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Enabling Sustained Student Success Support for students at risk in Ontario's Colleges

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1 Executive summary

Ontario's public colleges play a vital role in the province. Each year, a diverse group of more than 500,000 students and clients are served by Ontario's colleges of applied arts and technology¹. Over time this student population has become increasingly populated by non-traditional students at risk of not completing postsecondary education. These include for example students with disabilities (including learning and mental health), indigenous students, recent immigrants, mature or delayed entrance students, first generation students and underprepared students². Colleges are expanding support to these student groups at risk to steady enrollment and to fulfill their mandate to provide access to career training and education for the province. As a result, the colleges perceive that their governing mandate has expanded to include a large social component. This has important implications as these efforts are not without cost.

Deloitte was hired by Colleges Ontario to conduct a cost benefit analysis of the support provided to students at risk and to develop a report that explores key trends and offers a way forward. To explore this topic, Deloitte gathered financial data from all 24 public colleges in Ontario and researched statistics from reliable sources to be used in a cost benefit model. Deloitte also conducted 9 in depth interviews with a cross section of VPs of Student Services from colleges across the province.

1.1 Key findings

The research conducted for this report clearly demonstrated that:

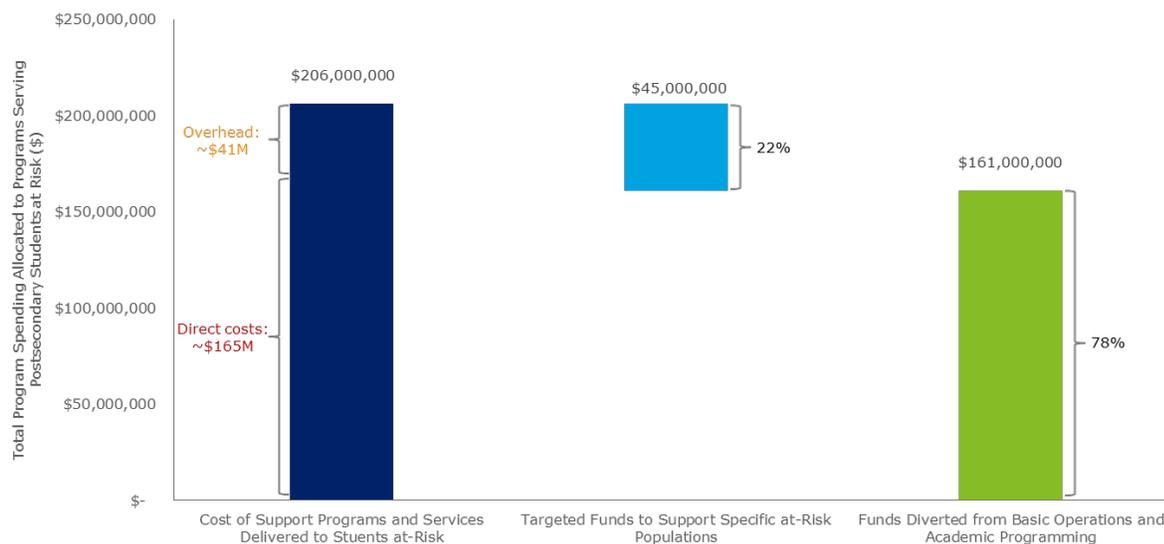
- **The need and expectation for colleges to support students at risk is increasing:** Ontario's colleges are facing increased needs across most student groups at risk, especially for students with disabilities (including mental health), indigenous students, recent immigrants and mature learners. Combined with demographic changes, this is leading to larger aggregate student at risk numbers relative to general enrollment. As a result the proportion of students at risk is estimated to include 35% of all enrolled postsecondary college students. Increasing complexity of student needs and higher expectations for student support within these at risk groups are also contributing to the growing pressure on colleges.
- **The cost of supporting students at risk is also increasing:** Direct spending by colleges on programs and services for students at risk was \$165 million in 2015-2016. The net cost of these programs and services, including overhead, was \$206 million in 2015-2016. These costs are largely being funded through diversions from general operations and academic programming, with \$45 million being paid for through targeted government funding and the remaining \$161 million, or 78%, being absorbed by colleges from general revenues. Key drivers of these growing costs are greater demand for services and increasing compliance related efforts mandated by the provincial government (see Figure I below). This is a significant challenge as past research has demonstrated that a growing cumulative funding deficit of \$1.9 billion may already be accrued by Ontario's public colleges by 2024-2025³.

¹ (Colleges Ontario 2017)

² See appendix 6.4.3 for a more in depth definition of students at risk

³ (PwC 2017)

Figure 1: Breakdown of costs (including overhead) and funding sources for programs serving postsecondary college students at risk



- Colleges face funding pressures for student at risk programs, even as outcomes improve:** Total MAESD operating grant funding per enrolled college student declined from \$7,000 in 2010-2011 to \$6,400 in 2015-2016⁴. In addition, funds are increasingly tied to specific at risk groups. This is limiting the flexibility of colleges to make decisions regarding the allocation of resources according to the specific needs of their students. Meanwhile, the gap in student success between at risk and other students appears to be narrowing. Driven by improved employment outcomes for students at risk graduating because of these programs, investments for postsecondary funded student at risk programs address an important social priority, while also providing a clear economic benefit through a strong estimated 13% public rate of return.
- Many initial innovation opportunities are already being pursued:** Colleges are currently diverting significant funds from general operations and academic programming to provide student at risk support programs and services. This approach is not sustainable. As a result, colleges have pursued a number of innovations aimed at doing more with less. These include shifting towards more proactive and holistic student support to address problems before a crisis occurs, expanding faculty and staff involvement, adopting new technological solutions, and building community partnerships that share resources and knowledge.

1.2 Areas of opportunity

Through this analysis it is clear that Ontario’s public colleges are under increasing pressure regarding support for students at risk, even though these programs represent a strong public investment. In response, a few potential areas of opportunity have been suggested that highlight important innovations and opportunities identified during the interviews. It is important to note that many of these areas of opportunity came from colleges themselves, who proposed that these could alleviate some pressure, improve sustainability and enhance student success – to the benefit of students, colleges and the province.

⁴ Based on 2010-2011 and 2015-2016 MAESD funding to colleges (not adjusted for inflation), provided by Colleges Ontario

These opportunity areas are organized into four themes:

- **Improve collaboration to manage colleges' complex mandates** by expanding collaboration with colleges, MAESD, other ministries and community groups, establishing pilot projects to test new approaches and sharing resources between postsecondary institutions
- **Engage key stakeholders proactively regarding policy changes** by involving colleges in government policy development and engaging faculty and staff in expanded student support
- **Focus on proactive care and sustainable funding models** by advocating for proactive student care and promoting greater continuity of funding
- **Streamline transitions into postsecondary education** by encouraging the Ministry of Education to modify high school programs to better meet college requirements

A frequent question raised during this research was “is this different than before”. It is clear that some of these challenges are not new, but that colleges are facing significant sustainability issues regarding their support for students at risk. Many student at risk groups are from the fastest growing populations, such as First Nations and recent immigrants. The ability of these students to attain the required skills to succeed in the college environment and the economy of the future is dependent upon receiving significant non-academic support. Ontario’s public colleges see an opportunity, with greater support, to sustainably serve these groups as the province drives towards creating a knowledge based, innovative and inclusive economy. This report has aimed to highlight important opportunities for key stakeholders, including government and college administrators, to collaborate in order to address these challenges and prepare for the future.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

In the September 2016 Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) mandate letter, Ontario's Premier, Kathleen Wynne, declared job creation and inclusive growth as the provincial government's primary policy objectives. Two key priorities related to this have been making postsecondary education more affordable and more accessible. The first priority has been tackled through the Ontario Student Grant, aimed at providing free tuition for tens of thousands of Ontario students. The second priority however has required, and will require, significant effort from postsecondary educational institutions to attract and retain student groups at risk of not completing postsecondary education⁵.

As the primary traditional provider of career training and certification, Ontario's public colleges are expected to be a key driver of education for these under-represented student at risk populations⁶. In particular, the Ontario government has directed Ontario's colleges to enhance educational access for people from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, mature students and indigenous students. Meanwhile, MAESD has established stronger requirements on postsecondary educational institutions regarding accessibility and accommodation for students with disabilities⁷, sexual assault policy and reporting⁸ and enhanced mental health services for students. These policy changes are perceived to have broadened the mandate and expectations placed upon Ontario's public colleges.

Furthermore, the complexity of individual student needs are increasing. According to the VPs of Student Services interviewed as part of the research for this report, many students arriving at college are lacking the basic math and literacy skills that are required to be successful. Colleges also report that they are grappling with lower resilience and independence in new students. External research supports this, with Ontario ranking below the country average results for resilience according to the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results⁹. Other research has also highlighted troubling trends in Canadian literacy and numeracy skills, including students attending postsecondary education in Ontario¹⁰. The number of postsecondary college students with disabilities has increased by 41% over the past five years, with an increasing number of these students having cognitive disabilities¹¹.

Ontario's colleges have responded over time to these evolving demands by making concerted efforts to support students at risk of not graduating from their programs. These efforts include recruitment and outreach programs that work with community partners to help students decide whether to apply and accept entrance offers, orientation programs to ease the transition into college and learning supports to make college more accessible to students from all backgrounds. Colleges have also focused on enhancing the retention and intervention services provided to proactively address barriers to student success.

Targeted government grants have been provided to colleges to focus on specific student at risk populations, however the majority of the costs of these programs and services are funded through

⁵ (Ontario 2016b)

⁶ See definition of students at risk in Appendix 6.4.3

⁷ (Ontario 2015)

⁸ (Ontario 2016b)

⁹ (The Conference Board of Canada 2017)

¹⁰ (Dion and Maldonado 2013; Dion 2014)

¹¹ Data provided by Colleges Ontario and the year-end reports from college disabilities offices

diversions from core programming budgets. Additionally, some of these grants were provided on a one-time basis and require applications that may not initially be offered to all colleges (e.g., Mental Health Innovation Funding¹²). While MAESD is responding by providing stable funding for some at risk groups (i.e., ongoing funding through the Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities), significant gaps remain. As a result, colleges are diverting substantial funding from core programming. Past research has demonstrated that a continuation of these status quo patterns of funding to Ontario's colleges may lead to \$1.9 billion in cumulative debt by 2025, with proportionally larger deficits in small or rural colleges¹³. Ontario's quickly aging demographics also suggest that the traditional pool of college-age population will decline, forcing these institutions to broaden their recruitment efforts¹⁴. The provincial government has acknowledged this, with deputy Premier and Minister Deb Matthews saying: "The issue of demographic change is real...the changes to [financial aid] mean there is a huge potential...for more participation from indigenous students, from mature students"¹⁵. However, the capacity to continue this expansion without diverting resources from the core mandate may be limited.

As a result, Ontario's colleges are raising concerns over their ability to sustainably fulfill both their core educational access mandate and the broader mandate they have evolved to take on.

2.2 Scope of the analysis

This analysis focused on the role of Ontario's 24 public colleges in enabling students at risk to successfully achieve their educational and career goals. Specifically, this analysis focused on identifying key trends related to students at risk, estimating the cost of providing an evolving portfolio of student at risk supports and estimating the resulting benefits provided to government and society. Through this research areas of opportunity were developed for the Ontario government and college administrators.

2.3 Purpose and objectives

Deloitte completed this study on behalf of Colleges Ontario to explore the role of Ontario's colleges in serving students at risk of not completing college studies (see Appendix 6.4.3 for a definition of a "student at risk"). This analysis will be an update of a Deloitte study completed five years ago to assess the number of students at risk, the range of programs to help them and the incremental costs involved¹⁶. The original report found that colleges were diverting funding from other purposes to provide support services to students at risk, and that these support services had become part of the core business of the colleges. The report also found that the skilled labour supply produced by colleges, in particular through the enhanced success of students from at risk groups, is integral to ensuring that Ontario's economy remains robust¹⁷.

The updated analysis in this report focused on three key areas:

- Surveying colleges to understand the costs incurred by colleges to help students at risk
- Interviewing select Vice Presidents of Student Services, from both English and Francophone colleges, to assess whether pressures to attract, retain and graduate students at risk have changed in the past five years or are expected to change in the next decade

¹² (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development 2017)

¹³ (PwC 2017)

¹⁴ (PwC 2017)

¹⁵ (Simona Chiose 2017)

¹⁶ (Deloitte 2012)

¹⁷ (Deloitte 2012)

- Analyzing the growing student demand for mental health services and the increasing complexity of their needs.

This research aimed to provide critical information required to illustrate the implications and costs associated with raising the province's educational attainment rate, especially for under-represented groups, in order to enable the inclusive growth the province seeks.

3 Approach

Deloitte leveraged previously completed research¹⁸ and collaborated with Colleges Ontario to guide the overall research direction and to gain connections to each of the 24 colleges contacted for the study.

3.1 Public (government) cost benefit approach

To analyze the costs and benefits of programs and services to support students at risk, Deloitte administered a financial cost survey to all 24 of Ontario's public colleges (see Appendix 6.4.1 for a sample financial survey). The response rate was 100%. To calculate the additional costs and public benefits from these programs and services, Deloitte leveraged statistics from reliable sources, such as Statistics Canada, and the expertise of college administrators. Due to limitations in available data required to project future costs and benefits, reasonable assumptions were made as necessary. The majority of assumptions within the analysis remained consistent with past research, while most data inputs were updated using newer, comparable data from reliable sources (see Appendix 6.4.2 for a full list of sources and assumptions). Overall assumptions regarding the number of full time equivalent students, the number of students at risk served and the improved graduation rate for these students due to the programs and services were developed using pre-existing research and verified through collaboration with Colleges Ontario.

This analysis aimed to understand the total costs involved with supporting students at risk and to estimate the benefits to society due to an increased graduation rate and educational attainment for these groups. The financial costs associated with this investment relate to the direct program costs of the services provided, the additional retention costs associated with the college grants required for the additional students commencing and completing college, and the lost tax revenue due to students stopping or reducing their working hours while attending college. Governments receive a benefit from these investments through increased tax revenue, reduced employment insurance spending and reduced social assistance spending for these additional college graduates¹⁹. This analysis does not include the benefits such as economic growth spillover effects, health benefits, civic participation benefits and intergenerational benefits. Each of these cost-benefit areas and approaches are explained in more detail in Appendix 6.4.2.

Note that to better understand the actual investment made by the colleges into these programs, an estimated overhead rate was developed with each of the colleges. Since many Ministry grants are not eligible to cover these indirect expenses, overhead was excluded from the net present value and internal rate of return figures. The applicable programs and services for inclusion in these program costs are included in Appendix 6.4. Funding related to financial support was purposefully excluded from these totals as it is considered a core function of the college that would still exist otherwise.

3.2 Stakeholder consultations

To better understand the evolving nature of support for students at risk, interviews were conducted with the VPs of Student Services from 9 colleges in March of 2017. The interviewees shared both perspectives from their experience and through particularly impactful stories from individual students.

¹⁸ (Deloitte 2012)

¹⁹ These benefits from additional college graduates may accrue to both Federal and Provincial governments, although the funding for students at risk programming is primarily received through the Provincial government

The colleges were chosen to provide a representative mix of geography, size, and language. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, with an interview guide distributed to the interviewees in advance (see Appendix 6.2 for a copy of the interview guide). To ensure accuracy and appropriate representation of these interviews, specific quotes or figures referenced during these interviews were verified through follow-up communication.

3.3 Areas of opportunity

Based on these findings and conclusions, some initial insights and areas of opportunity have been identified for government and college administrators. A key emerging theme was an opportunity for greater collaboration and communication between stakeholders. This report therefore aims to address this gap by encouraging sector wide collaboration to better understand the needs of student groups at risk and the support network required to enable their success. These insights are aimed at enabling the inclusive growth the province seeks.

4 Overview of findings

Colleges in Ontario are raising sustainability concerns regarding their ability to fulfill an ever growing mandate without corresponding funding increases. This has important implications not only for the provincial economy, but also for the individual students who depend upon these services on a daily basis. These findings emerged from four overarching trends with respect to students at risk in Ontario:

1. The need and expectation for colleges to support students at risk is increasing
2. The cost of supporting students at risk is increasing
3. Colleges face funding pressures for student at risk programs, even as outcomes improve
4. Many initial innovation opportunities are already being pursued by the colleges

These trends are expected to have important implications for our province and the economy. Based on the financial analysis conducted for this report, **colleges spend \$165 million (not including overhead) on student at risk programs and services** funded through MAESD Post Secondary grants. This is paid for primarily through diversions from general operations and academic programming with only **\$45 million being supported through targeted MAESD funding**. These investments address an important social priority while also providing a clear economic benefit through an estimated **13% public rate of return**. This is generated through increased tax revenue, reduced employment insurance and reduced social assistance requirements resulting from the additional college graduates produced because of these programs²⁰. If the trends mentioned above continue, students from at risk groups could face the risk of significant reductions in the support services provided by colleges. In turn, this will result in a reduced ability to fulfill the broader mandate of the colleges and potentially the externalization of the costs of supporting these students from the colleges onto society.

4.1 The need and expectation for colleges to support students at risk is increasing

Ontario's colleges are facing increased needs across most, if not all, student groups at risk. It has reached the point where some colleges feel that the majority of their students are at risk and require specialized support. For example, one VP of Student Services claimed that "when you are talking about students at risk, you are talking about our students". Specifically, growth has occurred within the populations of students with disabilities (including mental health related issues), indigenous students, recent immigrants and mature learners. A feedback loop appears to be developing as

"We have a mandate to ensure that the student is not only academically ready for the marketplace, but the community is also now expecting us to include helping the at risk student population in our mandate...to help these students integrate into the community and into the workplace" Renée Hallée, Director of Student Services, Boréal College

colleges have become more successful with specific student groups at risk, leading to higher enrollment from these groups. Overall, this is leading to larger aggregate student at risk numbers relative to general enrollment. Increasing complexity of student needs and higher expectations for student support within these groups are also contributing to the growing pressure on colleges. For example,

²⁰ This rate excludes overhead from program costs. See Appendix 6.4 for more in depth methodology

more students are arriving at college with personalized learning plans created in high school. These students may expect that student services in college will also offer personalized learning plans, although resources are not necessarily available for individualized programming.

Due to these factors, interviews with colleges revealed that they are experiencing a growing tension between supporting increased numbers of students at risk that require higher levels of support and upgrading, and producing highly qualified, capable graduates that will uphold the reputation of the colleges and their graduates.

Recent immigrants are one example of an at risk student group, as colleges continue to be a frequent destination for recent immigrants. The proportion of students who do not speak English or French as a first language has increased from 18% of the college student population in 2010-2011 to 23% in 2015-2016²¹. These students often require significant

“We have been accepting more displaced persons that before, such as a group of Syrian refugees...these students are smaller in numbers, but require much more significant support.” Craig Stephenson, VP of Student Services, Centennial College

orientation support to ease the transition into postsecondary education. Many also require substantial academic upgrading and language support. Research has suggested that first generation immigrants, who made up approximately 13% of college applicants in 2015²², may arrive too late to obtain a correct non-visible disability diagnosis prior to postsecondary education²³. This can create new challenges for administrators and staff. Anecdotally, many colleges reported that their recent immigrant student population was arriving from an increasingly diverse set of countries. This can create new challenges with integrating the students into the community. As a more recent development, many colleges also reported an increase in the number of refugee students. These students often have complex mental health and cultural adjustments beyond those of the typical non-Canadian born students.

“In the Waterloo region 70-80% of new jobs require some form of postsecondary education to apply, yet Waterloo doesn’t produce graduates at those rates...as a result, we are focusing on training displaced workers to rejoin the workforce...these groups have unique needs.” Mike Dinning, VP of Student Services, Conestoga College

Mature learners can also be considered an at risk group. Many colleges reported increased numbers of non-traditional learners returning to school for upskilling. This is caused in part due to disruption in the economy. For example, most colleges involved in the study are grappling with a growing number of students who have been displaced from manufacturing jobs and have been encouraged to return to school. Colleges Ontario data reveals that the

percent of college students who are older than 21 years of age was 60% in 2015²⁴. Furthermore, the percentage of college applicants who do not apply directly from high school has increased from 63.4% in 2010-2011 to an estimated 67.7% in 2015-2016²⁵.

These students have different expectations and may not be used to classroom style learning. Colleges have been investing additional resources into mature-student specific onboarding and advising to proactively address concerns that may prevent these students from commencing or completing college. The need for these programs is clear. Some colleges reported offering new math “boot camps” to support under-prepared students that get filled immediately. Conestoga has created a Tech Tutors

²¹ (Colleges Ontario 2017)

²² (Colleges Ontario 2017)

²³ (Sweet et al. 2012)

²⁴ (Colleges Ontario 2017)

²⁵ (Colleges Ontario 2017)

program to help primarily mature students learn more about technology²⁶. Furthermore, increasing numbers of mature learners are attending college after university and they often expect a similar level of support as universities provide, even though colleges receive approximately half of the funding relative to universities²⁷.

Indigenous student populations provide a third example. The numbers of indigenous students have increased at many of the colleges, with 7% of new registrants in 2015-2016 identifying as Aboriginal, relative to 3% in 2010-

2011²⁸. Increases in the number of First Nations, Inuit and Metis who are completing high school have contributed to this growth in indigenous college student numbers, especially as university attainment rates for this population still lag behind those of the general population²⁹. This increase has been driven in part through greater, more intentional outreach to indigenous communities, but also due to an increased willingness of individuals to self-identify. A number of colleges have reported inviting elders into residences on campus, founding aboriginal centres and holding aboriginal ceremonies throughout the year. Some colleges, such as Sault have engaged a positive mix of indigenous

"We have started hosting more drop in events at our indigenous education centre and have been experiencing huge uptake from all types of students...we have had around 2,000 students attend these events, yet we don't have anywhere close to 2,000 aboriginal students." Janice Beatty, VP of Student Services, Sault College

"[we] run programs for 8 aboriginal students, while the minimum size for general domestic students is at least 40 students." Wayne Poirier, VP of Student Services, Mohawk College

students, international students, and non-indigenous domestic students through these programs. Other colleges, such as Centennial College have developed mentorship programs for indigenous students aimed at reducing barriers to success. The release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report has added momentum towards these efforts.

Mental health has also been an important area of concern for colleges because a number of key, complicated mental health concerns arise most frequently during the typical ages of engaging in postsecondary education. These issues can also be enabled by the stress and lack of exercise that often occur for college students. These include but are not limited to schizophrenia³⁰, anxiety, depression, and mood disorders³¹. The rates of students who are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, psychiatric conditions and other disabilities have also increased dramatically in Ontario in the past three years³². Some of these increases may be caused by higher self-identification rates and greater outreach by students with mental health concerns due to reduced stigma over these disabilities. For example, the percent of college students self-reporting the use of special needs/disability services has increased to 14% as of 2015-2016³³. Enrollment in accessibility programs has increased across most colleges interviewed for this study. Students with diagnosed disabilities and mental health concerns often require greater support than other students.

²⁶ (Woodley 2017)

²⁷ (Financial Accountability Office of Ontario 2016)

²⁸ (Colleges Ontario 2017, 2012)

²⁹ (Bougie, Kelly-Scott, and Arriagada 2013)

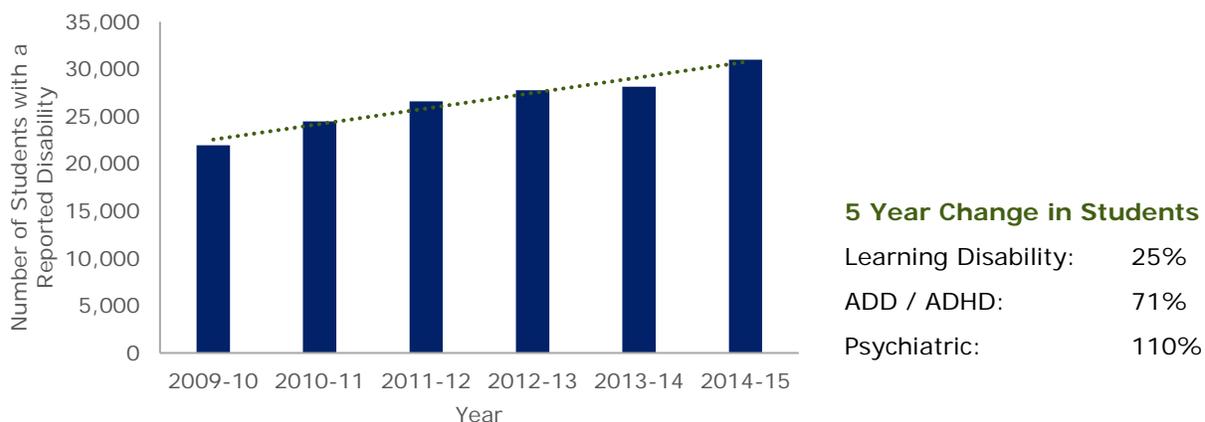
³⁰ (Canada's Public Policy Forum 2014)

³¹ (Findlay 2017)

³² (American College Health Association 2016, 2013)

³³ (Colleges Ontario 2017)

Figure 2: Number of Students with Disabilities attending Ontario's Colleges, by year³⁴



Insight Snapshot: Mental Health on Campus

The study was expanded to include a greater focus on mental health due to the trend towards increasingly prevalent mental health challenges for students in postsecondary education. To explore this topic, a series of follow up group interviews were organized with the same colleges interviewed for the broader report (see Appendix 6.5 for more detail).

These interviews suggest that Ontario's colleges are approaching a tipping point with rising demands from a growing number of students facing mental health challenges and due to an increasing complexity of cases. These cases are presenting important challenges and opportunities for the colleges moving forward. Although the challenges from increased strain on limited staff resources are real, the colleges stressed that this should not be portrayed as a purely negative story, due to reduced stigma around mental health and stronger student success rates for students with mental health challenges.

Data availability can be challenging due to the complicated nature of categorizing mental health, however these trends can be illustrated by the **increased complexity** of cases (e.g., illustrated by a 26% increase in the number of counselling visits per student at Mohawk College since 2013-2014 and an almost five-fold increase in the number of case management visits reserved for more serious cases at Centennial College since 2014-2015). This is also illustrated through the **growing number of students** registering with college accessibility centres and the types of diagnoses being registered. Data is limited on the underlying causes behind these mental health challenges, though many colleges specifically mentioned growing numbers of students with addictions issues and co-morbidity of diagnoses, which both present new, more complex challenges. At Durham College for example, the number of students with a mental health diagnosis has risen over 69% since 2014-2015 and the percent of students with co-morbidity of mental health diagnoses has increased from 15% in 2012-2013 to 41% in 2016-2017 (See Figure II for more details).

“Complex cases can be a real challenge for a college’s support team. It does not take many complex cases to really burden down or overwhelm the student support services centre.”
 Meg Houghton, Director, Student Access, Wellness and Development, Humber College

³⁴ Data provided by Colleges Ontario and the year-end reports from college disabilities offices

Figure II: Access and Support Centre Data, Durham College



In addition to the above trends, most colleges indicated that they are also experiencing increasingly frequent and more challenging accommodation requests from students (i.e., retaking tests, requesting extensions on project deadlines, missing class for extended periods). Some of these new challenges with accommodation are due to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) decision in 2016 to remove the requirements to first disclose a diagnosis before gaining access to accommodation. These requests can create significant scheduling and planning challenges, and increase the need for coordination and collaboration across faculty and staff. Two case studies listed below help illustrate the highly contextual, often complex needs and accommodation requirements of students facing mental health challenges:

Stories from the front line:

- A student with a mental health condition started at Durham College after a failed attempt at another college. The student was previously receiving accommodations through extra time on tests, but was unprepared for the non-academic demands of postsecondary education. Durham College set up ongoing Accessibility coach appointments, weekly peer mentoring appointments and connected the student with other services. As a result, the student was successful in completing the program and is thinking of continuing for further postsecondary education.
- A student was diagnosed with ADHD and mental health challenges regarding emotional regulation. The student is currently working through a second attempt at college and receives support through bi-weekly counselling, bi-weekly wellness coaching, crisis drop-in support, extensive use of learning skills advisors, and a mental health nurse. Some involvement by the Dean has been required given the nature of the student's requests. The student is currently progressing well, but requires ongoing emotional management support.

In response to these trends, colleges are developing innovative models to better triage students into the appropriate care in order to enable more proactive care while reducing the burden on the college support system. For example, Collège Boréal shifted their model to better ensure students with less complex mental health needs are being referred to appropriate counselling and provided with resources to help them manage their mental health. At times this involves providing informal "compassionate chats" before initiating formal case management. Colleges are also beginning to enhance mental health education on campus to reduce stigma and enhance knowledge on the topic, while building the resiliency of graduates in preparation for life after postsecondary education.

Demand for campus support services has been increasing without corresponding resource increases, creating real challenges in enabling the success of these students. Nonetheless, colleges stressed that this should not be portrayed as a purely negative story. All saw positives in reduced stigma, greater understanding of mental health, and enhanced support for students. Students with more complex mental health concerns typically have been considered at risk, but the student success gap appears to have narrowed between students with mental health challenges and other students. As a result of investments by the colleges, students who previously would have struggled to integrate and contribute to the community and Ontario's economy are now able to do so.

Recent data from the colleges suggests that the total number of students with disabilities has increased by 41% from approximately 22,000 students in 2009-2010 to 31,000 in the 2014-2015 school year³⁵. The growth has been fastest in psychiatric or mental health related disabilities, autism and attention deficit related disorders³⁶. As an additional challenge, students with mental health concerns are becoming much more likely to seek out support on campus. In response, colleges have begun speaking about creating a “community based integrated model, located on campus” enabled by community level service arrangements for students to receive care and support without wait. This may be helping to drive lower stigma on campus.

It may also be caused by community partners referring more student patients onto campus to take advantage of shorter wait times. In response to growing need, some colleges have also reported launching new pilot programs specifically targeting students on the autism spectrum. For example, Durham College recently initiated a social group for residence students on the spectrum and Centennial College recently launched a career services program specifically for students with disabilities. Sault College has also developed a Mental Health Hub in partnership with Algoma University, Sault Area Hospital, CMHA Algoma, Algoma District and Huron Superior Catholic District School Boards, and St. John’s Ambulance. The model aims to enhance the capacity to support student mental health and wellbeing³⁷. Pressure on colleges is also rising as schools are grappling with more complicated individual student needs, driven in part by students with disabilities becoming more successful in the high school system. The impact on colleges is proportionally higher than universities because some disabilities sub-categories, such as students with special needs, are much more likely to pursue college rather than university. This is often due to course restrictions placed on these students

“There have been large increases in student response rates for stress and anxiety...even if the percentage of students being served are not growing, the same students are touching down multiple times.”
Wayne Poirier, VP of Student Services, Mohawk College

in high school that limit their ability to attend university³⁸. An implication of this has been new, challenging situations as these individual students with complex needs often require an un-proportionally higher level of resourcing and programming. This can be driven, for example, by individual student learning plans and additional direct connections to community partners and external support systems. The colleges refer to this as a holistic wraparound support model. For example, one college discussed the challenge of supporting a student

with autism who wanted to complete a degree in Engineering. Another college was working with a colour blind student who was pursuing an electrician’s degree. These cases were not being seen 10 or 15 years ago. To enable these students to be successful requires close collaboration between faculty, academic advising staff, student services and potentially the student’s high school. These examples illustrate the difficult decisions faced by colleges regarding the appropriate level of accessibility to provide to students. Many colleges reported greater complexity created by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) regulations and Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) ruling on retroactive accommodation for unreported mental health issues³⁹.

³⁵ Data provided by Colleges Ontario and the year-end reports from college disabilities offices

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health 2017)

³⁸ (Sweet et al. 2012)

³⁹ (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2016)

4.2 The cost of supporting students at risk is increasing

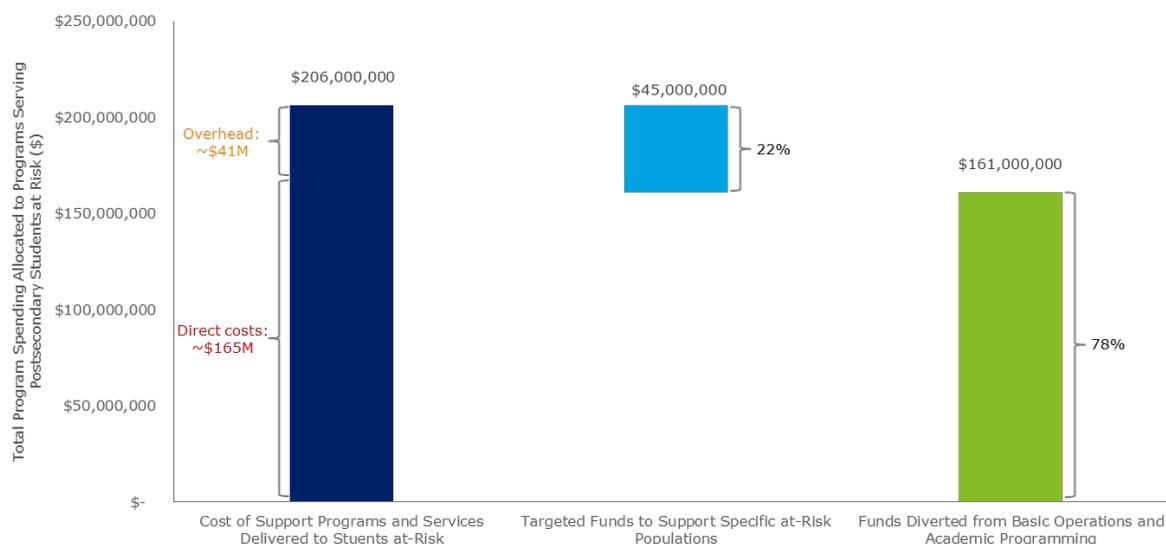
The total annual direct cost of support for students at risk for government-funded postsecondary students, excluding financial aid, is estimated at \$165 million, or \$1,100 per enrolled student. This is an increase of 15% since 2010-2011 and now represents 11% of the 2015-2016 MAESD operating and special purpose grants received by colleges. Key drivers of this increase in cost are expanding demand for services and growing compliance related costs.

Furthermore, the colleges already cover an estimated \$41 million in indirect costs that cover expenses such as facilities, utilities, non-allocated salaries and supplies, resulting in an estimated \$206M in total cost to support programs and services delivered to students at risk. Past research has argued that these costs are rising, especially with regards to the aging facilities of Ontario’s colleges⁴⁰.

“Even if we get new money for projects, we put in place services and after the project is over, it often simply increases the demand from students and the workload without allowing us to increase permanent staffing levels.” Renée Hallée, Director of Student Services, Boréal College

Targeted funds to support specific student at risk populations have in fact increased from \$37M in 2010-2011 to \$45M in 2015-2106⁴¹. These targeted funds already leave a gap of \$161M (78%) that is diverted from basic operations and academic programming⁴². Meanwhile, MAESD base funding within the college funding framework has remained relatively flat in the past five years. It should also be recognized that the Government has announced a further \$6M in annual funding for mental health services in the postsecondary sector.

Figure 1: Breakdown of costs (including overhead) and funding sources for programs serving postsecondary college students at risk



⁴⁰ (PwC 2017)

⁴¹ Based on 2010-2011 and 2015-2016 MAESD funding to colleges, provided by colleges Ontario

⁴² Ibid. Targeted funds include Aboriginal Student Success Fund for Aboriginal Postsecondary Institutions, Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities, Interpreters Fund, Support Services for Hearing Impaired, First Generation Institutional Grants, Autism Spectrum Disorder Pilot, Child and Youth Mental Health, Aboriginal targeted initiative fund

4.3 Colleges face funding pressures for student at risk programs, even as outcomes improve

Total MAESD **operating grant funding per enrolled college student** has declined from approximately **\$7,000** in 2010-2011 to **\$6,400** in 2015-2016⁴³. This occurs even though anecdotally the retention gap between students at risk and the general student population appears to be closing, especially with indigenous students and students with disabilities. As discussed previously, the funds being provided are increasingly tied to specific at risk groups. For example, MAESD provides funding that is directly allocated to specific at risk groups through the Aboriginal Student Success Fund for Aboriginal Postsecondary Institutions, Aboriginal Targeted Initiatives, the Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities, the Interpreters Fund, Support Services for Hearing Impaired, Autism Spectrum Disorder Pilot, Child and Youth Mental Health and First Generation Institutional Grants.

“For students with mental health issues, the retention rate has closed to within a few percent of students without mental health issues...there used to be a gap of about 6-7% in retention rates, so the gap is closing.” Janice Beatty, VP of Student Services, Sault College

In response to these budgetary pressures, colleges have been diversifying their fundraising efforts. In particular, colleges have been driven to increase their recruitment of international students to access new revenue sources. In addition to expanding international recruitment, colleges have been applying to more non-MAESD funding sources, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Local Poverty Reduction Fund⁴⁴. Some colleges have also begun canvassing the private sector for funds with varying degrees of success. One college included in the study successfully passed a student resolution to levy a new

“We have been reaching out to other groups for funding, but there is not a lot of money out there...we aren’t seen as health care providers...we chase everything we see potential for, but are often not successful. Our students see this as such a critical issue that they have partnered with us to invest dollars in our programming.” Janice Beatty, VP of Student Services, Sault College

ancillary fee to pay for some mental health services, however, most colleges have not implemented such plans. These fundraising efforts require significant amounts of time and energy, and the general consensus is that there is little money available.

Based on this study, spending on student at risk programs and services represent a strong investment for governments by delivering an estimated **public rate of return of 13%**, and a **net present value of \$198 million**⁴⁵. This return is calculated based on costs from:

- **Direct program spending on student at risk programs and services:** Total direct spending on programs for student at risk programs and services has increased from **\$144 million** in 2010-2011 to **\$165 million** 2015-2016 and now represents **11% of total MAESD operating grant funding**
- **Increased retention:** Student at risk programs cost the government an estimated **\$84 million in total increased funding costs** allocated over a two year period (the length of a typical college degree) due to higher student retention

⁴³ Based on 2010-2011 and 2015-2016 MAESD funding to colleges, provided by Colleges Ontario

⁴⁴ (Government of Ontario 2015)

⁴⁵ See appendix 6.4 for detailed assumptions and a summary of approach

- **Lost tax revenues:** These programs cost governments an estimated **\$20 million** in total lost tax revenue over a two year period from students leaving full time work to attend college

These costs are more than offset by benefits resulting from the additional college graduates through:

- **Increased annual tax revenues:** Higher wages generated by these additional college graduates create **\$18 million to \$48 million** in total increased annual tax revenue, with the variance depending upon the average incomes by age bracket for college graduates relative to high school graduates
- **Employment insurance savings:** The government benefits from an estimated **\$350 thousand** in total annual employment insurance savings because of stronger employment outcomes for these college graduates
- **Social assistance savings:** The government further benefits from **\$15 million in annual social assistance savings** from stronger employment outcomes for these college graduates

As a result, it is clear that investments in student at risk programs represent a strong public investment, even with without accounting for well-established additional benefits such as economic growth spillover effects, health benefits, civic participation benefits and intergenerational benefits.

4.4 Many initial innovation opportunities are already being pursued by the colleges

A majority of the colleges interviewed for the report indicated a shift had occurred towards more proactive and holistic student support. The goal of this shift has been to address problems before a crisis occurs. Other innovations have also been pursued regarding faculty and staff involvement, technological solutions, and community partnerships to share resources and knowledge. All of these innovations are being pursued to address rising needs and student complexity with the limited resources that are available. As a result, these innovations are driving towards doing more with less, while 78% of funds (\$161 million) are being diverted from basic operations and academic programming to pay for the net costs to colleges for student at risk programs and mitigate the gap in funding.

4.4.1 Proactive student care

The colleges are trying to shift towards proactive models of student care in a number of ways. The most common shift in college support to students over the past five years has been to reimagine the advising model itself. There is an increased focus on the advisor initiating more coordination across departments to provide holistic support to individual students, combined with increased specialization and enhanced training. Some colleges have begun co-locating offices to reduce the barriers to access and to enable support service providers to multitask and more quickly adjust to evolving demand. New, more specialized offices have also opened in response to growing areas of student need, such as mental health and wellness. Other colleges suggested that they are becoming more efficient at supporting students with disabilities as their staff gain greater experience and establish precedents. Specifically, this has enabled greater efficiency when determining the appropriate accessibility accommodations for individual students with complex needs. The hope is that this institutional learning will translate to other student at risk areas as well.

*"It is our goal as an organization to become more nimble...to use more user or student centric design."
Laura Stanbra, VP of Student Services, Algonquin College*

Other innovations have focused on reimagining the transition period into college. This has been pursued through new orientation and upgrading programs for under-prepared learners that often are quickly oversubscribed. In addition, colleges are collaborating more closely with school boards to share individual learning plans. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints less effort has been allocated to the transition from college into society and the workforce, however, this may be a future area of focus. For example, some colleges have started to consider developing resilience and life skills in their students so that they can better succeed in the community. Other colleges now provide surveys to students at the start of each semester to pre-identify any warning signs and proactively reach out to provide support. Unfortunately, these can be expensive to coordinate.

"I spoke with an academic counsellor...she said you can't solve a student's academic problems until you address the underlying problems...we can't reasonably talk about test scores if a student's life is falling apart around them." Janice Beatty, VP of Student Services, Sault College

4.4.2 Staff and faculty engagement

Most colleges involved in the study discussed mental health first aid training that had been provided to their faculty and staff. This initiative had been funded through a government grant to Humber College to provide training to all the colleges⁴⁶. This training was initiated in response to the rising incidence of mental health and anxiety issues among students, combined with a recognition that academic and personal challenges are often interlinked. This initiative has been widely hailed as a success. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence has been the expansion of faculty roles beyond the comfort level of some. Recently, colleges have begun reporting some resistance from staff, in the form of disengagement and increasing sick leave or burnout.

4.4.3 Technological investments

To address cost concerns, colleges have already begun to use various models of service delivery in an attempt to maximize the amount of face to face interaction with students. A number of the colleges interviewed have also made significant investments in technology, such as customer relationship management (CRM) software to better track interactions with students. These are aimed at enabling truly holistic student care by sharing information between departments and reducing the time spent on administrative functions. The VPs of Student Services interviewed hope to eventually use analytics to become better at proactively identifying students who may drop out, or worse, go into crisis. Unfortunately, these efforts require significant investment, especially as some colleges are grappling with legacy information systems. As a result, many colleges are lacking the funding to make this a priority.

"We are trying to use automation in the right way and at the right time...looking into using technology to maximize the high impact in person support...legacy information systems are making this change slow and expensive." Laura Stanbra, VP of Student Services, Algonquin College

4.4.4 Stronger community partnerships

As colleges perceive that their mandate has broadened into other areas of student support beyond academics, there has been an increased emphasis on community partnerships. Most colleges involved in the study have formed strong relationships with the school boards and high schools in their regions. These focus on better preparing students for the transition into postsecondary education. A number of colleges have also formed relationships with health service providers or agencies, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), to provide services to students and to train staff. A few colleges have established close ties with First Nations and northern communities to identify and prepare potential students for college. For example, Centennial College has formed close relationships

⁴⁶ (Laux 2013)

with local chiefs and connects with them on a regular basis. Many colleges have started engaging with more employers to tailor course content and improve employment outcomes for students at risk. All of these efforts provide important benefits to students in the form of smoother transitions in and out of college that increase their potential for success. Canadore and the other smaller or northern colleges also reported a greater focus on community economic development that has led them to get involved in regional planning groups in order to better fill local skilled trades gaps. Unfortunately, many of the colleges interviewed expressed concerns over the capacity of the colleges and these partners to continue sustaining these relationships without fresh financial and political support.

4.5 Potential impacts

The analysis and consultations completed for this report illustrated a number of important potential impacts if the status quo is maintained in the face of the emerging trends discussed above. These include a shift from proactive to reactive student care, rising tensions over resource inequality, reduced collaboration with community partners and declining student access ultimately leading to negative impacts on student success.

4.5.1 A shift from proactive to reactive care

The VPs of Student Services interviewed for this report universally suggested that new innovations around proactive, holistic student at risk care and advising would be unsustainable without additional general funding. These advancements have been based on significant research that suggests proactive student support and advising⁴⁷ enhances student success outcomes such as graduation rates⁴⁸.

“Our current model is better and has fewer incidences of crisis, where hospitals and the police need to be involved...it is very expensive to send someone to hospital, and we can avoid more of these crises through preventative and proactive approaches...making referrals earlier.” Janice Beatty, VP of Student Services, Sault College

Research, primarily conducted in the United States, suggests that these interventions are particularly important in commuter campuses, similar to many colleges in Ontario⁴⁹. The interviewees suggested that a reduction in staffing levels of 10-15%, which could occur without future funding increases, would lead to a return to reactive, crisis management student services. These would focus on preventing harm rather than promoting student success. Proactive systems require

significant upfront and ongoing investment, however, most interviewees suggested that this support saved the public significant cost. For example, proactively addressing students at risk with mental health concerns is significantly more cost effective to the public rather than simply referring these students to the police.

4.5.2 Rising tensions over resource inequality

Throughout this analysis, Ontario’s public colleges were supportive of collaboration and sharing of best practices. This is particularly true in non-competitive areas such as support for student at risk populations. As an example, Collège Boréal has developed relatively sophisticated video and teleconferencing courses and programs to support their network of 7 campuses and 35 access centres⁵⁰. Other colleges have begun learning from Collège Boréal and are implementing similar networks to reduce service costs and improve student outcomes. Another example is Humber College’s mental health first aid training. In 2013, Humber College received Mental Health Innovation

⁴⁷ Defined as “deliberate personal outreach from advisors to provide information or support to students before they need it” (Varney 2013)

⁴⁸ (Abelman and Molina 2002)

⁴⁹ (Braxton et al. 2013); (Fricker 2015)

⁵⁰ (Bates 2001); (Collège Boréal 2017)

funding to provide mental health first aid training to the province's 24 colleges and a few northern Ontario universities⁵¹. The training was aimed at enabling representatives from each institution to become instructors for mental health first aid in order to quickly scale up to train more staff and reach a greater number of students.

Unfortunately some tension has started to arise due to funding inequality. The previously mentioned Mental Health Innovation Fund has supported 32 projects since 2012⁵², however some colleges have not received any funding. Some efforts appear to be underway to address this⁵³.

4.5.3 Reduced collaboration with community partners and staff

Colleges have expressed concern that their mandate has grown beyond core education to now include providing social services to students at risk in partnership with community groups. Given the significant time and effort required to build and maintain relationships with community partners, many colleges suggested that these may fall by the wayside with further budgetary pressure. These partnerships are integral to the successful transition of students both into college and also into society after graduation. As discussed previously, colleges are getting better at ensuring success for their students through higher graduation rates. Since a college's mandate is primarily to serve its own students, its ability to work with community partners to support graduates in transition to the labour market may be compromised.

"We have developed relationships with a number of community service providers...these providers are running out of funding just as we are running short of funding...often colleges have more scale so we are relied upon more heavily to provide the bulk of the resources, capacity and leadership." Shawn Chorney, VP of Student Services, Canadore College

Collaboration may also potentially lessen between faculty and staff, and student services as faculty and staff are now learning to play a much larger role in student success than simply focusing on students' academic achievements.

4.5.4 Restricted student access

In response to growing budgetary constraints, a number of colleges indicated that some access limitations have recently been placed on high demand or expensive student services, such as counselling. It is expected that this will happen more frequently if funding levels remain at status quo and costs continue to rise. This could lead to increases in wait times that can result in a dramatic negative impact on the success of any intervention. Commonly cited benefits of providing care to students on campus are reduced travel time and shorter wait times, which reduce a significant barrier to students accessing the support they need. This could lead to resistance on access to the appropriate resources both within the college and the health care system.

"The pressures are clear...student wait times are increasing and we have started putting limitations on the number of times advisors see students." Wayne Poirier, VP of Student Services, Mohawk College

⁵¹ (Laux 2013)

⁵² (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development 2017)

⁵³ In March 2017, MAESD indicated that it would provide additional funding of \$100,000 per year to each college and university to offset their costs for front line student mental health service providers. Subsequent to the MAESD commitment, Ministers Matthews and Hoskins announced in May 2017 that additional funding of \$6 million per year for three years would be available to colleges and universities to support mental health services and supports. At the time of publishing, the government had not given any further details on how the college share of the total will be determined

5 Areas of opportunity

Through this analysis it is clear that Ontario's public colleges are under increasing pressure regarding support for students at risk, even though these programs represent a strong public investment. In response, a few potential areas have been suggested that highlight important innovations and opportunities identified during the interviews. It is important to note that many of these areas of opportunity came from colleges themselves, who proposed that these could alleviate some pressure, improve sustainability and enhance student success – to the benefit of students, colleges and the province.

These opportunity areas are organized into four themes: improve collaboration to manage colleges' complex mandates, engage key stakeholders proactively regarding policy changes, focus on proactive care and sustainable funding models, and streamline transitions into postsecondary education.

5.1 Improve collaboration to manage colleges' complex mandates

As discussed previously, most VPs of Student Services involved in this study believe that the mandate of their college has grown to include social, health or community development components. This is creating funding sustainability challenges, but also collaboration opportunities for the sector:

- **Expand collaboration with colleges, MAESD, other ministries and community groups:** Interviewees suggested that positive intentions and goodwill exist between the Ministry and the colleges. The provincial government has been encouraging colleges to offer higher standards of care around accessibility, aboriginal affairs, mental health and sexual violence. In response some colleges have approached other ministries and organizations beyond MAESD for funding and support. Since colleges are feeling greater pressure and expectations to provide social services to their students and the community, interviewees recommended that non-MAESD ministries should be involved in providing program specific funding for colleges. For example, the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation for indigenous programming and the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario could help address accessibility needs for students with disabilities and mental health challenges. Pilot projects established in conjunction with relevant ministries are another means of assessing the impact of new approaches to student care. For example, a pilot project could explore the impact of personalized digital applications on access to mental health support. In addition, interviewees suggested that more opportunities for funding collaboration may exist between the colleges and a broader set of stakeholders in order to unlock greater benefit. The potential from this approach is illustrated by the **13% public rate of return** that benefits ministries beyond MAESD.

“Per our mandate from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development we are focussing on our current students, but as soon as students graduate it becomes a Ministry of Community and Social Services' concern. We wish that there was better collaboration to ensure a more fluid transition of the student into the workplace and social life.” Renée Hallée, Director of Student Services, Boréal College

- **Share resources between postsecondary institutions:** A key theme from the interviews was that each college has developed important innovations in response to growing pressures and expanding college mandates. Support for students at risk was also highlighted as being ripe for greater collaboration across postsecondary institutions as it is a non-competitive area and because clear opportunities to improve long term efficiency exist from sharing resources across institutions. Some colleges have already started to work together more frequently,

however there may be an opportunity to expand these efforts for communal gain. As outlined earlier, Humber offered to coordinate Mental Health First Aid Training for all of the province's public colleges⁵⁴. Colleges have also started to collaborate more closely with other postsecondary institutions. Two examples are Centennial College's mentorship program run in partnership with McGill University⁵⁵ and Mohawk's collaborative programs that share resources with McMaster University⁵⁶, although this model is more academic in nature.

"Student services is less of a competitive field as it is more of a sharing or supporting function...it is a good environment for collaboration right now because of the common pressures we are facing." Jason Hunter, VP of Student Services, Humber College

5.2 Engage key stakeholders proactively on policy changes

Interviewees suggested that evolving policy development has created increased pressure on some stakeholders through greater administrative burdens, and expanding faculty and staff expectations leading to disengagement. On this topic, interviewees offered a few potential opportunities to achieve efficiencies by more effectively engaging key stakeholders regarding key policy changes:

- **Proactively involve colleges in government policy development:** Interviewees suggested that enhanced, proactive collaboration with MAESD could more effectively achieve the province's policy objectives. Moving forward, interviewees suggested that the government could approach colleges to explore and understand the needs of individual students and their communities. Some of the responsibility to collaborate on key policy changes may also rest on the colleges themselves to organize and proactively approach government where possible. The colleges can provide input based on current work to develop student centric programs and services that enhance prevention and support.

"Government level intervention can be blunt...often little time or flexibility are provided for good planning, and reporting is frequent. This takes away from our time with students and stretches us to properly implement other important initiatives". VP of Student Services at a college in Ontario

- **Engage faculty and staff in expanded student support:** Interviews suggest that colleges should explore opportunities to more proactively engage faculty and staff groups prior to rolling out key initiatives. There may be an opportunity to explicitly include support for student groups at risk as a component of faculty and staff job descriptions. If newly hired staff recognize that this is part of their job and are adequately trained to fulfill this role, then there should be greater support and engagement.

5.3 Focus on proactive student care and sustainable funding models

Interviewees suggested that one-time funding can lead to important innovation within the system, but can also create new operational challenges through increased, potentially unsustainable student and community partner expectations. As a result, interviewees identified promoting the business case for proactive student care and advocating for sustainable funding models as key opportunities.

⁵⁴ (Laux 2013)

⁵⁵ (McGill University 2017)

⁵⁶ (McMaster University 2017)

- **Advocate for proactive student care:** Interviewees suggested that it is important to recognize the business case for proactive care in order to ensure funding and fully realize the benefits it provides. These programs involve higher up-front costs which have been linked to longer term savings. As such, many interviewees indicated that any decline in funding could lead to a return to student care focused on individual student crisis management. It was suggested that this is less cost effective in the long run and may pass on additional costs to other stakeholders. To protect funding for proactive student care, stakeholders could collaborate to share data that can effectively demonstrate the value of proactive care. There are also opportunities to share examples of successful messaging or communications used to convince other stakeholders of the business case behind proactive student advising and support. Once equipped with these tools, it will be important for college administrators to consistently reinforce this messaging across all interactions with other key stakeholders.

“Some people think that student services are ‘nice to haves’ rather than ‘need to haves’, however, I would argue that all the data clearly shows that this area is very important for retention. Therefore, it is the right thing to do both ethically and from a business sense.”
Mike Dinning, VP of Student Services, Conestoga College

- **Support innovative approaches by pursuing pilot project funding:** Research suggests that there is important opportunity to test, assess, and learn from the impact of new initiatives on students and college resources. For example, there may be an opportunity to initiate a pilot to assess the impact of personalized digital applications that are intended to improve the mental wellness and resilience of students.
- **Promote greater continuity of funding:** Interviewees suggested that the greatest benefits from students at risk programs occur through the continuity of service provided to students. Interviewees argued that sustainable or renewable funding can provide an opportunity to better encourage long-term student success. As a result, the VPs of Student Services interviewed indicated that a preference exists for greater emphasis on sustainable funding, combined with a thoughtful use of one-time funding programs. For example, there may be opportunities to establish more automatic renewal processes if reasonable, sufficiently high hurdle requirements have been met for initial funding.

“Our college was very fortunate to receive four years of mental health innovation funding, however we won’t be able to continue the enhanced services we have developed without ongoing funding.” Craig Stephenson, VP of Student Services, Centennial College

5.4 Streamline student transitions into postsecondary education

An ongoing challenge discussed by interviewees was a perception that many high school graduates continue to be underprepared for postsecondary education. As a result, colleges have to expend significant resources on upgrading student skills and orienting new students who are underprepared for the rigors of postsecondary education. This suggests an important opportunity for efficiency gains to the system:

- **Encourage the Ministry of Education to improve the transition between secondary schools and college:** Interviewees indicated that because of an ongoing myth in Ontario that those pursuing vocational education and the trades do not require literacy and numeracy skills, students come to college unprepared for the rigors of their programs. Discussions with colleges suggest that the government could help facilitate a greater level of preparedness through policy and expectation setting within the primary and secondary school systems. Interviewees proposed that there could be greater recognition by high school guidance counsellors and academic advisors regarding the expectations students will need to meet before attending college. Interviewees also suggested that high school teachers, who are

often university educated, could be exposed more to the value proposition of the college system for students.

“We are dealing with less prepared and less resilient students from high school...our services are absolutely essential to ensure that these students can survive, let alone thrive, in the workforce.” Craig Stephenson, VP of Student Services, Centennial College

5.5 Closing comments

A frequent question raised during this research was “is this different than before”. It is clear that some of these challenges are not new, but that colleges are facing significant sustainability issues regarding their support for students at risk. Many student groups at risk are from the fastest growing populations, such as First Nations and recent immigrants. The ability of these students to attain the required skills to succeed in the college environment and the economy of the future is dependent upon receiving significant non-academic support. Ontario’s public colleges see an opportunity, with greater support, to sustainably serve these groups as the province drives towards creating a knowledge based, innovative and inclusive economy. Driven by improved employment outcomes for students at risk graduating because of these programs, the **\$165 million in investments** for government-funded postsecondary student at risk programs provides a strong estimated **13% public rate of return**. This report has aimed to highlight important opportunities for key stakeholders, including government and colleges, to collaborate in order to address these challenges and prepare for the future.

6 Appendix

6.1 Description of approach

Deloitte relied on multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative evidence, including primary and secondary sources, to conduct the analysis. Specifically, the analysis involved the following components:

1. **Document / literature review and external research:**
 - a. Review of research and literature from academic sources, college and post-secondary education associations, think-tanks, individual post-secondary institutions, and government (primarily Canadian sources)
 - b. Quantitative research using statistics from sources such as Statistics Canada and Government of Ontario Ministries
2. **Primary research on college spending levels to support students at risk and the inventory of programs and services delivered**
 - a. Survey of Ontario's 24 public colleges to collect data on the range and total costs of programs/services to support students at risk (see Appendix 6.3 for a copy of the financial survey that was sent to colleges)
3. **Stakeholder consultations**
 - a. Interviews with the VPs of Student Services from 9 colleges in March of 2017
4. **Cost-benefit analysis of programs and services for students at risk**
 - a. Comparison of costs and benefits of programs and services delivered to students at risk from the perspective of government

Documents and literature were reviewed at the beginning of the process in order to frame the scope of the study, to inform the consultations with stakeholders, and to direct further analysis. Deloitte continually gathered documents and literature referenced during consultations with stakeholders, and monitored the field for the latest research and publications. Sources were catalogued according to the objective of the analysis for which they were relevant, and were used to inform the final analysis and recommendations. Appendix 6.5 provides a list of sources used throughout the project.

To analyze the costs and benefits of programs and services to support students at risk, Deloitte administered the financial cost survey to Vice-Presidents of Finance for all 24 Ontario colleges (see Appendix 6.3). The response rate was 100%. To calculate the benefits associated with these programs and services, Deloitte relied on the expertise of college administrators and statistics from reliable sources, such as census data. An overview of the cost-benefit methodology, approach and assumptions are provided in Appendix 6.4.2 of this report.

Stakeholder consultations were conducted with college administrators from 9 colleges to better understand the evolving nature of support for students at risk. The interviewees shared both perspectives from their experience and through particularly impactful stories from individual students. These colleges were chosen to represent a sampling of geography, size and language. The interviews were conducted in March 2017 with the following 9 colleges:

- Algonquin College
- Conestoga College
- Collège Boréal
- Canadore College
- Centennial College
- Durham College
- Humber College
- Mohawk College
- Sault College

For these consultations, Deloitte worked with Colleges Ontario to develop an interview guide to be sent in advance. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interview guide is included in Appendix 6.2 of this report. To ensure accuracy and appropriate representation of these interviews, specific quotes or figures referenced during these interviews were verified through follow-up communication.

Based on these findings and conclusions, some initial insights and areas of opportunity have been identified for government and college administrators. A key emerging theme was an opportunity for greater collaboration and communication between stakeholders. This report therefore aims to address this gap by encouraging a more holistic consideration of the needs of student groups at risk and the support network required to enable their success. These are aimed at enabling the inclusive growth the province seeks.

6.2 Interview guide

Interview Introduction

Deloitte is completing a study on behalf of Colleges Ontario to explore the role of Ontario's colleges in serving students at risk of not completing college studies (see Appendix 6.4.3 for a definition of a "student at risk"). This analysis will be an update of a study completed five years ago to assess the number of students at risk, the range of programs to help them, and the incremental costs involved.

This update will focus on two areas:

- Surveying colleges to update the costs incurred by colleges to help students at risk
- Interviewing select Vice Presidents of Student Services, from English and Francophone colleges, to assess whether pressures to attract, retain and graduate students at risk have changed in the past five years or are expected to change in the next decade

This study is an important component of the strategic plan for Colleges Ontario. The research will provide critical information that will be needed to support advocacy efforts and to illustrate the fundamental role and costs associated with raising the province's educational attainment rate.

This document contains prompting questions the Deloitte team will use to guide the discussion. Please inform Deloitte at the beginning of the interview if you are willing to be quoted, if you are willing to be named as an interviewee in the report, and if you wish to receive an emailed PDF copy of the final report.

Interview Questions

Background and current state

1. Please introduce yourself and your role within the college
2. Can you comment on your college's current broad priorities, successes and challenges related to students at risk?

Trends from the past five years

3. Thinking about the past five years, what would you say have been the most significant changes in your college's support for students at risk?
4. How have the pressures your college is facing with students at risk changed over the past five years, and what evidence exists to demonstrate this?
 - a. **Overall pressure** from increased numbers of students at risk (i.e., via increased high school graduation rates, higher diagnosis rates), changes in the mix of student groups at risk, greater overlap between groups, increased complexity of student needs, greater budgetary pressure
 - b. **Group specific pressures** for students with learning, physical and mental health disabilities (i.e., due to new AODA requirements), sexual harassment and violence, under-represented groups (i.e., indigenous learners, immigrants and/or international students, under-prepared students, mature learners)
5. What have been the implications of these pressures and how has your college addressed these pressures? (i.e., through its priorities, policies, and programs, through identifying efficiencies to meet the needs of students at risk at a lower cost)

Future looking trends

6. How do you expect the overall and group specific pressures discussed earlier will change over the next 10 years? Which changes will be most significant?
7. Please comment on the impact of continued fiscal pressure and the risk of budget cuts.
 - a. Assuming that staffing in student services dropped by 10-15%, what would be the most significant impacts on students at risk?
8. What opportunities for stronger integration do you see with external partners? (i.e., high schools, employers, school boards, government services)
 - a. Do you anticipate changes in the capacity of these organizations to deal effectively with referrals from your college?

6.3 College financial survey

6.3.1 Instructions

Colleges Ontario / Deloitte Survey - Estimating the Incremental Costs and Benefits of Publicly Funded Programs and Services to Help Students At-Risk

Please follow the instructions below for completing the survey and submit it electronically to Deloitte and copy Colleges Ontario.
If you have any questions, please contact Deloitte at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Deadline for Survey Completion: March 1, 2017

Purpose of Survey

To estimate the costs and benefits incurred by Ontario's colleges in offering programs to help students at-risk of not commencing or completing college studies in 2015-16.
Please note this survey is collecting information related only to publicly funded activities.

Instructions

Please fill out the inputs tab by following the instructions below. Cells highlighted in green (■) require input. Cells highlighted grey (■) should not be modified.

1. Contact Information

- a) Please email Deloitte at xxxxxx@deloitte.ca and Colleges Ontario at xxx@collegesontario.org with the contact information for the person from the Finance Department who is responsible for coordinating this request as soon as possible. The request should be filled out by the Finance Department in consultation with the Vice President, Student Services, or
- b) Fill out the contact information for your institution's Finance Department, as well as revenues generated by programs that target at-risk students. See below for definition of "Students At Risk".

2. Program List, Descriptions, and Costs

Program List:

- a) The program list has been pre-populated with the responses that your institution submitted to the survey conducted in 2011. Please review with the VP, Student Services, the list of programs and services offered by your institution in the 2015-2016 year (April 1st 2015 - March 31st 2016) that have one of their primary purposes to attract, retain, and promote the success of students at-risk. If any of these programs have been discontinued, please uncheck the "Program is operational" checkbox, but do not delete the row.
- b) For any new programs, please add the program name(s) in the blank rows at the bottom of the table. Please enter one new program per row. Please refer to the list of Applicable Programs and Services below. Note that a program could include one- or two-semester programs, a series of courses, single courses, or other learning supports.

Descriptions:

- c) If any new programs have been added, please ask your VP, Student Services, to arrange for a description for them to be filled out in the "Description of New Programs/Services" table at the bottom of the "Inputs" tab. Program/service descriptions are not needed for pre-existing programs/services.

Costs:

- d) Fill out the cost estimates in the "Inputs" tab. The cells that require input are highlighted in green.
 - A. Personnel costs: fully salary costs (including an estimation of benefits) of personnel hired exclusively for the program/service (e.g. Aboriginal student counsellor) and partial salary
 - B. Supplies, equipment, and instructional material costs; and
 - C. Other costs, excluding capital costs and college-wide overhead costs (e.g. maintenance costs for campus).
- e) The cost table is set up to default to 100% funding from MAESD/post-secondary grants and fees. If the source of funding for a program/service is not MAESD/post-secondary grants and fees, please enter the relevant percentage (%) in the "Other government e.g. Employment Ont." column.
- f) Please enter the college's "Total Contribution to Overhead" as a percentage of "Total Direct Program Operating Budget" at the bottom of the costs input table.
 - A. Definition of overhead: all indirect costs including rent and facilities, utilities, repair & maintenance, insurance, taxes, non-direct or non-allocated salaries (i.e., executive, management, administrative salaries), accounting, finance and supplies that are provided by the college. These costs are indirect and should therefore not be included in the Total Direct Program Operating Budgets listed in the survey
 - B. If you are unable to provide an overhead rate specific to these at risk student programs, please provide an estimated average overhead rate (%) for your college and contact Deloitte to determine whether this number should be adjusted higher or lower for these programs
- g) Please save the Excel file periodically as you input the data. Please submit the final survey to Deloitte at xxxxr@deloitte.ca and copy Colleges Ontario at xxxxx@collegesontario.org by **March 1, 2017**.
- h) For your reference, see the "2011 Survey Response" tab for the program list and cost data provided by your institution in 2011.

6.3.2 Definition of students at risk and applicable programs

Definition of "Students At Risk"
<p>Students who may be at-risk of not commencing or completing college studies may have some of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Students needing academic skills preparation such as math and literacy remedial courses in order to be successful in their career programs; B. Students who have been out of the system for an extended period of time; C. Students with disabilities (e.g. learning disabilities and mental health issues); D. Students from groups traditionally under-represented in post-secondary education, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students from low-income families; - Students from families with no history of attending post-secondary education ("first generation" students); - First- and second-generation immigrants, particularly non-English speaking immigrants; - Those from single-parent (or other 'non-traditional') families or have dependents (children under 18 or adult dependents); - Those of Aboriginal or First Nations ancestry; and E. Students facing informational barriers (e.g. lack of knowledge about potential success or benefits of post-secondary education) and/or advisement deficits (lack of access to counselling, lack of access to technology) resulting in a lack of clarity on career goals.

Applicable Programs and Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Recruitment, outreach and promotion costs directed towards under-represented students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promotion: targeted material and campaigns b. Influencing particular groups: partnerships; market analysis; development of strategies c. Outreach in the community d. Partnerships with secondary schools e. Academic assessment f. Other (please specify) B. Student orientation (only costs for targeted services) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Pre-admission advising; b. New student orientation; c. Assessment of needs (e.g. literacy skills assessments) d. Student information services e. Other (please specify) C. Assistance with accessing financial aid (total spend for the financial aid office) D. Programs, courses and learning supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Literacy and math skill classes for students at-risk b. Foundation and pre-programs (including Employment Ontario funded programs such as pre-apprenticeship) c. Other unique preparatory programs and courses d. Peer tutoring and mentoring e. Writing, math or learning skills centers f. ESL/FSL/ LINC and vocational programs/ courses/ tutoring g. Bridging programs for immigrants h. Adapting course material or adapting teaching and learning methods (including materials for students with disabilities) i. Academic advising j. Counseling k. Disability services/supports (including learning disabilities and mental health) l. Targeted advising (e.g. career, pre-admissions, including due to sexual violence and harassment, and other) m. Other (please specify) E. Retention and intervention strategies - this includes the direct costs of addressing any accommodations required, including those required as a result of sexual violence and harassment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Initiatives to identify and support students at-risk b. Other (please specify)

6.4 Summary of cost-benefit methodology and assumptions

6.4.1 Financial survey

Financial surveys (provided in Appendix 6.3) were administered by Deloitte to the Vice Presidents of Finance for all 24 of Ontario's public colleges. The response rate was 100%. Upon completion of the surveys, Deloitte reviewed responses for completeness and to ensure that the programs and services indicated fell within the scope of the study. Where Deloitte was uncertain about the accuracy or applicability of an entry, colleges were contacted to request additional information and clarification, and revisions were made where necessary. To ensure accuracy and consistency across all responses, Deloitte categorized the following programs and services as non MAESD / postsecondary funded, based on current provincial funding structures:

- Second Career Program
- School College Work Initiative (SCWI)
- Literacy and Basic Skills Program (LBS)
- Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)
- Apprenticeship Training
- Work Safety Insurance Board Programs (WSIB)
- Academic Upgrading

Funding related to financial support was also purposefully excluded from these totals as it is considered a core function of the college. Beyond these specific programs and services, Deloitte deferred to the expertise of college administrators and assumed that the operating budgets, percentage of costs associated to serving students at risk, and funding sources were accurate and complete.

6.4.2 Cost-benefit analysis

To calculate the additional costs and public benefits from these programs and services, Deloitte leveraged statistics from reliable sources, such as Statistics Canada, and the expertise of college administrators. Assumptions were made as necessary due to limitations in available data and as required to perform a cost-benefit analysis of projected future benefits. The majority of assumptions within the analysis remained consistent with the cost-benefit analysis conducted in a similar 2012 report⁵⁷, while most data inputs were updated using the most recent, publicly available data from reliable sources. Overall assumptions regarding the number of full time equivalent students, the numbers of students at risk served and the improved graduation rate for these students due to the programs and services were developed using pre-existing research and verified through collaboration with Colleges Ontario. Below is a summary of the approach and assumptions used to calculate the costs and benefits in the analysis:

6.4.2.1 General assumptions

- The number of students at risk was calculated using the total first-year college enrolment for 2015-2016

⁵⁷ (Deloitte 2012)

- 35% of college students are at risk and access at least one program/service intended to attract, retain and promote the success of students at risk during the course of their study
- As a result of accessing these programs/supports, there is a 35 percentage point increase in the graduation rate of students at risk
- Students enter college with a high school diploma level of education
- Students are assumed to remain in college for 2 full-time years of study
- Students graduate at age 21, and work until retirement age of 65
- Male and female graduates earn the same income, and work without interruption until retirement age
- College graduates participate in the labour force until retirement age (i.e., they are employed, or unemployed for less than the full year and seeking work)
- Net present value is calculated with a real discount rate of 8%

6.4.2.2 Assumptions and approach to calculate the costs to government

Costs to government include the total costs of programs/services delivered to students at risk that are funded through MAESD/post-secondary funding, as well as the costs of providing increased funding to colleges because of the higher retention rate of students as a result of these programs. College financial survey results were used to calculate the total program/service costs funded through MAESD/postsecondary funding.

Note that to better understand the actual investment made by the colleges into these programs, an estimated overhead rate was developed with each of the colleges. Since many Ministry grants are not eligible to cover these indirect expenses, overhead was excluded from the net present value and internal rate of return figures. The applicable programs and services for inclusion in these program costs are included in Appendix 6.4.4.

To calculate costs from higher retention, Deloitte used the estimated funding per student per year based on data provided by Colleges Ontario. A key consideration is that colleges are funded based on enrolment levels reported as of November 1, February 1, and June 1. Therefore, Deloitte took into account the fact that students who would have otherwise dropped out before these dates each semester would not have cost the government additional funding, as they would have dropped out before enrolment counts were finalized. The following assumptions were made to calculate retention costs to government:

- The students who graduate as a result of accessing support programs and services would have otherwise dropped out of college at a constant rate over the course of two years of study
- Government would have to provide additional per-student funding for each student who did not drop out as a result of accessing programs and services, calculated using the MAESD/postsecondary funding level per FTE student in Ontario in 2015-2016⁵⁸
- While the increased retention of students at risk may, in reality, result in certain colleges requesting, and receiving, additional grants and funds to support these students (e.g. funds for students with disabilities, funding for Aboriginal services), these are not included

⁵⁸ (Financial Accountability Office of Ontario 2016)

An additional cost to government is lost tax revenue from college students who would otherwise have been employed and earned income. To calculate this cost, the following assumptions were made:

- The employment rate of graduates, if they did not attend college, would have been equal to the employment rate of college applicants in the 2015-2016 year⁵⁹. These students would have earned the average income of a high school-educated Ontarian earner in their age bracket and paid the corresponding amount of federal and provincial income tax
- The cost of lost income tax revenue to government is offset by the fact that a considerable proportion of college students work while in college. It is assumed that the percentage of students at risk who work while in college is equal to the percent of underrepresented college students who are employed while enrolled, and their earnings are equal to the average earnings of a college student employed during their studies

6.4.2.3 Assumptions and approach to calculate the benefits to government

The benefits to government as a result of programs and services to support students at risk were calculated in terms of increased income tax revenue as a result of higher earnings for graduates. As well, government benefits include reduced Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Employment Insurance (EI) payments due to lower dependency rates associated with higher educational attainment levels. To calculate these benefits, the following assumptions were made:

- Graduates earn the average income of college-educated income-earning Ontarians in their age bracket (e.g. 20-24, 25-29, etc.). If they had not graduated, they would have earned the average income of high school-educated Ontarians who earns income in their age bracket, using Labour Force Survey Data for 2016
- Federal and provincial tax rates for 2016 were used, including the basic personal tax amount⁶⁰
- The percentage of college students who self-identified in 2015-2016 as accessing disability support services (14%⁶¹) reflects the actual percentage of students who have a disability and access disability support services
- The education level distribution of Ontarians with disabilities is equal to the education level distribution of Canadians with disabilities, using Statistics Canada data from 2012⁶²
- The breakdown of OW/ODSP recipients with a post-secondary education, in terms of the proportion with a college education, is equal to the breakdown of the general Ontario postsecondary educated population, using 2011 data from the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario⁶³
- All college students with a disability would receive ODSP as opposed to OW if they were to rely on social assistance
- The incremental cost per OW/ODSP recipient is equal to the average cost per OW/ODSP case using provincial government reported annual expenditures, using 2015-2016 expenditure data and the January 2017 caseload from the Ministry of Community and Social Services⁶⁴

⁵⁹ (Colleges Ontario 2017)

⁶⁰ (C. R. A. Government of Canada 2017)

⁶¹ (Colleges Ontario 2017)

⁶² (S. C. Government of Canada 2013; Turcotte 2014)

⁶³ (Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario 2012)

⁶⁴ (Ontario 2016a)

- Due to limitations on the availability of data, it is assumed that the monthly caseload of OW and OWDSP recipients is equal to the annual caseload of unique recipients⁶⁵
- College graduates without a disability will rely on OW at a rate equal to the calculated provincial probability of relying on OW among college graduates. Had they not attended college, they would have relied on OW at a rate equal to the calculated provincial probability of relying on OW among secondary school graduates
- College graduates with a disability will rely on ODSP at a rate equal to the calculated provincial probability of relying on ODSP for adults with disabilities with a college education. Had they not attended college, they would have relied on ODSP at a rate equal to the calculated provincial probability of relying on ODSP among secondary school graduates
- Students at risk who graduate experience unemployment at a rate equal to the provincial average unemployment rate for Ontarians with a college-level education in 2014. Had they not graduated from college, they would have been unemployed at a rate equal to the provincial average unemployment rate for Ontarians with a secondary school education in 2014⁶⁶
- Unemployed individuals with college or high school level education qualify for Employment Insurance benefits at a rate equal to the Ontario qualification rate in 2015⁶⁷
- Unemployed individuals receive regular EI benefits in the amount equal to the national average weekly amount for 2015-2016, and for the average duration of claims⁶⁸

This analysis does not include the benefits such as economic growth spillover effects, health benefits, civic participation benefits and intergenerational benefits.

6.4.3 Definition of "At Risk" students

The analysis focused on programs and services for students at risk of not commencing or completing college studies. The likelihood of an individual attending and graduating from college is ultimately based on their personal situation and abilities. Furthermore, being 'at risk' is a continuum, rather than an 'either/or' designation. However, there are characteristics associated with lower likelihood of attending college and greater difficulty in successfully completing a program of study. Students at risk frequently show a multiplicity of these factors. In other words, having one of these characteristics was often not enough for a student to be at risk of not staying in the system; however students that exhibited a number of these factors are often at risk of not succeeding in college. Below is the definition that was used to frame the analysis.

Students who may be at risk of not commencing or completing college studies may have some of the following characteristics:

- A. Students needing academic skills preparation such as math and literacy remedial courses in order to be successful in their career programs;
- B. Students who have been out of the system for an extended period of time;
- C. Students with disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities and mental health issues);
- D. Students from groups traditionally under-represented in post-secondary education, including:
 - a. Students from low-income families

⁶⁵ (Ontario 2017)

⁶⁶ (Council of Ontario Universities 2015)

⁶⁷ (S. C. Government of Canada 2016)

⁶⁸ (S. C. Government of Canada 2016)

- b. Students from families with no history of attending post-secondary education (“first generation” students);
 - c. First- and second-generation immigrants, particularly non-English speaking immigrants;
 - d. Those from single-parent (or other ‘non-traditional’) families or students who have dependents (children under 18 or adult dependents);
 - e. Those of Aboriginal or First Nations ancestry; and
- E. Students facing informational barriers (e.g., lack of knowledge about potential success or benefits of post-secondary education) and/or advisement deficits (e.g., lack of access to counselling, lack of access to technology) resulting in a lack of clarity on career goals.

This definition was developed by Colleges Ontario and Deloitte based on research into post-secondary enrolment trends and barriers. It remained largely consistent with the definition from past research⁶⁹.

6.4.4 Applicable Programs and Services

The analysis focused on the programs and services offered by colleges to help students at risk of not commencing or completing their college studies in 2015-2016. Specifically, Deloitte examined the programs and services offered by colleges which have as one of their primary purposes to attract, retain, and promote the success of students at risk. Colleges were provided with the following list of applicable programs and services for which to provide descriptions and cost data. Deloitte informed colleges that this list was not exhaustive, and additional programs and services could be included, provided that serving students at risk was the focus.

- A. Recruitment, outreach and promotion costs directed towards under-represented students
 - a. Promotion: targeted material and campaigns
 - b. Influencing particular groups: partnerships; market analysis; development of strategies
 - c. Outreach in the community
 - d. Partnerships with secondary schools
 - e. Academic assessment
 - f. Other (please specify)
- B. Student orientation (only costs for targeted services)
 - a. Pre-admission advising;
 - b. New student orientation;
 - c. Assessment of needs (e.g. literacy skills assessments)
 - d. Student information services
 - e. Other (please specify)

⁶⁹ (Deloitte 2012)

- C. Assistance with accessing financial aid (total spend for the financial aid office)⁷⁰
- D. Programs, courses and learning supports
 - a. Literacy and math skill classes for students at-risk
 - b. Foundation and pre-programs (including Employment Ontario funded programs such as pre-apprenticeship)
 - c. Other unique preparatory programs and courses
 - d. Peer tutoring and mentoring
 - e. Writing, math or learning skills centers
 - f. ESL/FSL/ LINC and vocational programs/ courses/ tutoring
 - g. Bridging programs for immigrants
 - h. Adapting course material or adapting teaching and learning methods (including materials for students with disabilities)
 - i. Academic advising
 - j. Counseling
 - k. Disability services/supports (including learning disabilities and mental health)
 - l. Targeted advising (e.g. career, pre-admissions, including due to sexual violence and harassment, and other)
 - m. Other (please specify)
- E. Retention and intervention strategies - this includes the direct costs of addressing any accommodations required, including those required as a result of sexual violence and harassment
 - a. Initiatives to identify and support students at-risk
 - b. Other (please specify)

Undoubtedly, initiatives undertaken by employers, industry groups, and secondary schools to promote college graduation and employment among students at risk have an impact. However, it is outside the scope of this analysis to assess mechanisms beyond college programs and interventions. As well, financial barriers are a major roadblock for many potential college students, but financial assistance was outside the scope of this study since financial assistance is generally outside the scope of colleges' control. The Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) is administered by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) on behalf of the federal and provincial governments.

⁷⁰ Excluded from cost-benefit totals per Colleges Ontario guidance, as it is considered a core function of the school

6.5 Supplemental Research: Mental Health on Campus

The study was expanded to include a greater focus on mental health due to a trend towards increasingly prevalent mental health challenges for students in postsecondary education. The supplemental analysis aimed to validate this trend with existing data and understand the impact of mental health on college resources and programming. To explore this topic in more detail, an initial discussion was conducted with experts from three colleges to align the definitional framework for students with more complex mental health challenges. Next, a series of follow up group interviews were organized with each of the colleges previously interviewed for the report.

Key themes

Through these interviews it quickly became clear that Ontario's colleges are approaching a tipping point from rising demands due to the growing number of students facing mental health challenges and due to an increasing complexity of cases. These cases are presenting important challenges and opportunities for the colleges moving forward. Although the challenges from increased strain on limited staff resources are real, the colleges stressed that this should not be portrayed as a purely negative story, due to reduced stigma around mental health and stronger student success rates for students with mental health challenges.

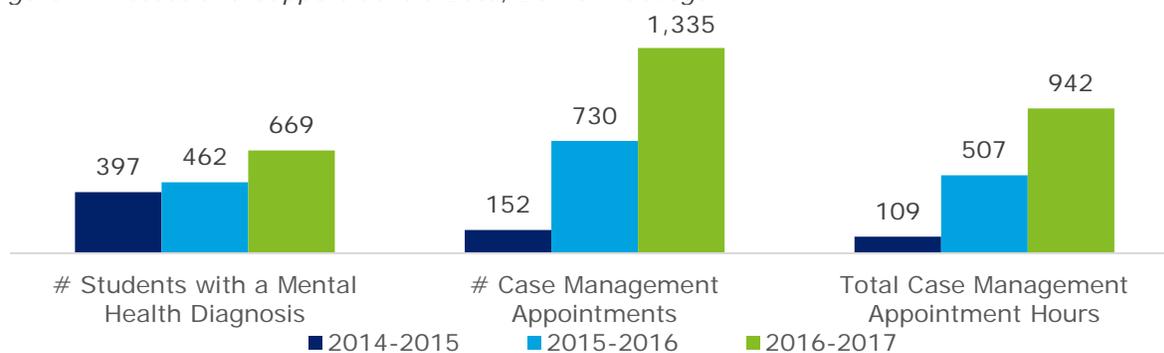
Rising demands

The colleges involved in the study identified that there have been consistent increases in the number of students facing mental health challenges, the complexity of cases, and the amount of support required by these students. Data availability can be challenging, but some of this growth in the number of students facing mental health challenges appears to have been driven by increasing numbers of students with increasingly complex needs. Mental health challenges are highly contextual to the individual and can be complicated to categorize, however often these students will exhibit multiple signs of distress, and may eventually require one or more accommodations. In addition to growing numbers of students with increasingly complex needs, the stress on student services centres has been compounded by a growing number of students with less complex needs. These students with less complex needs are being identified as exhibiting initial signs of distress, even without necessarily having a formal diagnosis. Increasing numbers of these students are now accessing services for a variety of reasons including reduced stigma and changed legislation that reduces the need for a diagnosis before receiving some supports. These trends can be demonstrated through the total numbers of visits to counsellors and the number of visits per student rising across most of the colleges involved in the study (e.g., a 26% increase in the number of counselling visits per student at Mohawk College since 2013-2014 and an almost five-fold increase in the number of case management visits reserved for more serious cases at Centennial College since 2014-2015), with mental health being a reason for many if not most of these visits.

These trends can also be illustrated by the growing number of students registering with college accessibility centres and the types of diagnoses being registered. Data is limited on the underlying causes behind these mental health challenges, though many of the colleges specifically mentioned growing numbers of students with addictions issues and co-morbidity of diagnoses, which both present new, more complex challenges. At Durham College for example, the number of students with a mental health diagnosis has risen over 69% since 2014-2015 and the percent of students with co-morbidity of mental health diagnoses has increased from 15% in 2012-2013 to 41% in 2016-2017 (See Figure II for more details).

"The signs of distress that are under discussion could be related to grief, which is not a mental health issue, it is a natural life process. Or could be from a chemical or hormonal imbalance not related to brain functions, or could be a result of any number of physical ailments." Meri Kim Oliver, VP of Student Services, Durham College

Figure II: Access and Support Centre Data, Durham College



In addition to the above trends, most of the colleges indicated that they are also experiencing increasingly frequent and more challenging accommodation requests from students (i.e., retaking tests, requesting extensions on project deadlines, missing class for extended periods). Some of these new challenges with accommodation are due to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) decision in 2016 to remove the requirements to first disclose a diagnosis before gaining access to accommodation. These requests can create significant scheduling and planning challenges, and increase the need for coordination and collaboration across faculty and staff. Interviewees did however suggest that past experience managing accommodation requests for their apprenticeship programming may have helped prepare them for some of these policy changes.

“Complex cases can be a real challenge for a college’s support team. It does not take many complex cases to really burden down or overwhelm the student support services centre.”
Meg Houghton, Director, Student Access, Wellness and Development, Humber College

Two case studies listed below help illustrate the highly contextual, often complex needs and accommodation requirements of students facing mental health challenges:

Stories from the front line:

- *A student with a mental health condition started at Durham College after a failed attempt at another college. The student was previously receiving accommodations through extra time on tests, but was unprepared for the non-academic demands of postsecondary education. Durham College set up ongoing Accessibility coach appointments, weekly peer mentoring appointments and connected the student with other services. As a result, the student was successful in completing the program and is thinking of continuing for further postsecondary education.*
- *A student was diagnosed with ADHD and mental health challenges regarding emotional regulation. The student is currently working through a second attempt at college and receives support through bi-weekly counselling, bi-weekly wellness coaching, crisis drop-in support, extensive use of learning skills advisors and a mental health nurse. Some involvement by the Dean has been required given the nature of the student’s requests. The student is currently progressing well, but requires ongoing emotional management support.*

Key challenges and opportunities

The trends discussed above are raising some important challenges and opportunities for colleges around the intake and student management process, effectively tracking data, creating alignment across stakeholders and addressing resource inequality. The intake process is important and will become increasingly important as a tool to enable more individual, proactive and stepped models of care. Many of the colleges interviewed are grappling with how to triage the type of support a student needs in order to improve care and reduce the burden on the college support system. For example, Collège Boréal found that some students were attending formal counselling sessions and tying up

resources, when more informal “compassionate chats” would be more appropriate. The college has recently changed their model to better ensure students with less complex mental health challenges are being referred to appropriate counselling and provided with resources to help them manage their mental health, before initiating formal case management. Related to this, many colleges suggested a

“There is a trend of anxiety and depression increasing, often through self-identification. This could come from awareness and education through strategies in schools, media and stigma reduction. But, we also need to make sure we are supporting and engaging students to receive diagnosis and medical treatment appropriately” Louisa Drost, Director of Counselling, Accessible Learning Services and Health Services, Mohawk College

challenge around effective data collection beyond the disability and accommodation numbers from their accessibility centre, largely due to the lack of a common definition and set of data that is tracked across campuses. Although the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) attempts to create a common set of available data, it currently does not separate out college and university results. As a result, Mohawk College is collaborating with five other colleges to develop college-specific data that enable enhanced understanding and decision making. Some initial work has been conducted to develop a common definitional framework through province-wide standards and guidelines for the kinds of documentation that post-secondary students must provide when they are seeking academic accommodation⁷¹.

Creating alignment across stakeholders has also been a challenge. Faculty are being expected to take on a greater role in student mental health and accommodation, and develop deeper knowledge and understanding of mental health. Many of the colleges expressed a desire to break down silos and create more alignment across the student services and academic programming divisions to better manage student needs. Beyond the campus borders, many colleges have expressed challenges establishing stronger connections with community partners in order to create a longer-term support network for students.

The colleges also identified some key challenges related to resource allocation. These include determining the balance of staff between counselling, case management, and planning. This balance can be especially challenging due to difficulties with resource inequality across the province. Interviewees suggested that the larger, more urban campuses are better able to achieve the economies of scale required to maintain longer term, more consistent programming. Smaller, more rural colleges are more reliant on stable, external funding to maintain and develop effective programming. Increased scale can also help prevent one, or a few, serious cases from overwhelming the student services department and creating challenges for other students.

Reasons for optimism

Across all the group interviews, college representatives were clear that this should not be portrayed as purely a negative story. All saw positives through reduced stigma, greater understanding of mental health and enhanced support for students. Many suggested that some of the rising demands on colleges are a result of colleges’ broader education, training and awareness efforts focused on mental health, combined with better results in ensuring the retention of these students. A few commented that students with more complex mental health concerns would previously have been considered at risk, but that the student success gap has narrowed between students with mental health challenges and other students. As a result, individuals who would previously have struggled to integrate and contribute to the community and Ontario’s economy are now able to do so.

⁷¹ (Condra and Condra 2015)

Conclusions

The colleges indicated that some skepticism has been raised regarding the growing numbers of students with mental health challenges. It is important to recognize that postsecondary education intentionally pushes students and creates stressors on students in order to better prepare them for their lives. Yet, it is important to avoid trivializing the significant challenges faced by individual students and the support systems of these colleges. Demand for campus support services has been increasing with a lack of corresponding resource increases, creating real and significant challenges in enabling the success of these students.

"We are approaching a tipping point. Every year demand (in the form of numbers and complexities) has outstripped capacity from the year before. We have been prompted to manage growth by finding new ways to deliver rather than by simply adding new resources. This requires us to be mindful, creative, and intentional of how we are providing services - all to position students for success." Dr. Craig Stephenson, Vice-President, Student and Community Engagement, Centennial College

6.5.1 Mental Health Discussion Guide

Introduction

Deloitte is completing a study on behalf of Colleges Ontario to explore the role of Ontario's colleges in serving students at risk of not commencing or completing college studies. The study has been expanded to include a greater focus on mental health due to a trend towards increasingly prevalent mental health challenges for students in postsecondary education. Please see the Appendix for a definition of students "at risk" and for a definitional framework for students with more serious mental health challenges.

The supplemental analysis will attempt to validate this trend with existing data and understand the impact of mental health on your resources and programming. In order to gather additional information, Deloitte will be facilitating a series of one hour group discussions with the nine Vice-Presidents of Student Services who were previously interviewed.

This document contains prompting questions the Deloitte team will use to guide the discussion. Please inform Deloitte at the beginning of the discussion if you are willing to be quoted in the report.

Discussion Questions

1. Are you comfortable with the definitional framework for more serious mental health challenges listed in the appendix?
2. What data is currently tracked / monitored regarding students with mental health challenges?
(e.g., number of diagnosed students, types of diagnoses, number of counselling visits per student, average length of visits, benefit program spending by drug type)
3. How reliable is this data and how is it used? (i.e., to drive decision making, gain access to funding)
4. What trends have you observed with students facing mental health challenges over the past five years? (e.g., number of students, complexity of cases, types of mental health challenges, demographic groups most impacted). What data or evidence exists to support these trends?
5. What challenges does mental health raise for your college? (i.e., what has the impact been on programming and resourcing over the past five years in terms of staff time, funding and services that are devoted to students with serious or complex mental health issues)
6. What quantitative or qualitative data and stories can you share for your college to use as a case study to illustrate the trends your college is facing regarding student mental health over the last five years? (i.e., health centre data, data reported to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development)

Definitional Framework for Students with More Complex Mental Health Challenges

- **Regulatory context:** In 2016, the Ontario Human Rights Commission removed the requirement to first disclose a specific Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) diagnosis before a student can gain access to accommodation, although documentation of a diagnosis (e.g., schizophrenia, major depression disorder, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, personality disorders, addictions) may eventually be required⁷². Additionally, postsecondary institutions are required to ensure that their facilities are accessible and that disabilities are accommodated to the point of undue hardship⁷³. For the purposes of this study, students receiving accommodation for a mental health disability will be considered to have a more serious mental health challenge
- **Definition of a mental health disability or challenge:** “The student experiences functional limitations due to a [mental] health condition that impairs the student’s academic functioning at a learning and/or access level while pursuing post-secondary studies”⁷⁴
- **There is recognition that a continuum of mental health challenges exist based on the seriousness of the distress. Some signs or symptoms of a student being in distress include significantly decreased academic performance, combined with**⁷⁵:
 - o Withdrawal — Recent social withdrawal and loss of interest in others
 - o Drop in functioning — An unusual drop in functioning, at school, work or social activities, such as quitting sports, failing in school or difficulty performing familiar tasks
 - o Problems thinking — Problems with concentration, memory or logical thought and speech that are hard to explain
 - o Increased sensitivity — Heightened sensitivity to sights, sounds, smells or touch; avoidance of over-stimulating situations
 - o Apathy — Loss of initiative or desire to participate in any activity
 - o Feeling disconnected — A vague feeling of being disconnected from oneself or one’s surroundings; a sense of unreality
 - o Illogical thinking — Unusual or exaggerated beliefs about personal powers to understand meanings or influence events; illogical or “magical” thinking typical of childhood in an adult
 - o Nervousness — Fear or suspiciousness of others or a strong nervous feeling
 - o Unusual behavior — Odd, uncharacteristic, peculiar behavior
 - o Sleep or appetite changes — Dramatic sleep and appetite changes or decline in personal care
 - o Mood changes — Rapid or dramatic shifts in feelings

If several of the following signs and symptoms are occurring, it is suggested to follow up with a mental health professional. One or two of these symptoms alone can’t predict a mental illness. But if a person is experiencing several at one time and the symptoms are causing serious problems in the ability to study, work or relate to others, he/she should be seen by a mental health professional. People with suicidal thoughts or intent, or thoughts of harming others, need immediate attention.

- **Indicators of more serious mental health challenges include**⁷⁶:
 - o **Lack of a stressor:** Some anxiety can occur in response to a stressor (e.g., an upcoming exam), however individuals with an anxiety disorder may be anxious most

⁷² (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2016)

⁷³ (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2017)

⁷⁴ (Condra and Condra 2015)

⁷⁵ (American Psychiatric Association n.d.)

⁷⁶ (ULifeline 2017; HeretoHelp BC 2015)

or all of the time, even without the presence of a stressor. As a result this anxiety may appear unexpectedly

- o **Greater intensity and length of mental health challenge:** More serious mental health challenges exist when anxiety or impairment start earlier, last for longer, or is more intense than what would be expected given a stressor (e.g., an upcoming exam)
- o **Greater impairment:** Avoidance of normal activities (e.g., skipping class, missing tests, stopping going to work) and a feeling / belief that the anxiety / mental health challenge is impossible to control or manage
- o **Presence of other symptoms:** The presence of physical symptoms (e.g., dizziness, light-headedness, sweating, trembling, heart pounding, headaches, nausea) and other psychological symptoms (e.g., inability to concentrate, racing or negative thoughts) such as the symptoms listed above can also indicate more serious mental health challenges

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