



Nova Scotia Career Education Framework: Grades 4 to 12



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INTRODUCTION

There are dramatic differences between the world of work today and the world of work just 10 years ago. The impacts of social and technological changes require future graduates to look at the basics of career planning and the jobhunting process, as well as workplace roles, environments, and opportunities in a very different way. These factors have contributed to a necessary shift in the focus on career education in Nova Scotia. Integrating career education within all curriculum is intended to support students' learning and ensure their readiness for post-secondary studies or training or to enter the workforce upon graduation. This change means students will start career education in grade 4 by exploring their learning preferences, interests, and skills, and continue building on these and contributing to their career exploration portfolio through the end of grade 12.

This framework for grades 4 to 12 provides direction and supports students in becoming lifelong and resilient learners who can set goals and make good decisions for themselves and their families. Studies have shown that effective career education reduces high school drop-out rates (Kotamraju 2011), increases student academic achievement, and creates more motivated and intentional learners (Belfield, Levin, and Rosen 2012; Hughes 2004).

The increased focus on career education in Nova Scotia's public schools was informed by two publications released in June 2015: *Future in Focus—Atlantic Career Development Framework for Public Education: 2015–2020* from the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) and *Disrupting the Status Quo: Nova Scotians Demand a Better Future for Every Student*, a report from the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's (EECD) Minister's Panel on Education.

Future in Focus committed each of the Atlantic provinces to developing their own career education frameworks to support, "... career development that included the application of age-appropriate, classroom-based career education, experiential exploration of post-secondary and work options, timely career and labour market information and guidance to students."

The *Disrupting the Status Quo* report included extensive feedback from many Nova Scotians throughout the province. The results of the research in the report affirmed the direction of the CAMET report by calling for changes to ensure students are better prepared to lead productive lives in a rapidly changing world.

What is Career Education?

Career education is the learning and practical application students need to support them in their lifelong exploration of identity and acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to make informed life, education, and career decisions.

Effective career education provides opportunities to integrate career-related learning experiences across all curriculums. It should include experiential learning, supports, information, and instruction that students need to develop life-building skills and resiliency. Building on the foundation of career education, students also need the support of many people in their lives:

families, community members, teachers, school counsellors, and other influencers who will help to shape and guide their career education experiences.

Nova Scotia's Vision for Career Education

This framework is intended to provide Nova Scotia students with a stronger understanding of themselves and their strengths, interests, and skills as they access a range of learning opportunities to guide them in making meaningful decisions about their life, education, and career goals. It will help students develop as intentional learners who proactively manage their career choices and transitions and are architects of their preferred futures.

Through an increased emphasis on improving literacy and math skills, as identified in *The 3 Rs: Renew, Refocus, Rebuild—Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Education*, students will develop an understanding of, and appreciation for, the importance of these skills in their post-secondary studies and the world of work.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These principles support an inclusive approach to career education to prepare all students for life and work. Career education

- is an integral component of all curriculums, teaching, and learning.
- is proactive and positive in helping students plan for life and manage the transitions from school to career.
- is respectful of the diversity, cultures, languages, and identities of students.
- provides equitable, quality, age-appropriate experiences, and knowledge to students.
- reflects the reality of an evolving and changing world to prepare students for multiple career and life changes, as well as educational journeys and pathways.
- strengthens the connections students make between their lives and what they are learning in the classroom as they plan their educational and career pathways.
- supports the development of individual, personal, and social skills, as well as civic responsibility.

The above principles support teaching, learning, and success for all students while considering their changing needs and social contexts, as well as the research that leverages best practices in career education. The principles also ensure that all students experience career education in multiple ways during their time in public school.

Inclusion

Students in Nova Scotia's public schools are diverse and come from many different backgrounds. The *Students First* (2018) report from the Commission on Inclusive Education highlighted the need to support all students in achieving their full potential. To meet the complexity of student needs, all students must receive appropriate, quality educational programs and services.

EECD is implementing an innovative curriculum that includes culturally responsive instruction to support career education for all students. Meaningful career education promotes student success by connecting students with authentic and relevant experiences and opportunities supported by a committed network made up of families, caregivers, teachers, school counsellors, community partners, and other stakeholders.

Transition Matters

The findings recently published in *From School to Success: Clearing the Path—Findings from the Transition Task Force* show that, "Students begin forming opinions about their future careers as early as grade 4, and they must have the information and advice to guide them, beginning early and continuing in college, university, and apprenticeship."

There are many factors that influence how students form opinions about their education and career pathways, and how they approach the transition processes between high school and the workforce or post-secondary studies or training. These factors include access to experiential learning and career exploration opportunities at earlier grade levels; engagement with community partners; and the integration of entrepreneurial and foundation skills across curriculums.

The task force also identified the need to support students with challenges and to examine how programs could be more representative of all students. The recommendations were clear that all students would benefit from authentic experiences, more mentoring, a variety of hands-on learning opportunities, and better access to career decision-making information in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them.

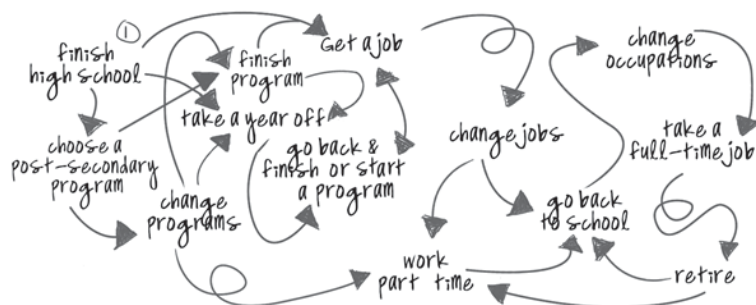
Successful transitions require planning. Students may transition from home to school, grade to grade, school to school, school to community, and community to community. Transition planning should consider students' academic and social readiness, post-school goals and aspirations, and career choices and pathways.

Career planning isn't a one-time decision. It's an ongoing cycle that will be repeated many times throughout students' lives. Career choices and identity exploration are closely linked so it follows that their choices will change as their identities evolve. This means that career choices made in junior high or high school may not align with who students are many years later (Campbell and Dutton 2015; Government of Alberta, Advanced Education 2018). This often leads to a career pathway that looks more like the second illustration (below) than the first.

Career pathways are no longer linear



Helping students navigate the twists and turns of life's journey



The two illustrations above are adapted with permission from images originally appearing in *This is Your Life* © 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015 Government of Alberta, Advanced Education. Reproduced with permission.

The Importance of Families and Communities

The influence of families and communities on students can influence their decisions when it comes to education, career exploration, and personal development and can help them succeed in setting and attaining personal goals. In many cultures, community and family are one and the same.

The composition of today's families shows that adults and children can be related in a variety of ways—biologically, emotionally, legally—and vary in structure. This means students will have

different understandings of and perspectives on personal and career development. Regardless, the family's role remains significant in supporting students' self-awareness through meaningful exploration opportunities. Exploration is an important part of helping students discover who they are and what they like to do.

When families encourage students to investigate their personal and career interests through a variety of activities and help them understand the value of being involved in extracurricular activities, students gain greater insight into their skills, interests, and strengths.

Families can support students in their exploration of a wide range of career options by speaking to other family members and friends, visiting businesses in the community, and, if they are employed, bringing students to their own place of employment. These visits and conversations focusing on career and self-exploration can also bring students' attention to the importance of math and literacy skills in the workplace, for all jobs and careers.

Community-based activities in partnership with clubs, organizations, businesses, industries, and government can help students explore and develop their strengths and interests. Social and professional networks within communities can also help them learn how different jobs and careers connect with their interests and mentors can help them identify real-world opportunities to explore those careers. Students' extended support networks can guide them to become independent and resilient citizens who will contribute to the prosperity of their families and communities.

Programs such as Business is Jammin' and Parents as Career Coaches, as well as services through Nova Scotia Works (formerly Careers Nova Scotia) and Mi'kmaq Employment Training Secretariat (METS, which also offers Youth Employment Services/Programs) help families learn to coach students; understand career development and the demands of the quickly changing labour market; and how to help them navigate their way through school to post-secondary education or directly into the workforce.

Options need to be explored and developed for students and families who may require access to technology or virtual assistance to meet their exploration needs. Potential solutions could include online career planning and opportunities to investigate a variety of careers that are not based in the local community; certifications or mentoring opportunities that are only accessible virtually; or to overcome other challenges such as transportation or geographic location.

Ensuring equitable access to career information, supports, and resources for students and families is critical to career development.

High-Quality Teaching, Leadership, and Positive Learning Environments

Teachers as Facilitators and Influencers

Teachers are essential in students' career conversations and supporting their career development. The degree to which career outcomes are embedded in curriculum and instructional practices dramatically impacts career education and planning for students. Teachers are an important point of contact for students who may be considering career opportunities or have career-related questions. They are influential in helping students

navigate information and acquire and develop the skills necessary to make informed life, education, and career decisions.

In making connections between careers and curriculum, students are able to develop their own career plans using skills such as setting goals, conducting job searches, understanding the expectations of work settings, and discovering how to handle constant life transitions. As students gather information, encounter new circumstances, and are exposed to different experiences, their life choices may change. In learning how to be flexible, students will be prepared for change and understand that the path they chart today may look very different in the future.

Equally important to teachers' roles as advisors, are the relationships, lines of communication, and partnerships they establish with families, community-based organizations, businesses, industries, and educational institutions, including post-secondary. These partnerships result in strong bonds between schools and communities, assist with transitions, and provide citizenship, learning, and work opportunities for students. Teachers establish and re-establish relationships with families and communities, particularly with populations who are marginalized, and contribute to safe, inclusive, and supportive school environments.

School Counsellors and Career Development

School counsellors are key individuals in Nova Scotia's public schools who support students' career development through the Comprehensive School Counselling Program and Practice (CSCPP). School counsellors are deeply aware of the link between career development and improved mental health and wellness. They have a strong understanding of the potential emotional and behavioural challenges that students may experience when managing their expectations for the future.

Within the CSCPP, school counsellors work with other educators and professionals to assist students to develop foundational career development competencies which enable them to make meaningful and satisfying life and work choices. School counsellors may do this through delivering direct services in the classroom, small groups, or individually that are related to students' social and emotional development.

They also support students with program and transition planning, course selection, preparation, and admission and application processes for post-secondary education and training. In addition, school counsellors may use their specialized skills and knowledge to assist students who have greater difficulties with career decision-making and connect students and families to other community support systems.

Career education, through a comprehensive lens, is the shared responsibility of all members of the school community.

A REVITALIZED CURRICULUM

In 2015, the *Atlantic Canada Framework for Essential Graduation Competencies* was adopted and identified six competencies to prepare students for a lifetime of transitioning and learning. The six essential competencies are

- citizenship
- communication
- creativity and innovation
- critical thinking
- personal-career development
- technological fluency

Students whose first language is French and who attend Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) also gain a seventh competency in French language acquisition and cultural identity. This competency empowers students to incorporate the French language and Acadian/francophone culture, so they can contribute positively to their community.

Through a thoughtful, strategic, and deliberate process, using a culturally responsive approach, career education has been integrated into the curriculums for grades 4 to 8 and a commitment has been made to extend this approach to other curriculums as they are updated and renewed in grades 9 to 12. This supports the development of students' attitudes and the skills and knowledge they need to adapt to changes in their lives and workplaces and successfully participate in lifelong learning. The vision for Nova Scotia students is that their career education will be strengthened by making explicit connections to these competencies in their classrooms.

When students finish high school, they are expected to be self-aware and self-directed individuals who can set and pursue goals. They should understand and appreciate how culture contributes to their roles at work and in their personal lives. They are also expected to make thoughtful decisions regarding their health, wellness, and career and educational pathways.

Strong Partnerships

Students need opportunities to connect their classroom learning to communities, post-secondary study and training options, and workplaces. As students, schools, families, and communities recognize the importance of career education, the demand for community-based learning experiences will increase.

Learning in authentic settings leads students to be more engaged and connected learners, and enables them to develop life, work, and career skills in every classroom. By bringing communities into schools and placing students in communities as part of their studies, career education makes students' learning relevant to their lives and futures.

The findings of the Transition Task Force show that Nova Scotia employers consider hands-on experiences to be one of the most effective ways for youth to prepare for the workplace. The report further indicates that career education and exploration must begin early and provide students with access to entrepreneurial and foundational skill development to prepare them for success, whatever their career choices. The task force emphasized the role that business and industry can play, as well as the willingness of these partners, in contributing to and expanding upon learning opportunities for students.

Partnerships with business, industry, and community organizations provide a key source of guidance, advice, and expertise to help students connect their classroom learning to the larger world and gain a better understanding of the skills needed to be successful in the world of work. These partners help inform students, families, and educators about essential and employability skills and competencies and provide insight into labour market information and growth sectors in Nova Scotia. These partnerships can also support teachers by providing coaching and mentorship regarding industry standards and requirements, as well as helping them to understand the connections between curriculum, post-secondary options, and career pathways.

Making a wide range of opportunities available to students, including the option to explore entrepreneurship, is important to give them the chance to see the diversity of the world of work and make strong connections between their interests, abilities, and educational choices.

As this framework is implemented, it is important that EECD, schools, communities, businesses, and industry and community partners move forward together. The focus must be on building flexible and meaningful relationships that provide positive career education experiences for all students and valuing the perspectives and experience of all partners.

A Comprehensive Approach

Career education should not be restricted to a single area of curriculum; it needs to be supported by the whole school and community. This approach enables students to become lifelong learners, as well as develop skills and fully explore their interests and future goals. It also brings prominence to the idea that students' careers, like their lives, can transform and evolve. To achieve its goals, Nova Scotia's approach to career education is divided into three stages:

- **Who Am I?** (grades 4 to 6)
- **Investigate and Explore** (grades 7 to 9)
- **Plan for Success** (grades 10 to 12)



Who Am I?

Students in grades 4 to 6 will tackle the “Who Am I?” phase of career exploration. They are ready and eager to develop an awareness of themselves, including their identities, interests, and strengths as they explore and investigate school, family, and community roles and responsibilities. This is the ideal time for students to be introduced to interest and learning preference inventories and to start developing portfolios that reflect who they are.

Investigate and Explore

In junior high, students will “Investigate and Explore” by carrying out more in-depth investigations of diverse career and post-secondary pathways and exploring what their preferred pathways may mean when making decisions about high school courses.

Experiential learning will serve as a foundation for classroom instruction and engagement with the community and will help students develop their competencies and skills. As part of this journey, the importance of math and literacy in the workplace will be emphasized, as well as the importance of financial literacy in their personal lives. It is also important for students to develop an appreciation for a range of career pathways, including entrepreneurship.

Plan for Success

High school students are at a pivotal point in their lives and need to “Plan for Success”. They are making key decisions about their transition from high school to post-secondary studies and training or employment. At this point in their education, increased emphasis will be placed on raising students’ awareness of the nine essential skills identified by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2015). These nine skills are the basis for learning all other skills and can be used in different combinations for different pathways.

High school students need to have culturally relevant and authentic opportunities to connect with community partners who can guide their learning about the necessary educational requirements for post-secondary and industry-specific career pathways. These also need to include supports and requirements for students with special needs and those who are, historically and currently, under-represented in post-secondary education and the workforce.

The CBL experiences will support students with the development of their career plans, which will be included in their e-portfolios. Students’ career plans will also benefit them by providing a way to reflect on their learning experiences and identify what is meaningful.

IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

This framework provides direction as curriculums and course information are changed, revised, and updated. Feedback received during the stakeholder sessions and student focus groups, as well as the recommendations made by the Transition Task Force have helped inform and guide its development. Plans for implementing this framework include:

- developing a “next steps” plan that is age and grade-appropriate, ensuring alignment with the *Inclusive Education Policy*.
- identifying tools, resources, and supports for students that promote well-being and engage them in life, career, and post-secondary exploration.
- developing supports for teachers and administrators that promote experiential learning opportunities in the curriculum.
- identifying measures of success that can provide evidence to show the framework is supporting students’ career exploration journeys and in developing their career and post-secondary plans of action.
- developing a communications plan and strategies for sharing the framework with students, educators, families, communities, and partners.
- developing partnerships and networks that are diverse, to further support career education and experiential learning for all students.

CONCLUSION

Every student should have meaningful opportunities to transition successfully from high school to education, training, or employment. A comprehensive and integrated approach to career education supports not just students, but teachers, families, and community partners, all of whom help students to plan and make informed decisions about their learning and their futures.

This framework sets the stage for students to experience career education at an early age. Starting students on the career exploration journey in grade 4 helps them develop the competencies and skills that will guide them as lifelong and resilient learners, who are capable of navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by a rapidly changing world.

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