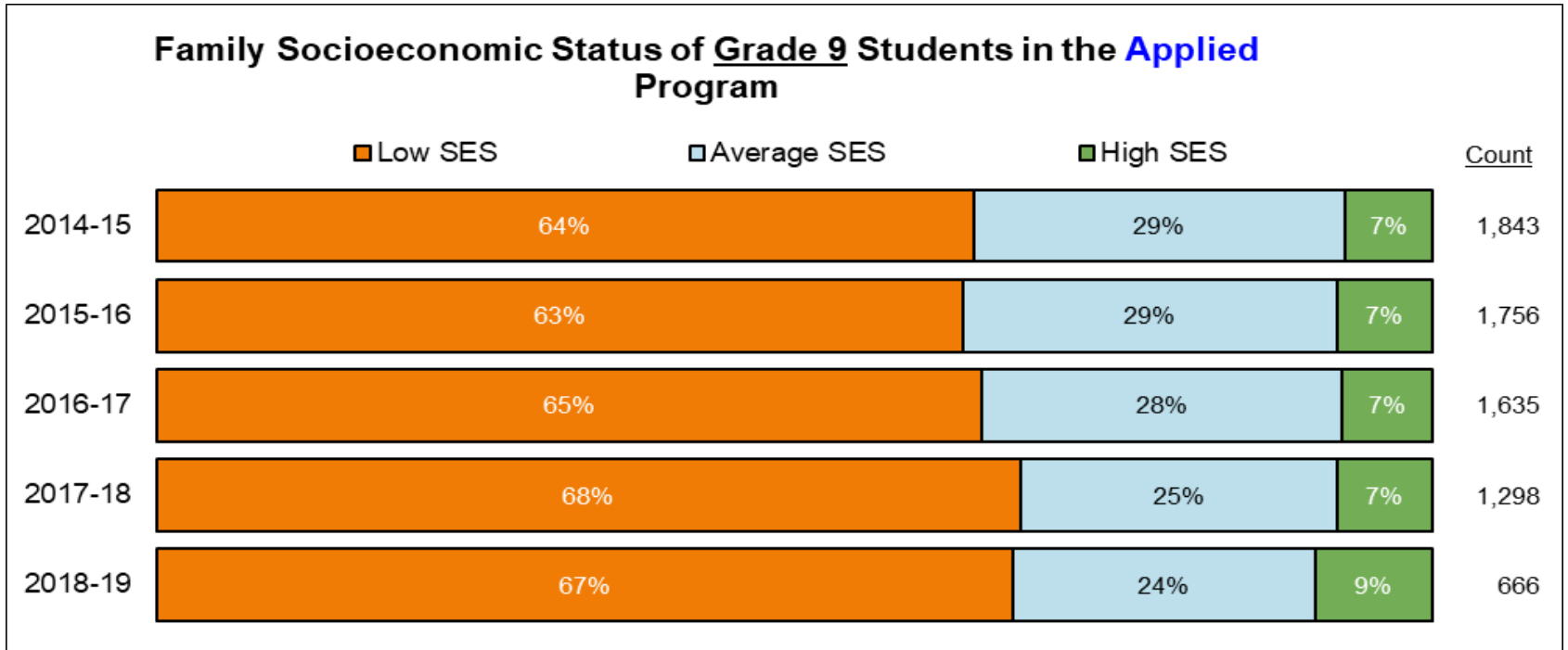
Figure 4



There have been notable decreases in enrolment of students with special education needs and students from families with the lowest socioeconomic background in Applied programs.



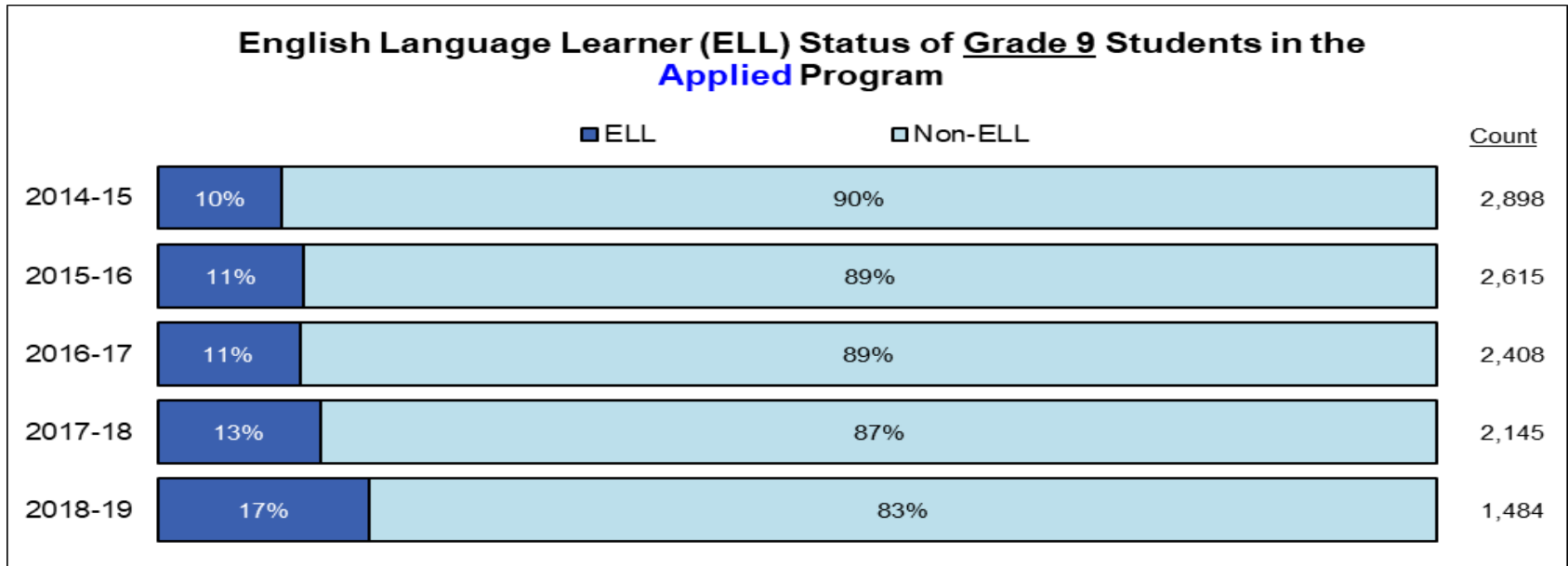
Figure 5



The actual number of students in Applied Programs is decreasing while there has been an slight increase in the overall percentage of students from families with a lower socioeconomic background in Grade 9.



Figure 6



ELLs are over-represented by percentage in Applied programs. The percentage of students who are ELLs in Applied programs has increased by 7% in Grade 9.

# Summary – Equity of Access

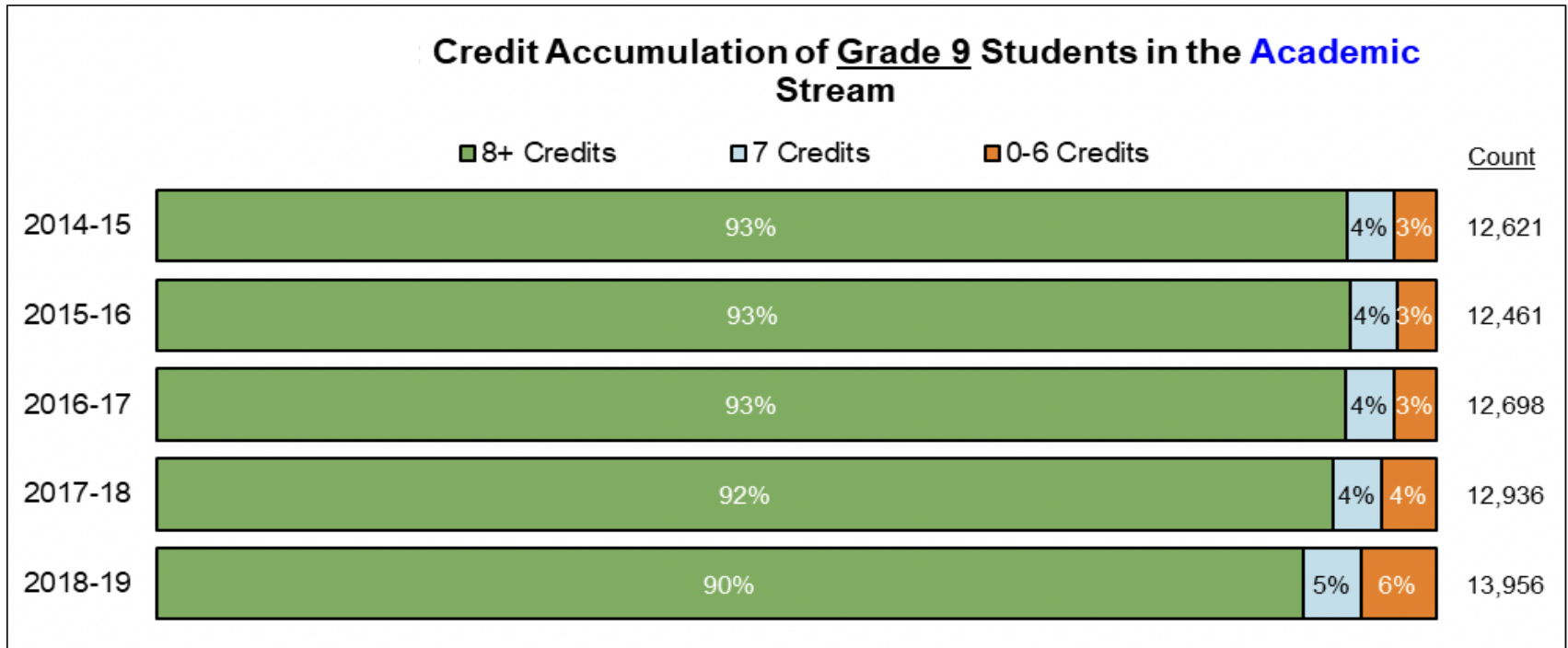
Academic Pathways are significantly and positively affecting the most historically underserved students.

We must develop new strategies to interrupt the over-representation of students with specific social identities enrolled in Applied programs albeit in smaller numbers.

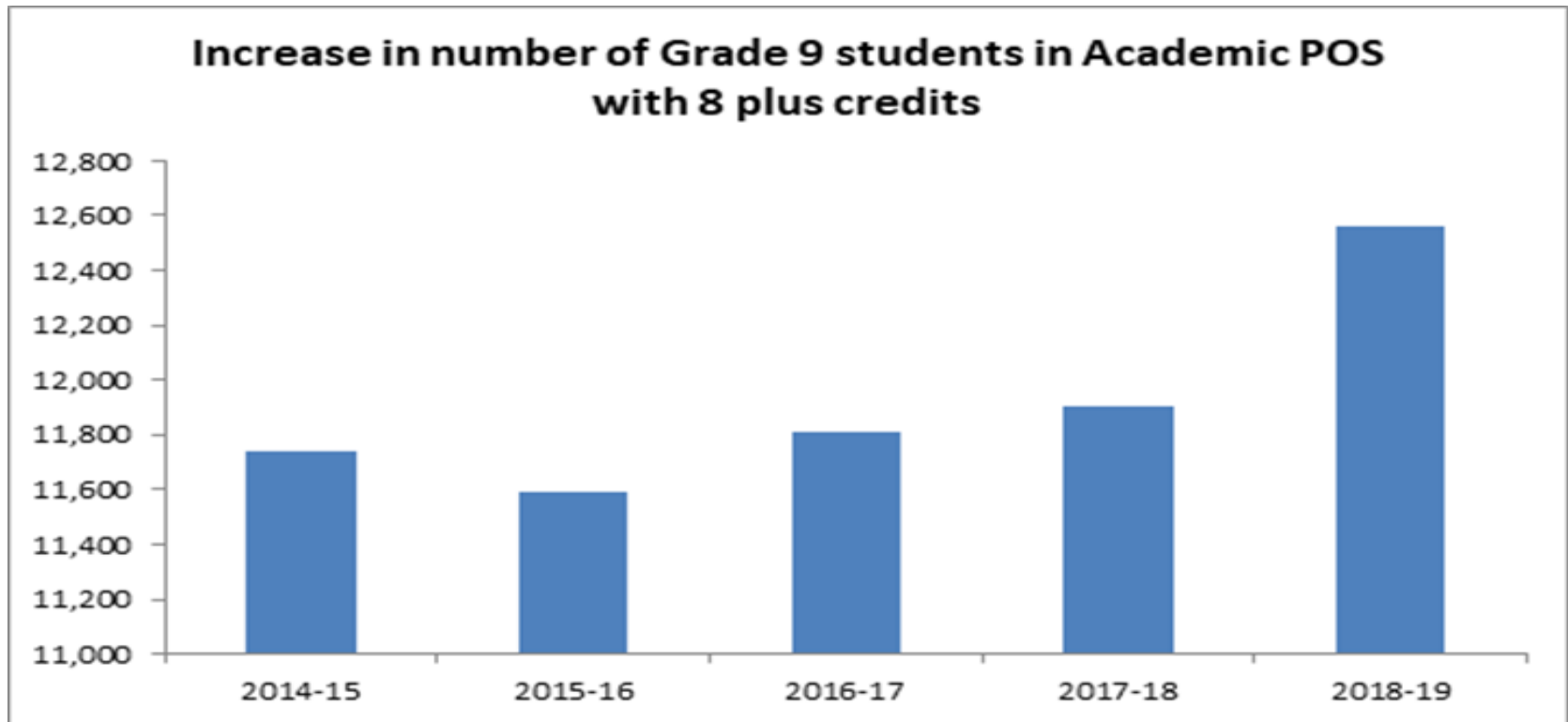




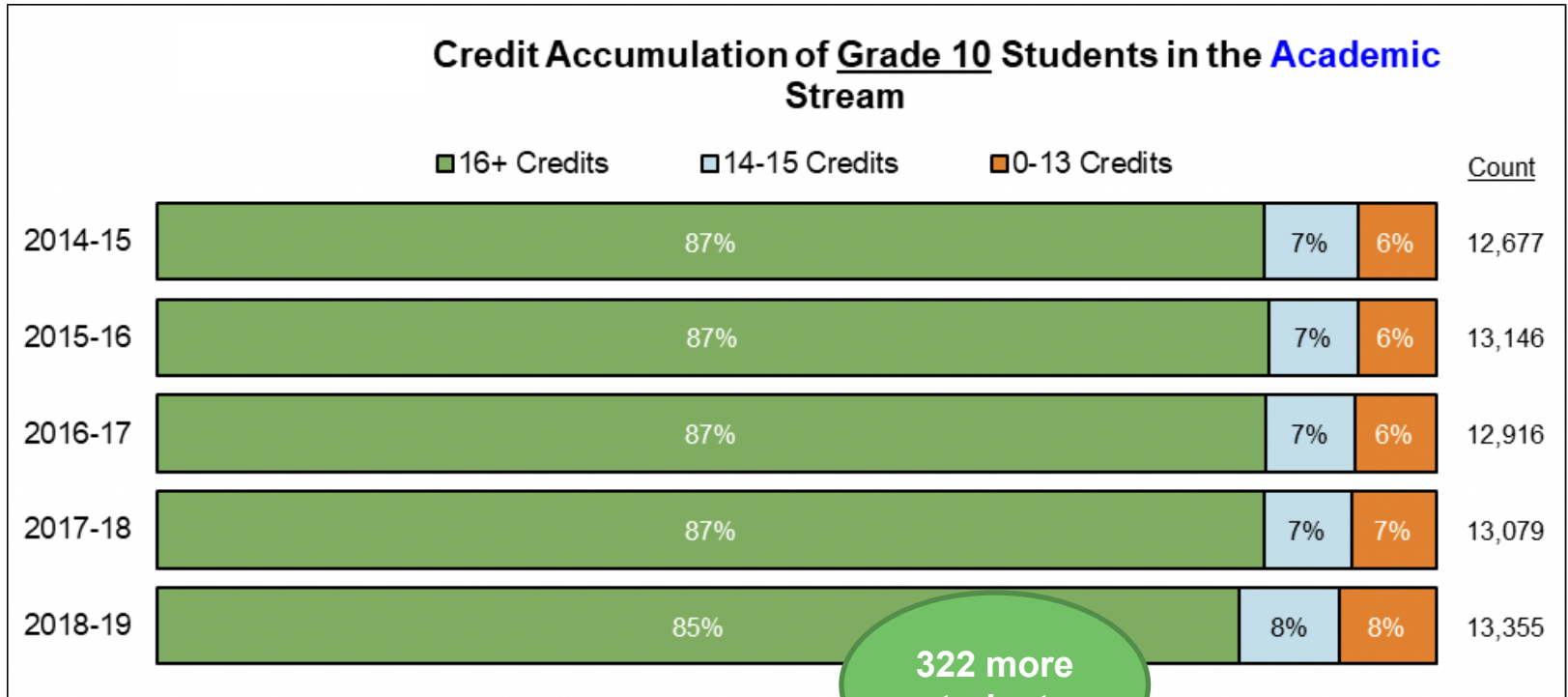
# Credit Accumulation Grade 9s



# 5 Yr Trend Data Credit Accumulation Grade 9s

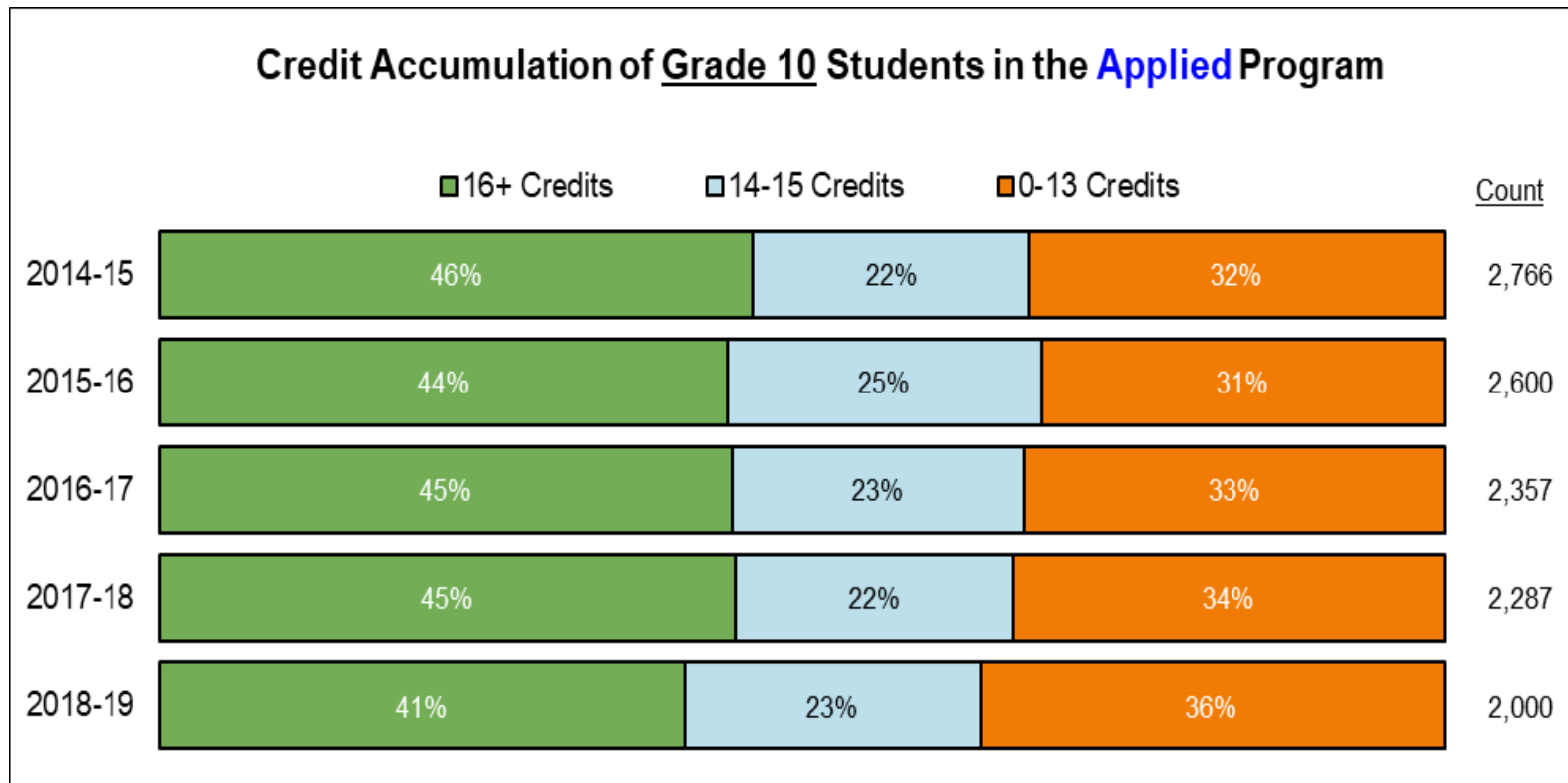


# Credit Accumulation Grade 10s



# Credit Accumulation Grade 10s

Figure 9







# Credit Accumulation

- There are more students in Grade 9 and 10 obtaining Academic credits
- Will continue to work with teachers to ensure success for all students:
  - Better support teachers in ensuring there are effective supports for all learners
  - Continue to implement strategies to close gaps and accelerate learning prior to Grade 9.



# Challenges to Implementation

- Fixed mindsets
- Staffing challenges
- Ensuring effective supports for all learners
- Close gaps in learning prior to Grade 9



# OVERALL RESULTS

The Pathway data tell an encouraging and positive story of a trend in students moving from the Applied to Academic programs.

This movement is currently occurring at a very rapid rate. The number of students in the Applied program has decreased by 50%. This represents a decrease of around 1400 students.

Greater enrolment and success in Academic programs represents an investment in the future life chances and economic opportunity that is central to the core purpose of public education in the TDSB.



# Categories of Actions Moving Forward

- Implement precise strategies for monitoring
- Strategically offer professional learning
- Continue to examine and remove barriers to success in Academic programs
- Effectively use resources

THANK YOU



