

**Report to Committee of the Whole
December 8, 2014**



**Waterloo Region
District School Board**

Inspired Learners – Tomorrow's Leaders

SUBJECT: **Waterloo Region District School Board – Involvement with Skills Canada**

ORIGINATOR: This report was prepared by Mary Lou Mackie, Executive Superintendent of Education, Scott Lomax, Superintendent of Education and Peter Rubenschuh, Assistant (to) Superintendent of Education - Program, in consultation with Executive Committee.

PURPOSE/STRATEGIC PLAN:

This report provides information regarding the involvement of Waterloo Region District School Board students in programs and activities supported by Skills Canada. Skills Canada is a not-for-profit organization that actively promotes careers in skill trades and technology to Canadian youth. Skills Canada in the Region of Waterloo is supported through Skills Canada, Ontario.

This report addresses the strategic directions of the board, as the involvement of students in Skills Canada, Ontario activities supports engaging students, families, staff and communities, championing quality public education, promoting forward thinking, and pursuing student achievement and success for all.

BACKGROUND:

At the October 20, 2014 Board meeting of the Waterloo Region District School Board, during Question Period, staff were asked to provide an update to trustees regarding the involvement of our students in Skills Canada, Ontario Activities. Agenda Development Committee of the board supported this request, and staff has prepared this report in response to this question.

STATUS:

Skills Canada, Ontario offers a number of activities to support student interest and involvement in the skilled trades and technology, including the Ontario Technological Skills Competition (secondary), the Cardboard Boat Races and Video Challenges (elementary and secondary), Young Women's Initiatives (senior elementary and secondary), Summer Camps (senior elementary), and presentations about skill trades and technology to schools (elementary and secondary). The Waterloo Region District School Board's involvement in Skills Canada, Ontario is ongoing. For example, each year the Board supports students competing at the provincial level in the Ontario Technological Skills Competition (OTSC). In 2013-2014, 17 students from a variety of secondary schools in the Waterloo Region District School Board participated in the OTSC. However, it should be noted that 225 secondary school students participated in school-level and board-level skills competitions. These included competitions in Transportation, Culinary Arts, Horticulture and Landscape, Film Production, and Robotics (Sumobots). Some of these competitions were used as qualifiers for the OTSCs. At the elementary level, students in grades 4 to 8 participate in the Waterloo Region Technological Skills Competitions that are jointly run by the WRDSB and the Waterloo Catholic District School Board. For 2014-15, secondary schools within the WRDSB have also taken advantage of Skills Canada Ontario presentations to promote opportunities in the skilled trades to their grade 10 students. There is also likely some participation in the other activities supported through Skills Canada, Ontario Activities although data is not gathered on this across the system.

Participation in Skills Canada, Ontario activities is voluntary. Schools make decisions about their involvement in the range of opportunities available, weighing the involvement in these voluntary activities against the other demands of the curriculum. One recent concern with respect to the involvement in the OTSC is a perceived mismatch between the focus of the Skills Canada, Ontario competition, which is sector-based, and the relationship to the Ontario curriculum, which is more broad-based in nature. There has been some difficulty, as well, linking involvement in a Skills competition that is voluntary, to the requirements of the Technological education program to deliver to all students who are enrolled in the program. Furthermore, in recent years, schools have experienced limited student interest in participation in the OTSC. As a result, the cost per pupil to participate has escalated.

Instead, secondary school Technology teachers in the Waterloo Region District School Board are encouraged to provide support for the development of in-class competitions reflecting identified curriculum 'Big Ideas' and essential learning reflected in the Ontario curriculum. From school level in-class competitions, there has been a move to Board-wide competitions as outlined earlier in this report. These competitions are being developed by sector specialist teaching staff to ensure curriculum relevance and appropriate assessment components, delivered in class, thereby involving all the students enrolled in the program, not simply the select few identified to compete in the OTSC. This reflects the commitment of the WRDSB to focus on developing programming that is sustainable over the long term and enhances the experiences of all technological education students.

Involvement in the OTSC competition has been funded through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) grant from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). Given that few students can participate in the OTSC competition, the high cost per student associated with participation in the OTSC competitions means that the funding is not being used as effectively as it could to satisfy the MTCU mandate. OYAP dollars are to be used to support students enrolled as OYAP participants and to promote the exploration of the skilled trades. Over the past few years the WRDSB has re-purposed this funding to involve more students in workshops and activities that promote skilled trades as a viable career pathway, in an effort to broaden interest in the skilled trades to a wider group of students.

The Waterloo Region District School Board continues to support the skilled trades and seeks ways to support access to these for all students in the district. Skills Canada, Ontario provides support for this through their programs and services, which are valued as part of an overall strategy, including Specialist High Skills Majors, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Programs, School/College/Work initiatives, Cooperative Education programs and other in-class supports for students interested in the skilled trades.

COMMUNICATIONS:

This report is provided to address the questions posed by trustees with respect to the level of involvement of the Waterloo Region District School Board students and staff with the voluntary activities and programs supported by Skills Canada, Ontario, and is for information only.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

No financial implications.

RECOMMENDATION:

No recommendation. For information only.

 **Director of Education**