

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Mature Students

Consultants' Report to CESBA on Phase 2 Training Sessions

May 31, 2004

Background

In July 2003, three consultants, Audrey Amo, Brenda Protheroe and Patricia Shaughnessy were contracted by CESBA to develop materials and deliver training sessions on Program / Policy Memorandum No. 132 in seven locations across the province. These training sessions took place in the Fall of 2003 and were attended primarily by Continuing and Adult Education principals, counsellors and coordinators. One of the needs identified by the participants in the sessions was for more training on the contents and implementation of PM 132, to reach a wider range of educators involved in the implementation of this legislation.

In April and May, 2004, as a result of funding from the Ministry of Education and the extension of the contract between CESBA and the consultants listed above, five more sessions were offered, in Ingersoll, Kingston, Niagara Falls, Toronto and Sudbury.

The Participants in Phase 2

Over 100 adult educators attended the five sessions. The participants included teachers, counsellors, department heads / site supervisors / program leaders, consultants / coordinators / instructional leaders and superintendents from 35 boards of education. In addition, there were representatives from approximately 10 private schools and other educational service providers. There were representatives from the Ministry of Education regional offices at four of the sessions.

The participants indicated that the boards are at different stages in the implementation of PPM 132. Several boards have made great strides in the implementation process, having well articulated policies and procedures in place, and in some cases, a variety of assessments prepared (sometimes in conjunction with other boards) for the Grade 9 and 10 Individual Assessment Process and for the Grade 11 and 12 Challenge Process. Other boards are clearly in the beginning stages of developing policies and procedures.

Issues Raised by the Participants

The issues raised in the Phase 2 sessions were very similar to those raised in the previous sessions. They included concerns about:

- the impact of PPM 132 on immigrant students – the fear is that the PLAR for Mature Students represents an unreasonable barrier for the most disadvantaged of our mature students, especially for those who do not have transcripts showing the first two years of secondary school, those who do not speak English and will not be able to acquire or demonstrate knowledge in the four subjects required for the granting of up to 16 grade 9 and 10 equivalent credits – this concern arose most dramatically in the Toronto session
- consistency / fairness across the province in application / implementation of PLAR policies
- funding provisions – small boards are especially concerned because their ability to congregate mature students for aspects of PLAR implementation is limited
- the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test diploma requirement – the fact that it is only administered once per school year is viewed as a barrier to the “fast-tracking” of mature students who are able to meet the rest of the diploma requirements well before the next administration of the OSSLT
- student access to the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course – the fact that students must have been eligible to take the OSSLT twice and been unsuccessful once is viewed as problematic for mature students, as are the logistics and costs involved offering the course, particularly in small boards

Needs Identified by the Participants

Participants were asked in a survey to identify what they need in order to facilitate the implementation of PPM 132. The following needs were mentioned consistently:

- More assessment instruments to be developed, for both the 9/10 and 11/12 processes / new challenge assessments to be posted on a Web site for everyone to access / the Ministry to begin to develop assessment item banks for PLAR for Mature Students processes
- Money and time
- Human resources, especially to support the involvement of subject teachers in all three PLAR processes
- An orientation video to introduce PLAR requirements to mature students and other interested parties
- More workshops – too much information to absorb in one workshop / a second session after boards have worked with PLAR for several months – to focus on implementation experiences and issues / follow up with boards once processes are well in place
- Ideas for addressing needs of private schools
- Ideas for addressing needs of night schools
- Shared resources for reviewing transcripts
- Work experience links to curriculum expectations – a document to facilitate decision making and promote consistency

- Information on course expectations from other countries and provinces
- Sharing of best practices / successful implementation in other boards
- Raising the level of awareness of employers / unions / social agencies in the community of the new PLAR for Mature Students requirements – employers and social agencies are requiring people to earn secondary school diplomas within timelines that are now not possible – this serves as a disincentive for the students who are faced with impossible demands

Strategies Suggested to Address Issues and Needs

Many boards, schools and individuals have engaged in creative thinking to mitigate some of the concerns and to find specific benefits in the new requirements for some groups of students. Their ideas include:

- In many boards, the various processes are being administered centrally so as to produce some economy of scale
- Several consortia of boards are continuing or have begun to work together to develop assessment instruments for both the 9/10 and 11/12 processes
- Some smaller boards are working together to share resources
- One principal is viewing the new PLAR requirements as positive and motivational for “dropouts” with only a small number of grade 9 and 10 credits who qualify as mature students and is planning to “invite” them back to school to earn their diplomas

Conclusion

Participants were, once again, grateful to CESBA and the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to come together to learn the details of PPM 132 and the new requirements for PLAR for Mature Students, to ask questions, raise their issues, offer their suggestions and share their implementation experiences with others. They demonstrated their commitment, at times their passionate commitment, to their students, to providing them with fair and consistent opportunities to earn a secondary school diploma and to opening up post-secondary educational and work experiences for them that would otherwise be inaccessible.

The consultants wish to acknowledge their gratitude to Dave Neumann, the Executive Director of CESBA, for his presence and support at all of the sessions, to the representatives from the regional offices of the Ministry of Education for their assistance and to Betty Stephan of CESBA for taking care of many of the administrative details.

Respectfully submitted,

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