

Experiential Learning **REFERENCE GUIDE**

Connecting students to real-world
experiences



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Ontario 

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REFERENCE GUIDE

Welcome to your reference guide on experiential learning for secondary school students in Ontario.

This guide is designed to help strengthen the connection between employers and educators, creating opportunities that empower students to explore pathways into the skilled trades.

In this guide, you'll discover how students can access programs like co-op placements, how employers can actively support and mentor emerging talent with practical ways to engage with your local school community.

Together, we can inspire the next generation of skilled trades professionals and build a brighter future for Ontario's workforce.



WHAT IS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING?

Experiential learning is hands-on, in-person, or virtual learning that connects students to real-world experiences beyond the classroom. It encourages students to:

- **Participate** in meaningful, real-world activities
- **Reflect** on their experiences to gain insights
- **Apply** what they've learned to make informed decisions and take action

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE SKILLED TRADES

Experiential learning is essential for preparing students to succeed in the skilled trades. By engaging in hands-on, real-world experiences, students gain practical skills, build confidence, and develop a deeper understanding of trade-specific tools, techniques, and work environments.

This approach bridges the gap between classroom theory and workplace application, helping students make informed career decisions and fostering a sense of purpose. It also connects students with industry professionals who provide mentorship and guidance, creating pathways to meaningful careers in high-demand fields.

For the skilled trades, experiential learning ensures that the workforce of tomorrow is equipped with not only technical expertise but also critical problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability skills needed to thrive in an evolving industry.



TYPES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING – SHORT TERM

Short-term opportunities provide employers a valuable platform to inspire, mentor, and connect with the next generation of skilled trades professionals while supporting local education initiatives.

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	DURATION	FACILITATOR/ ORGANIZER
Career Fairs	Showcase your business and discuss career opportunities within your organization or industry. These events often attract students, parents, and educators, and can serve as a platform for recruitment.	Typically held during the day and/or evening	Local secondary school or Board Office
Career Talks	Share insights about your occupation or skilled trade in a virtual or in-person setting. Students can ask questions and learn about career pathways and opportunities.	Typically 30 minutes to one hour or longer.	Local secondary school or Board Office
Job Shadowing	Allow students to observe your work environment and gain firsthand insight into a specific role or occupation.	Ranges from a few hours to a full day.	Local secondary school or Board Office
Workplace Tours	Host students at your workplace (in-person or virtually) to introduce them to careers within your organization or sector and provide a glimpse of on-site work.	Ranges from a few hours to a full day.	Local secondary school or Board Office

TYPES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING – LONG TERM

Secondary school experiential learning programs help students explore the skilled trades.

Learn more about these programs and how they can prepare secondary school students for [careers in the skilled trades](#) or starting an apprenticeship.

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	TIME FRAME	WHO TO CONTACT
Cooperative Education (Co-op)	Cooperative Education (Co-op) courses allow high school students in Grades 11 and 12 to earn credits by completing a work placement in the community along with classroom learning. All Ontario school boards with high schools offer co-op courses.	Half or full day, up to five months during the school year.	School Co-op teachers / Co-op Department Head
Dual Credit	Dual credit programs allow students in high school to take college courses or apprenticeship training that count towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma and a postsecondary certificate, diploma, degree or Certificate of Apprenticeship. Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earn high school credits while studying at a publicly funded college or taking apprenticeship training • Gain experience to transition to postsecondary education, including apprenticeship • Get a head start on learning and training for their future careers 	Varies and aligns with individual college programs.	Local Secondary School or Board Office
Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)	The Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) allows students to explore and work in apprenticeships through cooperative education (co-op) starting in the summer before Grade 11. Students can become registered apprentices and work towards becoming certified in a skilled trade while completing their high school diploma. Click here for frequently asked questions about OYAP	Half or full day, up to five months during the school year; full-day placements available in summer.	OYAP Board Lead / Recruiter

TYPES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING – LONG TERM

CONTINUED

Secondary school experiential learning programs help students explore the skilled trades and include:

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	TIME FRAME	WHO TO CONTACT
OYAP – Accelerated	Accelerated OYAP is an intensive program that combines co-op and the opportunity for students to attend a Level 1 Apprenticeship program at an approved Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) training centre facility.	Full day, up to five months during the school year or summer.	OYAP Board Lead / Recruiter
OYAP – Focused Apprenticeship Skills Training (FAST)	The FAST stream of OYAP is for students who want to complete the maximum amount of apprenticeship training before they graduate high school. Students who complete OYAP-FAST get a seal on their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) that shows their enhanced skilled trades learning when they graduate.	Full-day extended to the entire school year and/or summer.	OYAP Board Lead / Recruiter
Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)	The Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) is an innovative program that allows high school students in Grades 11 and 12 to focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests while earning their Ontario Secondary School Diploma. It includes a bundle of credits over two years focused on a specific sector and at least two cooperative education credits. Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concentrate their learning around a particular sector • gain important skills on the job with actual employers, at skills training centres and school • earn industry certifications 	Half or full day, offered during the school year or summer.	Local Secondary School or Board Office
Summer Co-op	Full-day workplace placements for students in Grades 11 and 12 during the summer, offered onsite, virtually, or in hybrid formats.	Full day, from July to early August.	OYAP Board Lead / Recruiter

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN SUPPORT SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS INTERESTED IN PURSUING SKILLED TRADES

Local employers are encouraged to offer career talks, industry tours, a half-day or a full-day OYAP or co-op experiential learning opportunity for a secondary school student(s) during the school year or during the summer.

Who to Contact?

Contact your local school board or a secondary school(s) in your area to offer experiential learning opportunities.

- Contact a local district school board central office in your region – click [here](#).
- Find a local secondary school by board name, postal code or municipality – click [here](#).

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING SKILLED TRADES PATHWAYS

By fostering collaboration between employers, educators, and students, we can build stronger, more connected communities and ensure a bright future for skilled trades in Ontario. We hope this resource inspires you to take the next step in supporting students on their journey to rewarding careers.

About HIEC



HIEC is a not-for-profit social enterprise focused on partnership, mentorship, and workforce development in Ontario. With 35 years of experience as an active community-focused organization, HIEC enjoys a reputation for being a strong partner with industry, education, and government, maximizing opportunities to build community capacity.



Over the last 25 years, ApprenticeSearch.com has established itself as a leader in supporting apprentices and employers in the skilled trades. ApprenticeSearch.com has been identified as a critical part of Canada's skilled trades labour market as its largest database of job opportunities in the skilled trades.

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About Skills Ontario



Skills Ontario is committed to preparing Ontario's youth for the highly-skilled economy of tomorrow. They partner with school boards, colleges, small business, large companies, labour groups, and governments to provide opportunities for youth to explore and develop skills for successful careers in the skilled trades and technologies. With 35 years of experience, Skills Ontario is a province-wide organization with a grassroots connection into the many communities we serve. Skills Ontario programs represent a long-term investment in the lives of all Ontarians.

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