

Options and Opportunities (O₂) Policy

Effective Date: May 2022

1. Policy Statement

Options and Opportunities, referred to as O₂, is a program designed to help students work toward a career or occupation in contexts that respond to their learning needs. Students develop connections to the workplace, post-secondary institutions, and training programs that assist with transitioning to new environments beyond high school. Students enrolled in O₂ will develop the competencies and skills that will prepare them for a lifetime of transitions and learning.

This policy will define program components and expectations, clarifying the responsibilities of all participants in supporting the program and learners.

2. Definitions

community-based learning: A teaching strategy that brings together academic learning with community engagement. This approach can see students demonstrating learning and skill development with partners in the community or can bring community engagement into the classroom.

co-operative education: A planned learning experience requiring a long-term community or worksite placement for which eligible high school students earn credit.

competencies: The attitudes, skills, and knowledge that prepare learners to successfully participate in lifelong learning and life–work transitions.

department: Refers to the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

experiential learning: Refers to learning through experience; requires students to reflect upon their learning and how the skills and competencies they develop through their academic studies can be applied to real life experiences that are structured as part of the learning experiences.

intake process: The process by which students apply and are selected for the O₂ program; this includes program promotion, identification of potential candidates, application, interview, selection, and orientation.

O₂ cohort: The student group selected to enter O₂ for grades 10–12.

O₂ Lead Teacher: A high school teacher designated to be responsible for the coordination of the O₂ program.

Options and Opportunities Learning Agreement: A document completed by student, family, and teacher that outlines responsibilities of each in the O₂ program.

parent: Includes parents, guardians, and people acting in the place of a parent (*loco parentis*).

post-secondary: Options after high school graduation, that may include apprenticeship, community college, military, private career college, university, or workplace training programs.

3. Policy Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to ensure that all Nova Scotia students have equitable access to O₂ and that the program is culturally and linguistically responsive, accepting, and respectful in supporting and valuing their learning and diverse abilities.

This policy provides clear, consistent direction for processes to be followed by all users. This will be achieved by

- defining the program components that are necessary to help students work towards career and education goals
- outlining program delivery requirements in the areas of
 - student intake and transition process
 - scheduling
 - cohorted courses and cohort size
 - curriculum delivery and resources/supports
- defining student requirements for completion of the O₂ program
- designating the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Regional Centres for Education (RCEs), Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP), schools, teachers, students, and families

4. Guiding Principles

- O₂ is intended to support students in re-engaging with their learning through a focus on skill development and career exploration.
- Students enrolled in O₂ will be engaged in a broad range of community-based learning experiences to support them in making meaningful decisions about post-secondary and career pathways.
- The composition of an O₂ cohort and the community-based learning opportunities should reflect the demographics of the school population.
- When participating in any community-based learning experience the safety and security of the students must be first and foremost and due diligence must be exercised to mitigate risks.

5. Application

This policy applies to all teachers, school administrators, and RCE/CSAP personnel responsible for implementing O₂, and to all students enrolled in an O₂ program.

6. Policy Directives

- 6.1 RCEs/CSAP must seek written approval from the department to offer the O₂ program in any of their schools.
- 6.2 The department will review provincial funding for O₂ on an annual basis.
- 6.3 Schools must deliver and adhere to the required components and fulfill the expectations for O₂, as outlined in *Options and Opportunities: A Resource for Schools*.

- 6.4 Entry to O₂ is available only at the grade 10 level. Students will not be permitted entry to an O₂ cohort after completion of grade 10.
- 6.5 The grade 10 cohort is a maximum of 20 students; permission must be obtained from RCE/CSAP Youth Pathways consultants to exceed this cap.
- 6.6 RCEs/CSAP will offer professional learning for O₂ teachers to support program delivery.
- 6.7 Administrators and school O₂ teams in approved O₂ designated schools will
 - 6.7.1 adhere to the processes and procedures described in departmental documents related to O₂ and community-based learning
 - 6.7.2 ensure all grade 9 teachers, staff, students, parents, and families have access to information related to the O₂ program and are aware of the application/intake process
 - 6.7.3 implement an interview and selection process that is equitable to create a grade 10 O₂ cohort using the criteria provided by the department in *Options and Opportunities: A Resource for Schools*; students must be notified in writing of the interview results
 - 6.7.4 support the success of all learners based on a universal design model
 - 6.7.5 support students in developing a career and life plan
 - 6.7.6 designate an O₂ Lead Teacher and provide, as part of their teaching assignment, a full course block (coded SNO2) that is scheduled each semester where no other teaching or duty can be assigned to fulfill the Lead Teacher responsibilities; as part of supporting student success and career exploration, the O₂ Lead Teacher is also required to teach Career Development 10 (CD 10) and/or Community-Based Learning 11 (CBL 11)
 - 6.7.7 establish an O₂ team and ensure that all staff working with O₂ students meet regularly
 - 6.7.8 appropriately code all students in O₂ in accordance with the required O₂ code established in PowerSchool
 - 6.7.9 establish an O₂ dedicated cohorted section of Career Development 10 (CD 10) and Community-Based Learning 11 (CBL 11)
 - 6.7.10 establish an O₂ dedicated cohorted section of English 10 or Français 10; other dedicated courses for O₂ students may be established at the school based on student need
 - 6.7.11 schedule a minimum of three co-operative education courses for O₂ students
 - 6.7.12 ensure that all O₂ students successfully complete all courses required to achieve the O₂ certificate; where students have not completed all required courses, it is the responsibility of the school to ensure the O₂ code has been removed from the student's record and transcript
 - 6.7.13 use staffing provided to offer sections of courses to O₂ students that best support student success; these classes must comprise a minimum of 50% O₂ students with a maximum enrolment of 25 students
 - 6.7.14 ensure access to this policy is available to teachers and is referenced where clarity of this policy is required
 - 6.7.15 ensure that documents (besides applications and interview forms) acquired from parents and teaching staff during the intake process are not made part of the student's permanent record

- 6.8 Records of students who are not accepted into O₂ (application and interview forms) are retained for a period of one year, in compliance with the *Freedom of Information Protection of Privacy Act*.
- 6.9 Records of applicants accepted into O₂ must be kept as part of the student's O₂ file and retained for a period of six years from the completion of, or upon leaving, the program.
- 6.10 RCEs/CSAP will establish a planning process to support students who withdraw from O₂ to ensure effective transitions.
- 6.11 Staffing resources provided for the delivery of O₂ shall be communicated to program directors on an annual basis.
- 6.12 The O₂ Certificate of Achievement shall be awarded to graduating students enrolled in O₂ who
 - 6.12.1 complete Career Development 10 and Community-Based Learning 11
 - 6.12.2 complete a minimum of three co-operative education courses
 - 6.12.3 develop a career portfolio based on the graduation competencies
- 6.13 Where possible, schools will
 - 6.13.1 assign more than one O₂ course to a teacher in order to promote the development of good student-teacher rapport
 - 6.13.2 provide opportunities for students to access a range of technology to support student learning and to aid in the development of employability and workplace specific skills
 - 6.13.3 include families in school events promoting O₂ programs and celebrating the successes of O₂ students

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Department

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is responsible for

- developing the objectives of the policy, in consultation with RCEs/CSAP
- communicating the policy to RCEs/CSAP
- developing and maintaining the resources to support O₂
- updating and communicating guidelines and forms that support community-based learning
- monitoring overall compliance with this policy
- working with regions and CSAP through the Director, Career Pathways, to evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of this policy and ensure that the policy is formally reviewed biennially

RCEs/CSAP

RCEs/CSAP are responsible for

- communicating the policy to schools
- providing schools with departmental documents
- monitoring and ensuring compliance with this policy
- obtaining written approval from the department prior to offering an O₂ program at a school
- working with schools to ensure students have equitable access to O₂

Schools

Schools are responsible for

- compliance with the directives and guidelines of the policy in the delivery of O₂

Teachers

Teachers are responsible for

- implementing O₂
- fulfilling roles and responsibilities as outlined in the directives and guidelines of this policy
- ensuring that all experiential learning in which students are engaged complies with regional and provincial policies
- ensuring that the community-based learning opportunities are diverse and reflect the demographics of the school population.

Students

Students are responsible for

- fulfilling the terms of their Learning Agreement, and acknowledging that not doing so will affect their continued participation in O₂

8. Monitoring

Department staff are responsible for reviewing this policy and its implementation in consultation with RCEs/CSAP, schools, partners, and external advisors when appropriate.

9. References

Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. 2022. *Community-Based Learning: A Resource for Schools*. Halifax, NS: Province of Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. 2019. *Inclusive Education Policy*. Halifax, NS: Province of Nova Scotia. <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/inclusiveeducationpolicyen.pdf>.

Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. 2022. *Options and Opportunities: A Resource for Schools*. Halifax, NS: Province of Nova Scotia.

10. Appendices

For further information regarding this policy or to obtain reference documents, contact the Director, Career Pathways, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.