



Ontario Public School  
Boards' Association

# **OPSBA Response to Ministry of Education's Life Skills Consultation: *Equipping Students with Practical Life Skills***

October 2, 2024



The OPSBA consultative work groups (Education Program and Policy Development) recently met and discussed this current consultation paper and its questions. For this survey, we asked our trustees to provide their answers and comments based on what they are hearing within their schools and communities, and from their discussions at their local boards. We encouraged trustees to think and respond freely and to include anything that came to mind during the consultation session.

The discussion followed remarks from a Ministry of Education representative who indicated that at that time (September 13), the ministry had received more than 5,000 submissions to its online survey.

That shows there is a tremendous amount of interest in the topic, and we look forward to seeing final publication of the survey results and the breakdown of responses between education and industry partners. The consultation is not clear on the final intention and whether this is to be addressed in both the elementary and secondary panels or whether it will be mandatory. OPSBA is very much interested to know what the next step in the process beyond this survey is and what the ministry's intentions are regarding the use of the data.

## **Key recommendations:**

### **1. Add agreed upon new “life skills” to existing courses**

- There is consensus that many of these “practical life skills” are part of many curricula and that schools are just one part of a child’s overall development. We do not believe a new “life skills” course is the answer. Instead, consideration should be given to greater attention being placed on particular critical life skills within existing courses. There is also the ongoing concern of adding more to an already crowded curriculum.
- We would support modernizing and expanding the subject matter and content of particular courses that are directly related to some of these “skills” to support those students interested in taking them, as opposed to adding a new course for everyone. Adding to an already prescribed set of courses could affect other course options for students and would limit participation in courses such as the arts, for example.

### **2. Build and expand experiential learning opportunities**

- There is a strongly held belief by many that several life skills are in fact learned through “living” and “life experiences.” The education sector has been actively providing more experiential learning options and our advice would be to continue to grow these programs. This includes such initiatives as Dual Credits, co-op placements, and apprenticeships. These courses and experiences are grounded in real-life learning and problem solving; they are also highly engaging for young people.

Other comments for consideration:

- We certainly recognize that education is a major contributor in this regard, and that children are in the care of schools for a large portion of the day. However, there are others who contribute to a child's learning of life skills, beginning with the adults and other supports at home and in the community. We also recognize that many children do not have these adults and/or supports. That is a larger societal issue that we must collectively work together to solve.
- Regarding the actual survey and its questions, our members have concerns about some of the examples provided in that they were more leaning to a white, middle-class demographic. It was also felt that there should be additional geographic and cultural references provided, along with consideration for age-appropriate examples (i.e., talking to a landlord.) In addition, it was noted that what is a relevant skill for some may not be for others.

## Personal health and safety skills

**How important is it for students to learn the following personal health and safety skills in school?**

### Questions

**First aid and emergency preparedness (for example, wound care, emergency kit preparation)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | Important | **Very Important***

**Food preparation (for example, chopping food, safely cooking meat)**

*Not at all Important | **Somewhat Important** | Neutral | Important | Very Important*

**Making informed decisions about health and nutrition (for example, sleep needs, getting key nutrients)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | **Important** | Very Important*

**Nutritious meal planning (for example, understanding food labels, planning balanced meals and snacks)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | **Neutral** | Important | Very Important*

**Which of the following personal health and safety skills is most important for students to learn in school?**

- None
- **First aid and emergency preparedness**
- Food preparation
- Making informed decisions about health and nutrition
- Nutritious meal planning

## What other personal health and safety skills do you think students should learn at school?

- *Menstrual equity and understanding.*

### Additional Comments:

- *First aid and emergency preparedness are skills that could save a life -- this skill is a community asset.*
- *Informed health and nutrition decisions are important but the curriculum to support this needs to be modernized.*
- *Nutritious meal planning needs to be addressed in term of equity – what different families have access to and afford.*
- *These skills shouldn't be a school's responsibility to teach, but the reality is that many caregivers are unable to provide the necessary learning.*

Note: OPSBA has been supportive of a National School Food Program and is an endorser of the Coalition for Healthy School Food. We have supported their work with an upcoming proposal to Ontario's Ministry of Education that includes recommendations for next steps for food literacy and school food in Ontario.

## Household management skills

### How important is it for students to learn the following household management skills in school?

#### Questions

#### **Bicycle maintenance and repair (for example, fixing a flat tire, oiling bicycle chains)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | Important | Very Important*

#### **Car maintenance and repair (for example, changing a tire, topping up fluids in a car, changing windshield wiper blades)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | Important | Very Important*

#### **Clothing maintenance and repair (for example, washing clothes, sewing buttons, sewing hems)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | Important | Very Important*

#### **Home maintenance and repair (for example, using cleaning products, fixing a leaky tap, replacing caulking, using wall anchors in drywall)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | Important | Very Important*

#### **Making decisions about household tasks (for example, delegating tasks to family or friends, talking to a landlord)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | Important | Very Important*

### Which of the following household management skills is most important for students to learn in school?

- None

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- Bicycle maintenance and repair
- Car maintenance
- Clothing maintenance and repair
- Home repair and maintenance
- **Making decisions about delegating household tasks**

**What other household management skills do you think students should learn at school?**

- Cooking / Safe Food Handling
- Budgeting
- Nutrition
- First Aid / CPR
- Reading grocery store labels and saving money
- Safe use of power tools
- Understanding how to change furnace filters, light bulbs, fire extinguishers
- Environmental awareness
- Phone Etiquette
- How and where to look for help
- Fire and emergency services
- Safe use of internet – sourcing credible contractors and other services, filtering false information
- How to access public transportation

**Additional Comments:**

- *Need to consider geographic differences and recognize that home economics vary*
- *Some maintenance and repair training can be short/brief or offered via online modules*
- *Maintenance and repair training is also something that would help/teach fiscal responsibilities*
- *Making decisions about household tasks would support leadership and advocating skills as well as learning personal responsibility.*

**Time management and technological skills**

**How important is it for students to learn the following time management and technological skills in school?**

**Questions**

**Effective and responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | Important | **Very Important***

**Effective use of frequently used computer applications (for example, email, spreadsheet, word processing)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | **Important** | Very Important*

**Managing scheduled priorities and obligations (for example, using a physical or digital planner, prioritizing tasks)**

*Not at all Important | Somewhat Important | Neutral | Important | **Very Important***

**Which of the following time management and technological skills is most important for students to learn in school?**

- None
- **Effective and responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools**
- Effective use of frequently used computer applications
- **Managing scheduled priorities and obligations**

**What other time management and technological skills do you think students should learn at school?**

### **Additional Comments:**

- *Regarding AI:*
  - *Appropriate uses*
  - *Understanding limitations*
  - *Strong critical thinking*
  - *Support for executive function for better time management*
  - *How it relates to jobs of the future*
- *Regarding Computer APPs:*
  - *Bring back keyboarding courses*
  - *Understanding systems*
  - *File management*
  - *Ability to adapt to changing technology*
- *Regarding Time Management:*
  - *Foundational skills are important – a planner cannot solve this.*

### **Other Skills**

**What other practical skills do you believe students should learn before they graduate from high school?**

- Students need to understand how to approach exams and how to prepare for them. We should consider minimizing the use of heavily weighted exams.
- To acquire the ability to discriminate between misinformation, disinformation, and fact, i.e., critical thinking skills. This has not always been part of the critical thinking skills education, but it must be going forward. There is good research out there on how important this is. We need to be very explicit about teaching this.
- The ability to research, report, and analyze the truthfulness of data is important for students.

**Thinking about the skills listed in this survey, what words would you use to describe them to a friend?**

- **None**
- **Practical skills for living**
- **Modern home economics**

- **Essential life skills**
- **Other...**

### **Additional Comments:**

This survey seems to be ignoring that the world around us is changing so fast that people live in such different circumstances that what is relevant for one person is not relevant at all for another. (i.e., changing a tire or cooking)

If you can read, you can do anything. One of the big pieces is to make sure that all of these skills are tied to students' ability to read, analyze and digest information. Learning "how" to gather information may be important.

Being able to read, and more importantly, building the metacognitive skills of "learning how to learn" is critical to a student's education. Teaching skills such as analysis, organization, and even technological skills, should be tied to subject content to ensure student success, rather than these skills being taught in a standalone course.

Learning how to learn is an art – this appears to have been forgotten. We are relying more and more on technology, so these basic skills are at risk of being lost. We are failing kids by not helping them to understand basic concepts.

Time management and organizational skills – this is so important in today's busy age.



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