



Initiatives for International Education in the National Capital Region

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Introduction

As our District is located in the heart of the National Capital Region, I am excited to share an overview of our efforts and energies in the field of international education, reflecting proudly upon past accomplishments and planning boldly through inspirational initiatives for the future.

In its insightful, inspirational position paper on international education released by Global Affairs Canada, *'Building on Success: International Education Strategy, 2019-2024'*, the Government of Canada has created a vision that aims to diversify the education sector, boost Canada's capacity for creativity and innovation, promote global connections, and foster a vibrant economy, nation-wide. The strategy is designed to support efforts by provinces and/or territories, as well as its interest holders, in the enhancement of a successful and sustainable system for public education.



The evolution of the Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy (2012) that highlighted initiatives for international education as essential to the country's future prosperity - particularly in the areas of innovation, trade, human capital development, and the labour market - has led to the Government of Canada's current strategy (2019) in striving to draw students from across the globe to school communities within Canada where they can enrol in a diverse array of programs and/or services at all levels of education, from pre-kindergarten to post-secondary. In the same spirit, the federal government seeks through its current strategy to assist a growing number of Canadian students experience their studies abroad, and find work upon their return - with a

multitude of global competencies and characteristics, knowledge and skills acquired - in order to drive the nation's economy forward. Further, governmental officials look to aid schools and businesses in the design and export of leading-edge, educational products and/or services to increasingly diverse international markets as part of the strategy in place at this time.

"International education is an essential pillar of Canada's long-term competitiveness. Canadians who study abroad gain exposure to new cultures and ideas, stimulating innovation and developing important cross-cultural competencies. Students from abroad who study in Canada bring those same benefits to our shores. If they choose to immigrate to Canada, they contribute to Canada's economic success. Those who choose to return to their countries become life-long ambassadors for Canada and for Canadian values." ~
The Honourable James Gordon Carr, Minister of International Trade Diversification (2019)

The three prominent objectives of Canada's current strategy for international education include:

- encouragement of Canadian students to gain new knowledge and skills through opportunities for study and work abroad in key global markets, especially Asia;
- diversification of the countries from which international students come to Canada, as well as the fields, levels and locations of their study while here; and,
- augmentation of support for institutions of the education sector to facilitate growth in the export of their products and/or services and explore new opportunities abroad.

Thinking ahead, the Canadian Bureau for International Education (2023) has provided a number of recommendations to Global Affairs Canada through its consultation brief in regard to the development and implementation of a new five-year strategy, including: adopting a comprehensive, whole-of-government and sector-wide approach to international education; strengthening the nation's global brand through an ethical approach; conducting labour market needs and immigration pathway analyses for inbound student mobility; ensuring diversification as an objective of educational efforts; investing in scholarship programming; securing a long-term strategy for outbound student mobility; and, creating a robust approach to the review of data related to internationalization. These recommendations will undoubtedly help the country balance the breadth and depth of both inbound and outbound endeavours, moving forward. Of note, these recommendations also emerge from the recommendations issued through the project of the Canadian Bureau for International Education (2009) that, at the time, aimed to expand post-secondary participation in institutional study abroad programs offered by colleges and universities, nation-wide.

In 2015, the Ministry of Education Ontario released its strategy for international education for Kindergarten to Grade 12. Through [Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education](#), the provincial government promotes opportunities for its students to learn from international peers by exposing them to the diverse cultures, languages and viewpoints of their classmates, as well as the broader school communities in which they live. The strategy focuses on four main goals:

- future-oriented learning for the province's students;
- high-quality programs and services for international students studying in Ontario;
- opportunities for sharing and developing the province's educational expertise; and,
- pathways to post-secondary education, work, and living in Ontario.

In the context of the provincial strategy, internationalization serves as an ongoing process of adaptation in the programs and/or services offered by systems for public education, as well as the teaching and learning environments of their schools. The extraordinary opportunities to enhance schools and systems are provided through the integration of international, intercultural and/or global perspectives, cultures and experiences. In fact, Ontario is the largest beneficiary of foreign students in Canada and hosts almost half of all international students choosing to live and study in the country.

"International education is defined and perceived in many different ways. In the context of Ontario's strategy, it comprises the following five interconnected components: Ontario students expanding their global awareness, knowledge, and perspectives; international students coming to Ontario; educators sharing expertise at home and abroad; internationalization of the curriculum and learning environment; and, overseas delivery of the Ontario curriculum." ~

Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education, Ministry of Education Ontario (2015)

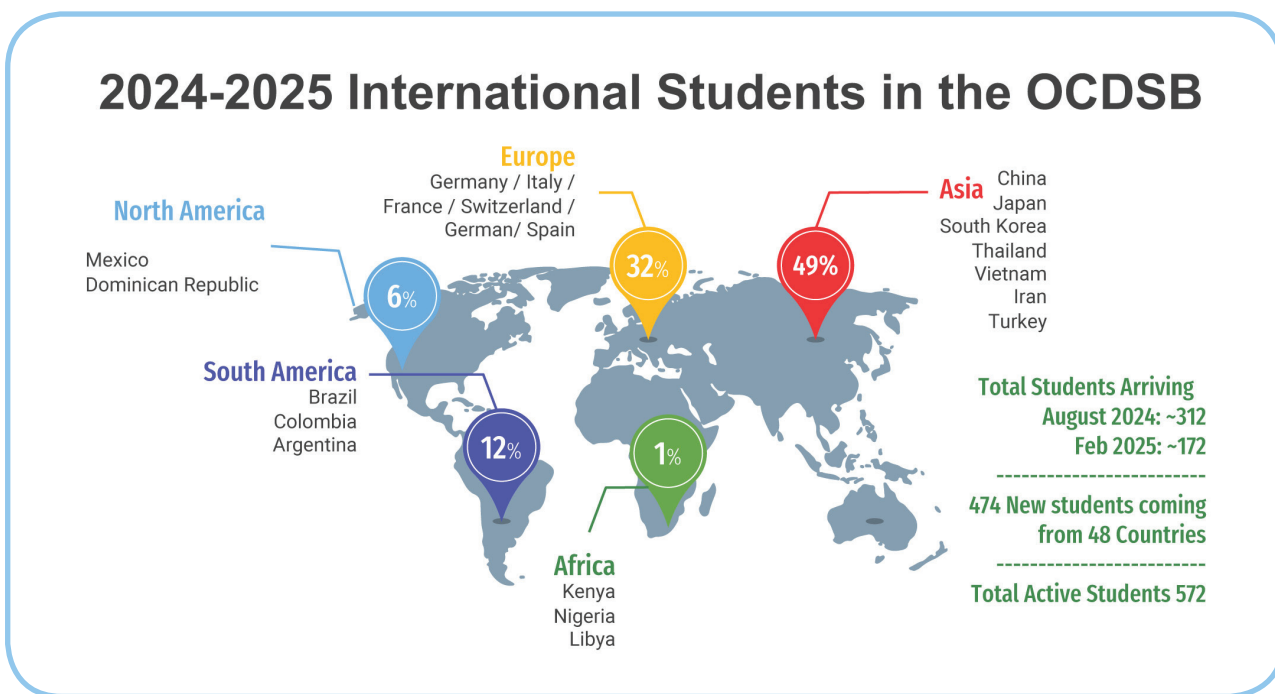
Of importance to share, the established objectives of the provincial strategy for international education are currently under review by the Ministry of Education Ontario, as is the case at a national level through the Government of Canada, as there are both challenges and opportunities with respect to the field of international education in the Canadian context, to be sure.

At the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), initiatives of international education are closely connected to the multi-year strategic plan, as well as the District's aspired outcomes for its students. The pillar related to 'social responsibility' of the OCDSB's [2023-2027 Strategic Plan](#), for example, highlights the development of student competencies through a focus on executive functioning, and social-emotional skills such as empathy, collaboration, communication, and building relationships with others. The District's [Exit Outcomes](#) emphasize a number of characteristics and skills, including 'global awareness' for instance, where students who are globally aware are empathetic

and responsive in their contributions to the local and global community... and where they demonstrate cultural proficiency and act in a respectful, inclusive manner.

In cooperation with the Ottawa-Carleton Education Network (OCENET), the District's international learning partner, the OCDSB is able to achieve its strategic objectives and experiential outcomes. As an independent, not-for-profit corporation governed by a Board of Directors, and a leader in the field of international education since 1999, OCENET strives to enhance the OCDSB's programs and/or services through international partnerships and provide financial assistance in support of the District's international endeavours. The OCENET has admirably created a global network for students and staff to share knowledge, expertise, as well as cultural and linguistic perspectives.

During the 2024-2025 school year, OCENET has welcomed close to 600 international students from 48 countries into 21 secondary sites and 32 elementary sites. Most specifically, the 'OCENET Student Programs' are available for both short-term stays (less than three months, typically) and long-term stays (longer than six months, usually).



Further, through the coordination of OCENET, the District has established a number of 'deep' partnerships with institutions of public education with jurisdictions, world-wide. The depth of the partnerships reflects the desire to exchange students and staff on a regular basis, and to date, includes the following global partners:

- L'académie d'Aix-Marseille, Région académique Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (Marseille / Nice / Aix-en-Provence, France);
- Chengdu Chenghua Municipal Education Bureau (Chengdu, China);
- Jeju School District (Jeju City, South Korea);

- Osaka Gakugei High School and Yamate Gakuin High School (Osaka and Yokohama, Japan); and newly established,
- L'Ufficio Scolastico Regionale per l'Emilia-Romagna (Bologna, Italy).

Through these 'Student Exchange Programs', the OCDSB and OCENET are also working in a dedicated and diligent manner to further expand partnerships into other regions of the countries specified, as well as other jurisdictions such as South America and Africa, over time.

The Network also coordinates a number of 'OCENET Educator Programs' that helps educators across the globe improve instructional practices and leadership skills. Current programs offered include capacity building in areas such as: Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL); Content and Language-Integrated Learning (CLIL); as well as provincially-focused leadership training sessions. Groups of educators from Australia, China, Columbia, Costa Rica, Nigeria, Spain, South Korea and Sweden have taken part this school year. The OCENET continues to explore ways to provide training sessions for international educators both in-person and on-line.

In addition, OCENET offers an '[International Certificate Program](#)' (ICP) where students at the secondary level across the District have the opportunity to foster global citizenship and connections, and learn through cultural exchange opportunities. Through thoughtfully-designed "course bundles", the three components of the ICP include: languages and communication; international coursework; and, international experience and engagement. After successfully completing all three certificate components, students showcase their commitment as a global citizen via a summative portfolio experience as an integral aspect of this innovative offering at the OCDSB. Currently, there are over 750 secondary students enrolled in the program, with a projected graduation cohort of approximately 240 students this school year.



Key Signs of Success for International Education

There are strengths to celebrate and areas for continued growth in regard to initiatives for international education, to my mind, as Chief Education/Executive Officer of the District. With reference to contemporary research on the topic, I am confident that the following three key 'signs of success' demonstrate a healthy, vibrant interaction between our school system and its counterparts abroad that reflects the spirit of the provincial and national strategies described above.

- *Sound Infrastructure for the Global Exchange of Cultures and Ideas*

MacDonald (2024) highlights that Global Affairs Canada has been consulting with interest holders in the education sector for over a year now in advance of the expected renewal of its international education strategy. Key foci of these consultations, she adds, has been related to greater responsiveness to national and regional labour market needs, spreading international students more broadly across the country (as most end up in Ontario and British Columbia at the moment), and protecting the Canadian brand by dealing with problems such as unscrupulous recruiters. One solution that MacDonald (2024) suggests as emerging from the research, for example, is tailoring co-op and internship programs for international students - through special work permits in addition to regular study permits - in order to meet many of the labour market needs described.

Bell, Tarc, Schechter, Racco and Tang (2023) explain that the internationalization of school systems, prior to post-secondary, isn't without its challenges. The authors indicate that international education initiatives are largely run out of internationalization offices that are resourced to focus on student recruitment and administrative support, with oversight of homestay and custodianship being significant complementary components. Bell et al. (2023) state, however, that "on-the ground" educational support for international students in the K-12 sector (deemed as early-study-abroad students in their research) often relies upon school administrators and staff who respond within their existing, and sometimes limited, capacities... while the intercultural dimensions and benefits of internationalization remain largely aspirational in nature.

Trilokekar and Tamtik (2020) add that governmental policies, and the subsequent strategic positioning of school systems, has intensified school recruitment efforts in order to address economic realities such as offsetting declining enrolment in schools, for instance. Trilokekar and El Masri (2019) highlight that these efforts cannot overlook the importance of teacher education in the implementation of equity-related educational policy objectives related to international, intercultural and multilingual sensibilities.

Several sites within the OCDSB have established formal partnerships with schools in other jurisdictions, world-wide. Currently, over two dozen elementary and secondary sites have a formal partnership in place. Many of these partnerships involve classroom connections on-line, while others are collaborative experiences in-person... all of which foster student and staff engagement in the spirit of international education.

The establishment of a reciprocal partnership with OCENET over the past quarter-century has ensured the creation, review and continual refinement of a sound infrastructure for the global exchange of cultures and ideas between the OCDSB's students, staff and school communities, and its counterparts abroad. Since its inception in 1999, OCENET has sought to close the gap between the pragmatic and aspirational aspects of Ontario's internationalization strategy for K-12. The Network's carefully-coordinated recruitment efforts, thoughtful placement in schools across the system in collaboration with the senior staff liaison overseeing the portfolio, along with the close connection to affiliated agencies/organizations such as Canada Homestay International, have ensured that the quality and quantity of placements and programs, services and stays remains optimized for the District. In fact, the Ontario Association of School Districts International (OASDI) has highlighted the partnership between OCDSB and OCENET on a number of occasions as a shining example of the infrastructure required for other districts to consider in their pursuit of internationalization.

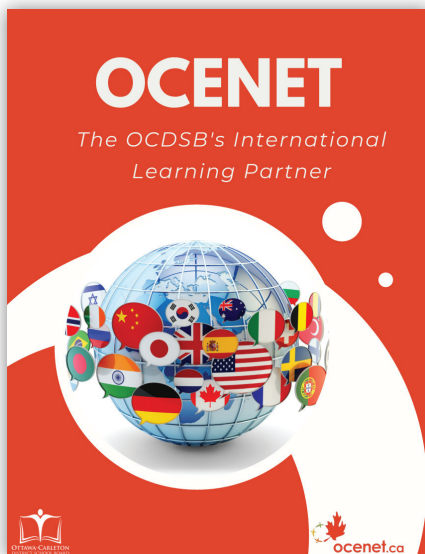
The OCENET also provides a number of awards or bursaries in support of both students and staff in their pursuit of exploring intercultural opportunities. The awards and bursaries currently available, include: International Education Bursary for OCDSB Employees; International Study Abroad Bursary for Students; as well as, Lynch-Getty Global Student Award. These endeavours highlight OCENET's commitment to supporting global engagement, removing barriers for students and staff to access these outstanding opportunities.

- **The Promising Potential of Paradiplomacy**

In an intriguing study of soft power through international relations, Murphy (2024) points out that sub-national actors, such as school boards, may accidentally become 'paradiplomats' at the international level as a by-product of their recruitment efforts,



often executed to address budgetary pressures. Building upon the notion of 'soft power' introduced by Nye (2004) as decentralized, emerging from multiple sources, and taking place largely within the domain of culture - as opposed to 'hard power' that is centralized, coercive in nature, and residing in the hands of national government decision-makers - Murphy makes the case that school boards have significant soft power through student exchanges, K-12. He claims that "soft power resources" have become increasingly important for the successful navigation of world politics (p.99). He emphasizes the long-standing connection between the education sector and soft power, revealing student exchanges as particularly valuable soft power projection strategies because they permit the formation of a lengthy relationship between the student and the host country. In turn, these students - the future leaders of tomorrow - become paradiplomats... unofficial, yet influential diplomats of sorts for their host countries when they return home... having developed an appreciation, awareness and understanding of the culture they experienced abroad.



Interestingly, Murphy (2024) surmises that school boards have, perhaps inadvertently, developed important businesses of building cultural bridges to export understandings of Canadian society. He claims that the opportunity to learn about Canadian culture, referenced as "home culture" by OASDI, is presented as an integral part of the value proposition to potential students.

Trilokekar and El Masri (2020) add that the story of internationalization in the province of Ontario has risen and waned like a swinging pendulum over the past few decades, and ultimately, its relevance is impacted by a series of factors. First and foremost, is the influence of policy actors... people in leadership positions in both government and

educational institutions... with those who have had personal international experiences very committed to the development and implementation of policies and procedures, practices and protocols for internationalization within their current organizations. As such, Canadian students who have studied abroad - as the future leaders of Canadian society - also become home-grown champions, 'paradiplomats' in their own right, as they tend to endorse the intrinsic value of exchanges/experiences related to international education for others here in Canada.

In an interview with Roopa Desai Trilokekar, the Ontario Federation of University Faculty Associations (2024) gleaned insights related to internationalization, nation-wide. In particular, she shares that there is very little policy coordination between the federal government and the provinces when it comes to international education, making the Canadian dynamic unique when compared to other countries. Further, she feels that there is room for growth in our institutions of public education and government with respect to equity, diversity and inclusivity as we have not yet fully contemplated these

important matters from an international perspective, from a decolonial lens, and from the perspective of the different and distinct identities of our international students. She emphasizes that we need to develop a better understanding of this changing population in order to have strong international education policies.

In support of the expansion of student exchanges, the OCDSB is exploring the establishment of credit-generating courses and experiential learning options for secondary students that are part of both short-term and long-term exchanges with all global partners. The intention is to further complement students' credit accumulation while abroad... as an integral aspect of their pathways to success.

The programs and services offered by the OCDSB nurture the promising potential of paradiplomacy in the holistic development of learners and leaders, system-wide. At the secondary level, the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program offered is a wonderful example. In fact, Hayden and McIntosh (2018) reinforce the value proposition for global education in their analyses of the transformative potential of experiential learning through the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. Coupled with the International Certificate Program (ICP), coordinated through OCENET as described above, these two prominent programs provide exemplars of authentic, experiential learning opportunities for students, staff and school communities. At the elementary level, the partnerships established for school sites with schools/classes in other jurisdictions, whether in-person and/or on-line, also ensure genuine, meaningful opportunities for learning about international, intercultural and/or global perspectives during fundamentally formative years. These programs contribute greatly to the creation of champions and development of 'paradiplomats' who will surely serve our country in immeasurable ways as they build their own global awareness and social responsibility through intercultural appreciation and understanding of others.

- ***Sensible Integration of Opportunities to Scale Up Internationalization***

A number of contemporary research articles on the topic of internationalization in the Canadian context, including Elnagar and Young (2021), speak to the shifting dynamic of the two major initiatives that school boards engage in with respect to international education: recruitment of international students; and, establishment of affiliate agreements with schools/jurisdictions overseas. Moreover, Elnagar and Young (2021) argue that the term "internationalization" has come to supplant the term "international education" in many ways as it more accurately reflects both the "ideological and pragmatic interests" of institutions of public education, especially at the post-secondary level (p.82).

In particular, Elnagar and Young (2021) suggest that international education as an academic field now reflects the above two interconnected research interests. First,

an education-oriented interest related to international development, cooperation, peace-making, and co-existence amongst nations. Second, an economic-oriented interest related to national competitiveness, profit-making, as well as the recruitment and development of a skilled labour force for the nation. As such, the authors intend, there are two observable approaches to conceptualize international education and/or internationalization: a learning-driven one and a market-driven one. Ultimately, they point out, additional scholarly interest in a number of the following areas would greatly aid the field: international student recruitment practices and the regulation of agents involved in recruitment process across Canada and globally; academic and social provisions for international students in public schools and their home placements; efforts to address issues of accessibility and equity for all students; as well as, the impact of international student fees on the funding of public education at the school, system and provincial levels... to name a few topics applicable at the K-12 level.

As a key contributor to initiatives of internationalization - regionally, provincially, nationally and internationally - the OCDSB will continue to collaborate with embassy officials of other jurisdictions, world-wide, in order to enhance global awareness and citizenship, intercultural and linguistic understanding. Each 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MoU) signed between the District and its counterpart abroad is a commitment to the worthy endeavours of international education.

In its summary report of current knowledge and best practices to accompany Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education, the Ministry of Education Ontario (2018) released [Global Education for Ontario Learners: Practical Strategies](#). This research summary highlights seven interrelated teaching and learning practices for internationalization that:

- nurture a respectful, inclusive and interactive classroom/school ethos;
- infuse learner-centred and culturally responsive, independent and interactive teaching and learning approaches that align with learning goals;
- embed authentic performance-based tasks;
- draw on globally-oriented learning resources that assist students in understanding the "big picture" of themselves in the world;
- make use of assessment and evaluation strategies that align with the learning goals and forms of instruction used to support learning;
- offer opportunities for students to experience learning in varied contexts in the classroom/school and local community; and,
- foreground the teacher as a role model.

Further, the following conditions are recommended in order to build system capacity for high-quality and effective global education:

- provision of relevant and high-quality pre-service, in-service, and ongoing professional learning and development that includes experiential learning through international travel;
- supportive leadership at the ministerial, district and school levels;
- access to diverse and responsive knowledge resources that integrate multicultural, multi-genre, as well as international news, research and analyses;
- spaces that allow for collaboration and learning with/from other educators and practitioners beyond the school; and,
- ongoing assessment and recognition of teaching and learning efforts and achievements made with respect to global education.

Of interest, locally, the University of Ottawa (2017) established a committee to analyze its internationalization strategy and found both encouraging signs as well as significant barriers to internationalization at the post-secondary level. Despite best intentions, the committee found that efforts remain fragmented in terms of levels of engagement, perceptions and outcomes. The report also states that internationalization remains introductory, conceptually simple and static. More specifically, the data collected suggests the need for revised governance structures, along with a renewed commitment to exploring innovative approaches to the complex challenges of globalized higher education.



As the OCDSB is the largest district school board in the National Capital Region, and one of the most prominent in the province, the District and OCENET are committed to continuing to enhance and expand opportunities to align with other international capital cities, globally. Deliberations pertaining to the sensible integration of opportunities to scale up internationalization efforts are well underway, including options for all secondary sites to access national and/or international initiatives and projects. Increased opportunities for elementary sites, both in-person and on-line, are also being considered. The careful, coordinated collaboration with OCENET will ensure that the balance of quality and quantity are maintained throughout the scale-up process.

Consolidation

I am a firm believer, personally and professionally, in the transformational nature (and power!) of initiatives for international education. As a student of the OCDSB, I experienced the incredible learning that takes place when internationalization is nurtured at school sites. As Director of Education at the OCDSB, I am committed to providing these same value-added experiences to our students, staff and school communities.

I am also convinced that initiatives of international education - through sound infrastructure for exchanges of culture and ideas, the promising potential of paradiplomacy, and sensible integration in the scale-up process - will provide the optimal opportunity today for our global leaders of tomorrow to get to know one another, to enjoy one another, and perhaps most importantly, to appreciate and respect one another for the peace and prosperity of the planet.

The final word on this inspirational topic is held for esteemed colleague and friend, Geoff Best, Executive Director of OCENET, as he so eloquently states...

“International education opens doors to meaningful engagement with diverse cultures, fostering appreciation and intercultural understanding. My own experience with internationalization has been transformative in shaping my personal growth. Each year, watching the International Certificate Program (ICP) graduation and hearing students share their experiences has been profoundly rewarding. Time and again, students speak about how their involvement in the ICP has reshaped the way they see the world and understand themselves.

The Program highlights the power of perspective-taking and the development of empathy - skills that students consistently cite as defining aspects of their learning. By encouraging secondary students to engage, culturally and globally, the ICP exemplifies how international education can create transformative opportunities for growth.

Initiatives for international education also enrich our schools and communities by welcoming students from around the globe. These interactions provide a platform for international and Canadian students to share their unique perspectives and cultures, fostering mutual understanding and connection. Together, these experiences cultivate the competencies and mindset needed to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.”

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