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Transforming Postsecondary Education in Ontario

A Strategic Framework for Innovation, Equity, and Sustainability

February 2025



Dr. Andre De Freitas

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EdVisingU

Dr. Andre De Freitas

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February 10, 2025

Notes from the Author

Ontario's postsecondary education system stands at a pivotal crossroads, with a unique opportunity to embrace transformative change that ensures its relevance, sustainability, and global competitiveness. The proposed models—focusing on institutional consolidation, personalized learning pathways, and innovative funding—present a roadmap for creating a future-ready system aligned with the evolving needs of learners, the workforce, and society. By prioritizing equity, technological advancement, and collaboration across public and private sectors, Ontario can lead the way in reshaping education for the 21st century.

As a first-generation student, my journey through Ontario's postsecondary system—from Seneca College to Guelph-Humber, Nipissing University, and finally Western University, where I earned my doctorate—has given me profound insight into the challenges students face. Navigating the complexities of education, real life, and the economy, I graduated with \$140,000 in OSAP and personal debt before the advent of the AI era. These experiences shaped my understanding of the obstacles that learners encounter, from financial strain to balancing academic and personal responsibilities. They also fueled my determination to advocate for systemic change that eases these burdens for future generations.

Throughout my career, I have consistently championed both students and the postsecondary community. Whether addressing inequities, supporting underrepresented groups, or advocating for systemic reforms, my commitment has been unwavering. I have worked on the frontlines of student support and advising, leading initiatives to enhance access, equity, and student success. This dual focus—on the individual needs of students and the structural requirements of institutions—has been the cornerstone of my professional journey. I firmly believe that transformative change must bridge these two perspectives to create a resilient and inclusive education system.

Adversity has been a defining feature of my path, and it has made me stronger, more confident, and deeply resilient. I have faced significant challenges in my roles, from navigating complex leadership dynamics to overcoming systemic barriers. These experiences have not only shaped my professional growth but also strengthened my resolve to advocate for meaningful change. They have taught me the importance of persistence, empathy, and the power of collaboration in driving progress.

I want to be at the forefront of this paradigm shift, contributing my lived experiences, professional expertise, and unwavering commitment to Ontario's postsecondary sector. By embracing research, innovation, and inclusive practices, we can strengthen institutions to remain pillars of excellence and opportunity. My work is fueled by the belief that education is not just a pathway to personal success but also a cornerstone of societal growth and resilience.

Together, we can create a postsecondary education system that not only addresses current challenges but also anticipates future needs—a system that supports students in achieving their aspirations, empowers institutions to innovate, and contributes to the economic and social vitality of our province. My vision is one of equity, opportunity, and excellence, where every learner is equipped to thrive, and Ontario's institutions are celebrated globally for their transformative impact.

Abstract

Ontario's postsecondary education system is at a critical juncture, requiring transformative strategies to address systemic inefficiencies, align educational outcomes with labour market demands, and leverage emerging technologies. This paper proposes three models for systemic reform: (a) institutional consolidation and resource optimization, (b) personalized and technology-enhanced learning pathways, and (c) an innovative private-public funding framework. Each model is grounded in evidence-based practices and designed to ensure the sustainability, equity, and competitiveness of the province's institutions.

The first model focuses on institutional mergers, program rationalization, and real estate optimization to reduce costs, streamline operations, and reallocate resources to high-demand fields such as AI, data science, and healthcare. The second model emphasizes personalized learning pathways powered by AI, micro-credentials, and hybrid education to create flexible, workforce-aligned academic experiences. The third model integrates public funding with private-sector partnerships involving organizations such as Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education to drive financial resilience and technological innovation while addressing equity challenges.

Using a phased implementation strategy, this paper evaluates the potential for cost savings, revenue generation, and long-term economic benefits, including enhanced graduate employability and institutional alignment with workforce needs. Legislative reforms and policy updates are proposed to support these initiatives, ensuring scalability and sustainability. By adopting these models, Ontario can position itself as a leader in postsecondary education, fostering institutional excellence, student success, and economic growth in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

Executive Summary

Ontario's postsecondary education system is at a critical juncture, requiring transformative changes to address the needs of students, the demands of the labour market, and the challenges of a rapidly evolving technological and economic landscape. This whitepaper outlines three innovative models designed to ensure the sustainability, equity, and competitiveness of the province's postsecondary institutions while fostering long-term economic and social benefits.

The first proposed model focuses on **Institutional Consolidation, Real Estate Optimization, and Program Rationalization**. By merging institutions with overlapping mandates and underutilized resources, Ontario can reduce administrative redundancies, streamline operations, and create regional hubs of excellence. Program rationalization prioritizes resources for high-demand, scalable fields like AI, data science, and healthcare, while low-demand programs are transformed or phased out. Real estate sales, particularly in high-demand urban areas, offer a significant revenue opportunity, with proceeds reinvested into digital infrastructure and innovative program development. This model provides a cost-saving framework projected to generate \$125 million annually, enhancing efficiency while maintaining access to quality education in underserved regions.

The second model, **Personalized, Skills-Based, and Technology-Enhanced Learning Ecosystem**, addresses the growing demand for flexible, personalized education. Leveraging AI-driven learning pathways, micro-credentials, and hybrid delivery models, this approach empowers students with customizable academic experiences aligned with individual goals and workforce needs. Micro-credentials cater to lifelong learners and working professionals, enabling rapid upskilling in high-demand fields. eCampusOntario plays a central role in managing centralized credential recognition and facilitating innovation. The model also emphasizes inclusivity, ensuring marginalized and underrepresented groups have equitable access to resources and opportunities. This approach not only supports student success but also aligns institutional offerings with labour market trends, creating a sustainable pipeline of job-ready graduates.

The third model introduces a **Future-Proof Educational Framework Through an Innovative Private-Public Funding Model**. This approach integrates public funding with private-sector partnerships involving technology leaders such as Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education. These partnerships provide critical financial support, in-kind contributions, and cutting-edge tools to modernize teaching, learning, and research. The model prioritizes equity by expanding OSAP eligibility to private programs that align with public degrees, diplomas, and certifications. By fostering collaboration between government, institutions, and industry, this model ensures financial resilience, technological advancement, and a robust alignment with workforce priorities. The anticipated long-term return on investment includes a 10–15% increase in tuition revenue from digital transformation and \$500 million in annual economic productivity gains from workforce-aligned graduates.

A phased implementation strategy ensures the practical execution of these models. Phase 1 (2025–2027) lays the foundation through institutional mergers, pilot programs for AI-driven personalized learning, and consultations with stakeholders. Phase 2 (2028–2029) scales successful initiatives, such as hybrid learning models, micro-credentials, and centralized data oversight under eCampusOntario. By Phase 3

(2030 and beyond), Ontario's institutions are fully transformed, aligned with workforce needs, and equipped with sustainable governance structures. Legislative updates, such as expanding financial aid for micro-credentials and modernizing governance frameworks, support these efforts.

The projected economic impact is substantial. Savings from institutional efficiencies and real estate optimization are estimated at \$125 million annually, while revenue generation from micro-credentials, revised programs, and partnerships could yield an additional \$300 million annually. Long-term benefits include enhanced graduate employability, increased workforce alignment, and broader educational access for underrepresented groups. Together, these changes position Ontario as a global leader in innovative, equitable, and future-focused education.

By implementing these strategies, Ontario can achieve a resilient, inclusive, and forward-thinking postsecondary system. The models presented in this whitepaper are designed to empower students, strengthen institutions, and support the province's broader economic and social objectives. Ontario has the opportunity to set a benchmark for excellence in education that not only meets the challenges of today but also anticipates the opportunities of tomorrow.

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Introduction

The postsecondary education landscape in Ontario is experiencing unprecedented disruption driven by three key factors: rapid advancements in technology, shifting demographic trends, loss of international students, and changing economic priorities. As institutions contend with the challenges of declining domestic enrollment, increasing reliance on private-public funding, and emerging demands for workforce-aligned programming, the need for innovative and transformative strategies has never been more urgent.

The Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs), which outline institutional priorities and align funding with provincial objectives, offer a critical opportunity to redefine the future of Ontario's postsecondary education system. In this context, this whitepaper provides suggestions to new and revised metric weighting for public-funding and explores three forward-thinking strategies designed to address these challenges:

- (1)** institutional consolidation and program rationalization to optimize resources and focus on high-demand areas
- (2)** the integration of personalized, technology-enhanced learning pathways underpinned by AI and micro-credentials to support student success and workforce readiness.
- (3)** The development and modeling of future-proof educational institutions through the introduction of an innovative private-public funding model, supported by strategic partnerships with eCampus Ontario, the Government of Ontario, Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education.

Leveraging data from key organizations such as the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), Statistics Canada, eCampusOntario, and IRCC, this whitepaper evaluates the potential impacts of these strategies on institutional sustainability, educational accessibility, and labor market alignment. By employing EdVisingU's conceptual framework for educational innovation, this research provides actionable insights to support policymakers and institutional leaders in shaping the SMAs for 2025–2030.

Methodology

This whitepaper was developed with the assistance of ChatGPT, utilizing personalized prompts and a curated collection of personal research, news articles, and previous whitepapers. This approach enabled efficient analysis and synthesis of data that would traditionally require months of research. It also utilizes publicly available data from authoritative sources to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis. Data from the [Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario \(HEQCO\)](#) provides insights into Ontario's postsecondary system, including student applications, enrollments, and graduation rates. National-level statistics are drawn from Statistics Canada, offering detailed information on educational attainment and labor market trends. Additionally, [eCampusOntario](#) contributes data on online and technology-enabled learning initiatives, supporting the development of digital learning resources. Statistics on international student populations are sourced from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Enrollment figures are obtained from the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) and the [Ontario College Application Service \(OCAS\)](#), providing valuable information on applicant demographics and program trends. Furthermore, labour market trends and employer needs are examined using resources like Ontario's Labour Market Information and reports from Workforce Planning Ontario. This alignment of educational data with economic priorities ensures the whitepaper remains relevant and impactful in addressing the development of future-proof educational institutions.

Data Collection

Historical enrollment trends and demographic data were obtained from the [Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario \(HEQCO\)](#) and Statistics Canada, which provide comprehensive data on postsecondary enrollments and demographic shifts over time. Additionally, the [Ontario Universities' Application Centre \(OUAC\)](#) and [Ontario Colleges Application Service \(OCAS\)](#) offers detailed statistics on university and college applications and enrollments within Ontario. These sources collectively offer valuable insights into enrollment patterns and demographic changes in the educational landscape.

Institutional performance reports were gathered from several authoritative sources to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis. Data was sourced from the [Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario \(HEQCO\)](#), which provides insights into Ontario's postsecondary system, including applications, enrollments, and graduation rates. Additional performance metrics, such as graduation rates, employment rates, and Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) default rates, were obtained from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU). Reports from Colleges Ontario contributed data on key performance indicators, including graduate satisfaction rates and employment outcomes. Detailed institutional metrics, such as degrees awarded, student enrollment, tuition fees, and research awards, were gathered from Common University Data Ontario (CUDO). Lastly, Ontario's Universities Open Data offered multi-year information on applications, funding, and graduates' employment outcomes, providing a well-rounded view of institutional performance.

Funding policies, including micro-credential adoption and alignment with Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs), were reviewed using several government and organizational reports. The Ontario government's [Micro-credentials from Ontario's postsecondary schools](#) page outlines the province's strategy to help learners access more opportunities to train or upskill for in-demand jobs. For insights into the policy and

regulatory context, the [Micro-certifications: Policy and Regulatory Context in Ontario](#) report provides an analysis of the current framework as it applies to micro-certifications. Regarding SMAs, the [College and University Strategic Mandate Agreements, 2020-2025](#) page offers access to agreements between Ontario and its publicly-assisted colleges and universities, highlighting institutional priorities and performance outcomes. Furthermore, the [College and University Strategic Mandate Agreements: historical data, targets, and results](#) dataset provides annual performance results and targets, supporting transparency and accountability in the postsecondary education system. These reports collectively inform the review of funding policies, micro-credential adoption, and SMA alignment in Ontario's educational landscape.

Data Analysis

Enrollment data was analyzed to identify regional disparities, program demand shifts, and reliance on international students. This analysis draws on comprehensive datasets from Statistics Canada, which provides national enrollment trends and demographic insights, and the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC), which offers granular data on university applications and enrollments across regions. Data from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) was used to assess the reliance on international students and their contributions to enrollment figures. Additionally, [HEQCO](#) reports and Ontario's Labour Market Information were leveraged to understand how program demand aligns with labor market needs and economic priorities, enabling a comprehensive evaluation of disparities and trends within Ontario's postsecondary education system.

Institutional mergers were evaluated through case studies and operational cost analyses. This evaluation utilized resources from [Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario \(HEQCO\)](#), which has published reports on institutional efficiencies and collaborations within Ontario's postsecondary system. Comparative case studies of mergers from other jurisdictions were drawn from [Universities UK](#) and reports by [The World Bank](#) that examine higher education consolidation strategies. Operational cost analyses were informed by data from Statistics Canada, focusing on expenditure trends in the education sector, and from institutional financial reports available through the [Council of Ontario Universities \(COU\)](#). These resources provided insights into the financial and operational impacts of mergers, including cost savings, administrative restructuring, and academic alignment.

Workforce alignment metrics were assessed using labor market data and employer partnership records. This analysis incorporated data from Statistics Canada, specifically focusing on employment rates, skills demand, and labor force participation by sector. Provincial insights were drawn from Ontario's Labour Market Information, which provides regional trends in workforce needs and skills shortages. Employer partnership records and industry collaboration data were gathered from reports by Workforce Planning Ontario and institutional employer engagement reports available through the [Council of Ontario Universities \(COU\)](#). These sources offered a detailed understanding of how postsecondary education aligns with current and emerging labor market demands, ensuring that workforce outcomes are closely tied to economic priorities.

Policy Review

SMA frameworks from 2020–2025 were critically examined to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. The review focused on the [Strategic Mandate Agreements \(SMAs\) for 2020–2025](#), which outline performance-based funding metrics and institutional priorities for Ontario’s publicly funded colleges and universities. Key performance indicators and annual results were analyzed using the [SMA historical data and targets dataset](#) to assess how institutions have performed relative to established benchmarks. Reports from the [Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario \(HEQCO\)](#) were also utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of the SMA framework in driving innovation and alignment with provincial economic and social priorities. The analysis highlighted areas for enhancement, including flexibility in metrics, improved mechanisms for tracking student outcomes, and greater alignment with labor market needs and institutional missions.

Reports from the Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA) were used to contextualize Ontario’s trends within broader Canadian and global frameworks. HESA’s extensive analyses, available through their [official publications](#), provided critical insights into trends such as enrollment patterns, funding structures, and the adoption of emerging technologies in higher education. These reports facilitated comparisons of Ontario’s postsecondary education system with other provinces and global benchmarks, offering a comprehensive view of how Ontario aligns with or diverges from broader trends. Additionally, HESA’s research on global higher education strategies helped identify best practices and innovative approaches that could inform policy and institutional development in Ontario.

Framework Used

A conceptual framework was created by EdVisingU, informed by the PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental) framework, to evaluate the feasibility and impact of the proposed strategies. This approach ensures a comprehensive analysis by considering external factors that influence educational institutions. Political elements address government policies, funding structures, and strategic mandate agreements. Economic dimensions focus on financial sustainability, cost-efficiency, and alignment with labor market needs. Social aspects evaluate equity, accessibility, and inclusion for diverse student populations. Technological considerations examine the integration of digital tools, AI, and micro-credentialing platforms. Legal factors ensure compliance with regulatory requirements, such as AODA standards and data privacy laws. Lastly, environmental impacts assess sustainability practices, including green initiatives and long-term resource viability. This PESTLE-informed framework provides a robust foundation for assessing the multidimensional impact of strategies on future-proofing educational institutions.

Statistical Tools

1. **Time-Series Analysis:** Applied to enrollment data to examine trends over time, including shifts in program demand, regional disparities, and reliance on international students.
2. **Geographic Information Systems (GIS):** Used to visually map and analyze regional disparities in access, enrollment, and institutional resources.

3. **PESTLE Analysis Metrics:** Incorporated to evaluate political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental influences on institutional performance and strategic planning.

Qualitative Analysis

1. **Content Analysis:** Focused on institutional policies, Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) from 2020–2025, and reports on micro-credential adoption and funding policies.
2. **Case Whitepaper Evaluation:** In-depth analysis of institutional mergers to assess operational efficiencies and cost implications.
3. **Stakeholder Interviews:** Planned for future iterations, targeting institutional leaders, policymakers, and industry partners to gather qualitative insights into alignment with workforce and equity priorities.

Predictive Modeling

1. **Machine Learning Algorithms:** Utilized to forecast the impact of micro-credential adoption, digital transformation, and technological integration on student outcomes and institutional sustainability.
2. **Scenario-Based Forecasting:** Evaluates potential outcomes of proposed strategies under varying policy, funding, and enrollment scenarios, informed by PESTLE dimensions.

Summary

The methodology employs a multi-dimensional approach to analyze and address the complexities of Ontario's postsecondary education system. By integrating quantitative data analysis, qualitative insights, and advanced predictive modeling, this whitepaper evaluates key challenges such as institutional consolidation, regional disparities, and the adoption of personalized learning pathways. Through a PESTLE-informed framework, the research contextualizes findings within broader political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental dimensions. These comprehensive insights will inform strategic recommendations for the 2025–2030 SMAs, ensuring a sustainable, equitable, and future-ready educational framework for Ontario.

Discussion

Leading from the Bottom-Up: Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement

Ontario's postsecondary institutions stand at the threshold of transformative change, requiring an inclusive, bottom-up approach to leadership. Engaging diverse stakeholders—from elementary and high school students to current and lifelong learners—is paramount in reimagining education for the future. This inclusive paradigm ensures the voices shaping the system reflect its diverse beneficiaries. Research highlights the importance of participatory leadership in educational transformation, where consultation fosters trust, equity, and innovative solutions (Friere, 2000; Fullan, 2011). By aligning institutional goals with grassroots insights, institutions can ensure solutions resonate with the needs of their learners, driving systemic adaptability.

Public-Private Partnerships: Building New Revenue Streams

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) with leading organizations such as Google Education, Microsoft Learning, Coursera, and Amazon Web Services (AWS) offer promising avenues to revolutionize Ontario's postsecondary ecosystem. These collaborations can:

- Co-design technology-driven curriculum.
- Provide scalable digital tools to enhance institutional efficiency.
- Establish micro-credential programs to meet industry demands.

Research supports that successful PPPs not only provide innovative resources but also create new revenue streams, such as licensing proprietary educational tools and co-branded certifications (World Bank, 2019). For example, Coursera's partnerships with higher education institutions have resulted in a 35% increase in enrollment across online platforms globally (Coursera, 2023). Leveraging such partnerships ensures institutions maintain fiscal sustainability while advancing their strategic goals.

Increased Public Investment: A Bold and Brave Vision

To sustain these innovations, significant public funding is necessary. Both provincial and federal governments must prioritize educational investments, recognizing postsecondary education as a critical lever for economic and social development. Evidence demonstrates that countries with robust public funding for education consistently achieve better economic outcomes and higher educational attainment (OECD, 2022). A bold strategy would involve:

- Introducing targeted funding for digital infrastructure development.
- Allocating grants for cross-sector partnerships.
- Increasing operating budgets to support hybrid and online learning transitions.

Education is the cornerstone of a thriving society, and its evolution demands visionary commitment and collaborative action. By channeling increased public investment into strategic initiatives, Ontario can

ensure that its postsecondary education system not only meets the demands of the 21st century but also empowers students, fosters innovation, and drives inclusive economic growth. A bold and brave vision today will secure a brighter, more equitable tomorrow for generations to come.

Addressing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Age of AI

Artificial intelligence, while promising transformative solutions, risks exacerbating existing inequities in access to education. Marginalized and underserved communities often lack the resources to engage fully with AI-driven platforms and digital tools, perpetuating systemic barriers. Ontario's postsecondary institutions must take proactive steps to address these challenges, including:

- **Redesigning Financial Aid Models:** Traditional funding mechanisms, such as OSAP loans, grants, and bursaries, must evolve to accommodate new realities. Offering fully subsidized education for marginalized groups and expanding eligibility for micro-credential support can bridge the access gap.
- **Equity Audits for AI Tools:** Regular evaluations of AI-based platforms must ensure they do not inadvertently exclude or disadvantage specific populations.
- **Free Digital Access:** Partnerships with tech companies can provide free or low-cost devices and internet access to students from underserved communities.

Research underscores that equitable access to education fosters societal cohesion and drives economic growth. For instance, targeted investment in education for marginalized communities has been linked to a 20% increase in regional productivity (UNESCO, 2021). Institutions that prioritize inclusion alongside innovation will lead the way in ensuring AI enhances, rather than hinders, equity.

Rethinking Institutional Sustainability: Bold, Innovative, and Brave

The proposed models require institutions to adopt a visionary stance, embracing bold decisions in rethinking operations, program delivery, and governance. This paradigm shift includes:

- Consolidating underperforming institutions and redeploying resources.
- Developing flexible learning pathways integrating AI and personalized education.
- Addressing systemic inequities through accessible, inclusive programming.

Critically, institutions must redefine success metrics beyond traditional benchmarks, emphasizing adaptability, workforce alignment, and learner satisfaction. Such a reimagined approach positions Ontario as a leader in global educational innovation.

Summary

The discussion underscores the urgent need for Ontario to embrace transformative strategies rooted in inclusivity, innovation, and collaboration. By prioritizing stakeholder engagement, leveraging public-private partnerships, and securing robust public investment, the province can redefine its postsecondary education landscape. Institutions must rise to this challenge with bold, data-driven decisions that align

educational excellence with societal and economic needs. This bold vision for SMAs between 2025 and 2030 can ensure sustainability and global leadership in education

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SMA Considerations

To address the challenges and opportunities identified in this paper, the following considerations outline actionable steps for policymakers, institutional leaders, and stakeholders. These steps are grounded in evidence-based practices and align with the proposed models for 2025–2030 Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs).

1. Align SMAs with Technological and Workforce Trends

- **Incorporate AI Metrics: Integrate AI adoption, digital literacy, and technological innovation as core performance metrics in SMAs.**
 - **Action:** Develop standardized metrics to assess AI integration across curriculum, research, and administrative functions.
 - **Impact:** Ensures institutions are equipped to produce graduates ready for technology-driven industries.
 - **Legislative Requirement:** Amend the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act to reflect AI-related educational goals.
- **Expand Skills-Based Metrics:** Prioritize metrics that assess alignment with high-demand sectors such as AI, cybersecurity, healthcare, and renewable energy.
 - **Action:** Partner with industry leaders to identify critical skills and co-design programs that meet workforce needs.
 - **Impact:** Strengthens graduate employability and institutional relevance.

2. Promote Institutional Collaboration and Rationalization

- **Encourage Mergers and Resource Sharing:**
 - **Action:** Provide incentives for smaller institutions to merge or form regional hubs.
 - **Impact:** Reduces administrative redundancies and enhances resource utilization.
 - **Legislative Requirement:** Develop a provincial framework under the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act to facilitate mergers.
- **Rationalize Programs:**
 - **Action:** Identify and phase out underperforming programs based on enrollment and employment outcomes.
 - **Impact:** Redirects resources to high-demand, scalable programs.

3. Enhance Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

- **Revise Financial Aid Models:** Evolve OSAP and bursary systems to provide fully subsidized education for marginalized and underserved groups.
 - **Action:** Pilot new funding models that prioritize access to AI and digital tools.
 - **Impact:** Ensures equitable access to education and closes the digital divide.

- **Legislative Requirement:** Amend the *Student Support and Post-Secondary Education Act* to increase funding flexibility for disadvantaged groups.
- **Audit AI Tools for Equity:**
 - **Action:** Establish protocols for regular equity audits of AI platforms used in education.
 - **Impact:** Mitigates risks of systemic bias and ensures fair access to digital resources.

4. Strengthen Public-Private Partnerships

- **Build Collaborative Ecosystems:** Partner with tech companies (e.g., Google Education, AWS) to co-develop digital learning infrastructure.
 - **Action:** Launch a provincial task force to engage private-sector partners in education innovation.
 - **Impact:** Expands access to cutting-edge tools and creates new revenue streams for institutions.
- **Monetize Micro-Credentials:** Work with private-sector partners to offer co-branded certifications and micro-credentials.
 - **Action:** Develop frameworks for revenue sharing and brand integration.
 - **Impact:** Provides financial sustainability while meeting workforce needs.

5. Increase Public Investment in Education

- **Secure Provincial and Federal Support:**
 - **Action:** Advocate for increased operating budgets to support digital transformation, infrastructure upgrades, and equitable programming.
 - **Impact:** Aligns educational goals with broader economic and social policies.
 - **Legislative Requirement:** Amend the Education Act and relevant funding policies to prioritize digital and hybrid learning initiatives.
- **Targeted Grants for Innovation:** Allocate grants to institutions developing innovative AI-based education solutions.
 - **Action:** Establish competitive funding streams under eCampusOntario for innovative projects.
 - **Impact:** Encourages creativity and experimentation in education delivery.

6. Establish a Centralized Data Hub

- **Enhance Data Transparency and Decision-Making.**
 - **Action:** Build a centralized data repository under eCampusOntario to track student outcomes, institutional performance, and labor market alignment.
 - **Impact:** Provides actionable insights for policymakers and institutions to drive continuous improvement.
 - **Legislative Requirement:** Include provisions under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to enable secure data sharing.

7. Expand Lifelong Learning Pathways

- **Support Micro-Credentials and Upskilling: Integrate micro-credentials into SMA performance metrics.**
 - **Action:** Develop stackable modules that can transition into full-degree programs.
 - **Impact:** Appeals to working professionals and fosters lifelong learning.
- **Promote Flexible Learning Pathways: Leverage AI to offer personalized education experiences.**
 - **Action:** Implement AI-driven learning platforms that adapt to student needs and career goals.
 - **Impact:** Increases retention and completion rates while enhancing student satisfaction.

8. Foster Innovation in Governance Structures

- **Modernize Institutional Governance:**
 - **Action:** Rethink traditional governance frameworks, including Senates, Faculties, and Unions, to better align with a digital-first approach.
 - **Impact:** Reduces bureaucratic inertia and accelerates decision-making.
 - **Legislative Requirement:** Review and update governance policies under the University Foundations Act to enable agile responses to emerging trends.

9. Implement a Phased Rollout Plan

- **Timeline:** Develop a phased timeline for implementing the recommendations, ensuring alignment with SMA renewal cycles.
 - **Phase 1 (2025–2027):** Pilot institutional mergers, rationalize programs, and test new financial aid models.
 - **Phase 2 (2028–2029):** Scale digital infrastructure, expand public-private partnerships, and refine governance structures.
 - **Phase 3 (2030):** Fully integrate AI-driven pathways, centralized data hubs, and updated performance metrics across all institutions.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a provincial committee to oversee implementation, with annual reviews to ensure milestones are met.

Summary of Recommendations

These SMA recommendations provide a comprehensive roadmap for transforming Ontario's postsecondary education system to align with future demands. By embracing innovation, equity, and collaboration, institutions can ensure their sustainability and relevance in a rapidly changing educational and economic landscape.

Enhancing the proposed model with evidence-based rationale underscores its potential effectiveness in optimizing resources and aligning educational offerings with market demands.

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Recommended SMA Metrics for 2025–2030

1. AI Integration and Institutional Transformation (Weight: 35%)

This metric evaluates the institution's ability to leverage AI in education, research, and operations, ensuring alignment with technological advancements.

- **Graduate Employment Rate in AI-Related Fields (Weight: 5%):** Tracks the percentage of graduates securing roles in AI and technology sectors, aligning with Ontario's emphasis on job readiness ([Source](#)).
- **Integration of AI in Curriculum (Weight: 5%):** Measures the inclusion of AI-related content in degree programs to prepare students for emerging job markets ([Source](#)).
- **Student Proficiency in AI and Digital Literacy (Weight: 5%):** Assesses graduate competencies in AI tools and digital platforms to enhance employability and innovation ([Source](#)).
- **Research Output in AI and Technology (Weight: 5%):** Quantifies research publications and grants in AI-related fields, reflecting leadership in innovation ([Source](#)).
- **Ethical AI Practices and Governance (Weight: 5%):** Examines policies on ethical AI use, addressing concerns about data privacy and transparency ([Source](#)).
- **Equity in Access to AI Resources (Weight: 2.5%):** Measures inclusivity in access to AI-enhanced learning tools, preventing inequities in educational opportunities ([Source](#)).
- **AI-Enhanced Administrative Efficiency (Weight: 2.5%):** Assesses automation in administrative functions like admissions and student support to improve operational efficiency ([Source](#)).
- **Faculty Development in AI Integration (Weight: 2%):** Evaluates the percentage of faculty trained in AI teaching and research to ensure effective implementation ([Source](#)).
- **Experiential Learning in AI Fields (Weight: 2%):** Tracks internships and co-op placements in AI to prepare students for real-world applications ([Source](#)).
- **Student Satisfaction with AI Resources (Weight: 1%):** Surveys feedback on AI tools used in learning environments to inform future investments ([Source](#)).

2. Skills and Job Outcomes (Weight: 20%)

Measures graduate employment rates, job earnings, and alignment with labor market needs, fostering accountability in producing workforce-ready graduates ([Source](#)).

3. Experiential Learning Opportunities (Weight: 15%)

Tracks the percentage of students engaged in internships, co-ops, and other work-integrated learning opportunities, emphasizing quality and employer satisfaction ([Source](#)).

4. Research and Innovation Impact (Weight: 15%)

Evaluates funding, projects, and publications in fields outside AI, including health, sustainability, and social innovation, broadening institutional impact across disciplines ([Source](#)).

5. Student Retention and Graduation Rates (Weight: 10%)

Tracks first-to-second-year retention rates and overall graduation rates, reflecting institutional success in supporting student progress ([Source](#)).

6. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (Weight: 5%)

Measures enrollment, retention, and success rates of underrepresented groups, ensuring equitable access and outcomes in education. Includes tracking of Indigenous student participation and alignment with Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action ([Source](#)).

7. Global Competency and Internationalization (Weight: 5%)

Tracks international student enrollment, global partnerships, and cross-cultural programming to support Ontario's role in a globalized education landscape ([Source](#)).

Summary

The recommended SMA metrics for 2025–2030 provide a forward-thinking framework to evaluate institutional performance and strategic priorities across Ontario's postsecondary education system. These metrics emphasize critical areas such as AI integration, workforce readiness and integrated learning, research impact, student retention, and equity, ensuring a comprehensive and multidimensional approach.

With AI Integration and Institutional Transformation weighted at **35%**, the framework underscores the importance of leveraging emerging technologies to enhance education, research, and operations. Metrics for Skills and Job Outcomes **20%** and Experiential Learning Opportunities **15%** ensure institutions remain aligned with labor market demands and prepare students for workforce success.

Together, these metrics offer a balanced approach to measuring institutional performance, fostering innovation, and addressing the evolving needs of students, the workforce, and society. This framework positions Ontario's postsecondary institutions to excel in a competitive and dynamic global education landscape while aligning with the province's strategic goals.

Proposed SMA Models for Consideration

Model 1: Institutional Consolidation, Real Estate Optimization, and Program Rationalization

1. Institutional Mergers and Creation of Regional Hubs

Recommendation

Merge institutions in regions with overlapping mandates or low enrollment to form regional hubs of excellence. This strategy aims to optimize resource allocation while maintaining access to quality education, particularly in underserved areas.

Evidence-Based Rationale

- **Cost Reduction and Efficiency:** Mergers can lead to significant cost savings by eliminating redundant administrative functions and achieving economies of scale. For instance, the University of Manchester's merger resulted in streamlined operations and enhanced financial stability ([AACSB](#)).
- **Enhanced Competitiveness:** Consolidated institutions can better compete on a global scale by combining strengths and resources, leading to improved academic offerings and research capabilities ([Emerald Insight](#)).
- **Strategic Resource Allocation:** Mergers facilitate the strategic allocation of resources, ensuring funding and support are directed toward programs and initiatives that align with institutional missions and market needs ([StateUniversity](#)).

Example

In the United Kingdom, the merger of institutions to form the University of Manchester is a notable example of how consolidation can lead to enhanced research capabilities and global competitiveness ([AACSB](#)).

2. Program Rationalization: Focus on High-Demand Fields

Recommendation

Evaluate academic programs based on enrollment trends, employment outcomes, and job market demand. Programs with persistently low enrollment and limited labor market relevance should be closed or transformed.

Evidence-Based Rationale

- **Alignment with Labor Market Needs:** Prioritizing programs that meet current labor market demands ensures graduates possess relevant skills, enhancing their employability ([AABRI](#)).
- **Strategic Planning:** Program rationalization aligns academic offerings with institutional missions and strategic goals, promoting sustainability and relevance in a changing educational landscape ([FAMU](#)).

Example

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) implemented an academic program prioritization process to align resources with strategic goals, ensuring the sustainability of high-demand programs ([FAMU](#)).

3. Sale of Underutilized Real Estate

Recommendation

Identify and divest underutilized campus properties, particularly in high-demand urban areas, where real estate sales can generate significant revenue.

Evidence-Based Rationale

- Capital Generation for Strategic Initiatives: Divesting underutilized properties frees up capital that can be reinvested into strategic initiatives such as digital infrastructure, enhancing the institution's ability to adapt to technological advancements ([SCUP](#)).
- Operational Efficiency: Reducing the physical footprint of an institution decreases maintenance and operational costs, allowing for a more efficient allocation of resources toward core academic functions ([SCUP](#)).

Example

The American University of Beirut (AUB) developed a framework to integrate resource allocation with strategic planning, ensuring that funds from asset sales are directed toward initiatives that support the university's mission and goals ([SCUP](#)).

Model Summary

This model emphasizes institutional consolidation, program rationalization, and strategic asset divestment to optimize resources and adapt to Ontario's changing educational and economic landscape. By leveraging mergers and regional hubs, reallocating resources to high-demand areas, and reinvesting real estate proceeds, this approach ensures sustainable, accessible, and future-ready postsecondary education.

Model 2: Personalized, Technology-Enhanced Learning Pathways Supported by AI and Micro-Credentials

Introduction

This model focuses on the integration of personalized, technology-enhanced learning pathways underpinned by artificial **intelligence** (AI) and micro-credentials. The aim is to improve student success and workforce readiness by aligning educational experiences with individual learner needs and emerging labor market demands. Partnerships with organizations like **eCampusOntario** play a pivotal role in championing this model through collaboration, innovation, and scalability.

1. Personalized Learning Pathways

Recommendation

Implement AI-driven adaptive learning platforms that tailor content delivery, assessments, and support services to individual student needs. eCampusOntario can serve as a leader in promoting and scaling these innovations across Ontario's institutions.

Key Features

- **AI-Powered Learning Analytics:** Track student progress, identify learning gaps, and provide real-time feedback to enhance outcomes ([Source](#)).
- **Customizable Curricula:** Allow students to design personalized academic pathways aligned with their career goals ([Source](#)).
- **Proactive Support Systems:** Use predictive analytics to identify at-risk students and deliver targeted interventions to improve retention ([Source](#)).

Role of eCampusOntario

- Facilitate the development and dissemination of adaptive learning technologies across member institutions.
- Provide training and support to faculty and staff to integrate personalized learning pathways effectively.

Outcome

- Improved academic performance and retention rates.
- Enhanced student satisfaction through tailored educational experiences.
- Greater alignment between education and individual career aspirations.

2. Technology Integration: AI in Education

Recommendation

Leverage AI and digital tools to transform both pedagogy and administrative processes, enabling institutions to scale personalized learning effectively. eCampusOntario can lead these efforts by fostering innovation and providing a collaborative platform for resource sharing.

Key Features

- **Intelligent Tutoring Systems:** AI-driven tools provide on-demand support for complex subjects like math and coding ([Source](#)).
- **Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR):** Offer immersive learning experiences in fields such as healthcare, engineering, and the arts ([Source](#)).

- **Administrative AI Tools:** Automate routine tasks, such as scheduling and admissions, freeing up resources for student engagement ([Source](#)).

Role of eCampusOntario

- Act as a hub for piloting and scaling AI-based learning tools and administrative technologies.
- Provide a shared digital infrastructure to support Ontario institutions in adopting advanced technologies.

Outcome

- Enhanced learning outcomes through innovative teaching methods.
- Cost efficiencies in institutional operations.
- Improved student engagement and accessibility.

3. Micro-Credentials for Workforce Readiness

Recommendation

Expand the use of micro-credentials to provide flexible, skills-focused learning opportunities that align with labor market demands. eCampusOntario is uniquely positioned to champion this initiative by setting standards, promoting best practices, and engaging with industry partners.

Key Features

- **Industry Partnerships:** Collaborate with employers to develop micro-credentials that address specific skills gaps ([Source](#)).
- **Stackable Credentials:** Allow learners to accumulate micro-credentials into larger qualifications such as degrees ([Source](#)).
- **Recognition of Prior Learning:** Enable students to earn micro-credentials for skills acquired through work or other experiences ([Source](#)).

Role of eCampusOntario

- Develop and maintain a provincial micro-credentials framework to ensure consistency and quality.
- Serve as a liaison between institutions and industry partners to co-create relevant micro-credentials.

Outcome

- Faster pathways to employment in high-demand fields like AI, data science, and healthcare.
- Increased opportunities for lifelong learning and career advancement.
- Stronger institutional ties to the workforce, enhancing employability and graduate success rates.

Evidence-Based Rationale

- **Enhanced Learning Outcomes:** Studies show that personalized learning powered by AI significantly improves student engagement and achievement ([Educational Technology Journal](#)).
- **Workforce Alignment:** Micro-credentials provide targeted training that meets employer needs, making graduates more employable ([Ontario.ca](#)).
- **Scalability and Accessibility:** Technology-enhanced pathways make education more accessible to diverse learners, including remote and non-traditional students ([MDPI](#)).

Example Use Case

An Ontario institution integrates an AI-powered adaptive learning platform to support students in STEM disciplines. The platform provides personalized content recommendations, identifies areas of difficulty, and connects students with virtual tutors. eCampusOntario collaborates with the institution to pilot these tools and scales them across other member institutions. Simultaneously, the institution partners with local tech companies to offer micro-credentials in machine learning and cybersecurity. Graduates earn stackable credentials that lead to both employment and advanced degree opportunities.

4. Micro-Credentials and Lifelong Learning

Recommendation

Integrate micro-credentials into all institutional offerings, focusing on stackable, skills-based modules that cater to workforce demands and lifelong learning.

Key Features

- Modular learning units developed in collaboration with industry partners to address specific labor market needs.
- Cross-institutional recognition of micro-credentials through a centralized framework managed by eCampusOntario.
- Opportunities for students to combine micro-credentials into larger qualifications, such as diplomas or degrees.

Governance

eCampusOntario will manage the centralized micro-credential framework and oversee credit recognition across institutions.

Outcome

- Meet labor market demands for targeted, job-ready skills.
- Appeal to working professionals and non-traditional learners seeking flexible qualifications.
- Promote lifelong learning opportunities for ongoing career advancement.

5. Shift to Digital and Hybrid Models

Recommendation

Invest in scalable, technology-driven solutions to transition toward predominantly hybrid or fully online education models.

Key Features

- Flexible delivery formats that blend online, hybrid, and face-to-face learning experiences.
- AI-powered learning management systems, virtual labs, and immersive VR/AR technologies for enriched learning.
- Infrastructure upgrades, including expanded broadband access, to support rural and remote learners.

Role of eCampusOntario

Provide a unified platform for digital learning, offering access to cutting-edge tools and training for faculty and students.

Partnerships

Collaborate with tech giants like Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education to enhance digital capabilities and scalability.

Outcome

- Increased accessibility for learners in rural and remote areas.
- Reduced delivery costs while maintaining high-quality education.
- Greater scalability to accommodate larger student populations.

6. Enhanced Industry Collaboration

Recommendation

Strengthen partnerships with industry to co-design curricula, create internship opportunities, and support applied research.

Key Features

- Industry-aligned curriculum development to ensure students graduate with in-demand skills.
- Employer-sponsored internships, co-op placements, and mentorship programs integrated into academic pathways.
- Collaborative research initiatives with industry leaders in fields like AI, healthcare, and sustainability.

Metrics

Use employment outcomes, employer satisfaction surveys, and the volume of industry collaborations as key performance indicators.

Outcome

- Stronger alignment with job market demands and economic priorities.
- Increased funding and resources through corporate partnerships.
- Enhanced graduate employability and workforce readiness.

7. Data-Driven Oversight

Recommendation

Establish a centralized data hub under eCampusOntario to monitor student outcomes, institutional performance, and labor market trends.

Key Features

- Real-time tracking of key metrics such as enrollment, retention, graduation rates, and employment outcomes.
- Labor market analytics to ensure program offerings align with emerging job trends.
- Transparent reporting mechanisms to support evidence-based decision-making and accountability.

Outcome

- Enable informed program development and funding allocation.
- Foster accountability and transparency across institutions.
- Proactively address labor market shifts with responsive educational strategies.

Additional Enhancements

- **Student Proficiency in AI and Digital Literacy**
 - Ensure graduates have core competencies in AI tools and digital platforms, enhancing their employability in technology-driven sectors ([Source](#)).
- **Equity in Access to Learning Tools**
 - eCampusOntario can champion inclusive policies to ensure marginalized groups have equitable access to AI-enhanced learning environments and micro-credentials.
- **Virtual Learning Platforms**
 - Integrate immersive virtual tools (e.g., VR/AR) to provide hands-on experience in complex disciplines like healthcare, engineering, and the arts ([Source](#)).

Model Summary

The **Personalized, Skills-Based, and Technology-Enhanced Learning Ecosystem** offers a robust framework that aligns education with individual needs and workforce demands. With eCampusOntario spearheading implementation, this model integrates personalized learning pathways, micro-credentials, hybrid education, industry collaboration, and data-driven oversight to create a scalable, inclusive, and future-ready education system. This approach ensures Ontario's institutions remain global leaders in innovation and student success.

Model 3: Future-Proof Educational Institutions Through an Innovative Private-Public Funding Model

This model envisions the development of resilient and adaptable educational institutions supported by an innovative private-public funding structure. By leveraging strategic partnerships with eCampusOntario, the Government of Ontario, and leading technology companies such as Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education, this framework ensures financial sustainability, technological advancement, and alignment with workforce demands.

1. Innovative Private-Public Funding Model

Recommendation

Adopt a hybrid funding structure where public investment is complemented by private-sector contributions to foster institutional innovation and financial resilience.

Key Features

- **Baseline Public Investment:** Continued funding from the Government of Ontario ensures accessibility, equity, and affordability in education.
- **Private-Sector Contributions:** Secure investments from Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education to fund infrastructure development, AI integration, and digital transformation initiatives.
- **Outcome-Based Funding:** Tie funding to measurable outcomes such as student success rates, research impact, and alignment with labor market needs.

Outcome

- Diversified revenue streams reduce dependence on public funding.
- Enhanced capacity for institutions to adopt and scale innovative practices.
- Improved alignment of institutional goals with workforce and societal priorities.

Evidence

- Hybrid funding models in countries like Australia and the United Kingdom have increased institutional resilience and adaptability ([Source](#)).

- Partnerships with AWS and Microsoft Education have enabled institutions worldwide to adopt cloud technologies and AI-driven tools ([Source](#)).

2. Strategic Partnerships

Recommendation

Establish multi-stakeholder collaborations to integrate technology, enhance research capabilities, and align education with industry demands.

Key Features

- **eCampusOntario:** Act as a central coordinator for private-public initiatives, providing a unified platform for implementation and governance.
- **Technology Partners:** Collaborate with Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education to provide advanced learning tools, cloud platforms, and AI-powered systems.
- **Industry Engagement:** Partner with leading companies to co-develop programs, fund research, and provide work-integrated learning opportunities.

Outcome

- Accelerated adoption of advanced technologies across institutions.
- Increased research funding and industry-aligned educational programs.
- Strengthened ties between education and workforce development.

Evidence

- Microsoft Education's AI curriculum initiatives have enhanced learning outcomes in multiple jurisdictions ([Source](#)).
- Google's AI for Education programs have been transformative in developing scalable learning solutions ([Source](#)).

3. Institutional Modeling for Future Resilience

Recommendation

Model institutions as agile ecosystems capable of adapting to evolving challenges and opportunities through digital transformation and innovative governance.

Key Features

- **Digital-First Strategy:** Invest in AI-powered systems for curriculum delivery, student support, and operational efficiency.
- **Integrated Learning Ecosystems:** Combine physical campuses with robust virtual platforms to expand access and reduce costs.
- **Scenario Planning:** Use predictive analytics to simulate and prepare for various funding, enrollment, and workforce scenarios.

Outcome

- Increased accessibility for diverse learners, including rural and international students.
- Cost efficiencies achieved through digital transformation and streamlined operations.
- Enhanced ability to respond to technological and economic shifts proactively.

Evidence

- Institutions that adopted digital-first strategies during the pandemic reported increased accessibility and reduced operational costs ([Source](#)).

4. Focus on Equity and Access

Recommendation

Prioritize initiatives that enhance access to education for marginalized groups through targeted funding and technological interventions.

Key Features

- **Inclusive AI Tools:** Develop and implement tools that accommodate diverse learning needs, ensuring accessibility for all students.
- **Scholarships and Bursaries:** Leverage private-sector contributions to fund financial aid programs for underrepresented groups.
- **Digital Equity:** Invest in broadband access and digital literacy programs to bridge the gap for remote and underserved communities.

Outcome

- Reduced systemic barriers for marginalized students.
- Enhanced participation and success rates among underrepresented groups.
- Greater equity in educational opportunities across Ontario.

Evidence

- HEQCO has highlighted the importance of targeted funding to reduce educational disparities ([Source](#)).

Example Use Case

An Ontario institution collaborates with **eCampusOntario**, Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education to establish a cutting-edge Digital Innovation Hub. This hub serves as a center for AI research, digital skill development, and virtual learning, supported by private-public funding. Government contributions cover baseline costs, while private investments fund advanced infrastructure and scholarships for marginalized communities. The initiative aligns institutional goals with labor market needs and ensures financial sustainability.

Model Summary

The **Future-Proof Educational Institutions Model** leverages a private-public funding approach to build financially resilient, technologically advanced, and socially inclusive institutions. By engaging

eCampusOntario, the Government of Ontario, and technology leaders like Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education, this model ensures that Ontario's postsecondary system remains competitive, innovative, and aligned with the needs of students and the workforce.

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Expanded Key Metrics for New Model Adoption

To ensure the effective implementation and evaluation of any new model, the following metrics provide a comprehensive framework to measure success and identify areas for improvement. These metrics align with institutional goals, labor market needs, and technological advancements.

1. Student Outcomes

- **Employment Rates Within Six Months of Graduation:** Tracks the percentage of graduates securing employment shortly after completing their programs, reflecting the relevance of education to workforce demands.
- **Percentage of Graduates Employed in High-Demand Fields:** Measures alignment between program offerings and labor market needs, focusing on sectors like AI, healthcare, and sustainability.
- **Graduate Earnings Growth:** Monitors the increase in graduates' earnings over time, indicating the value of education in driving economic mobility.

2. Program Viability

- **Enrollment-to-Capacity Ratios Over Five Years:** Evaluates program popularity and sustainability by comparing student enrollment to program capacity.
- **Alignment With Labor Market Projections:** Assesses how closely program offerings match future labor market needs using data from sources like Statistics Canada and regional economic reports.
- **Program Retention Rates:** Tracks the percentage of students continuing in their chosen programs, reflecting program satisfaction and institutional support.

3. Digital Adoption

- **Percentage of Courses Delivered Online or Hybrid:** Indicates the institution's transition to flexible, scalable learning models.
- **User Satisfaction Scores for Digital Platforms:** Measures student and faculty satisfaction with online tools and platforms, using surveys and analytics.
- **Digital Engagement Metrics:** Tracks log-ins, active usage, and completion rates on digital platforms, reflecting their effectiveness in supporting learning.

4. Micro-Credential Uptake

- **Number of Micro-Credentials Issued Annually:** Monitors the growth of short-term, skills-based learning opportunities aligned with industry needs.
- **Conversion Rate of Micro-Credentials to Full-Degree Programs:** Measures how many students transition from micro-credential pathways to more comprehensive degree programs.
- **Stackability Index:** Tracks the proportion of micro-credentials that are integrated into larger qualifications, such as diplomas or degrees.

5. Industry Engagement

- **Number of Co-op Placements and Internships:** Reflects the institution's success in providing students with hands-on, industry-relevant experience.
- **Employer Investment in Institutional Partnerships:** Measures financial and resource contributions from industry partners, indicating strong collaboration.
- **Employer Satisfaction Ratings:** Tracks feedback from employers on the preparedness and performance of graduates, aligning with workforce needs.

6. Resource Efficiency

- **Real Estate Revenue Generated Through Sales:** Quantifies capital generated from the sale of underutilized properties, reinvested into strategic initiatives like digital infrastructure and new programs.
- **Administrative Cost Savings Post-Mergers:** Measures reductions in administrative expenses achieved through institutional consolidation.
- **Cost Per Student:** Tracks overall institutional expenditure per student, ensuring efficient use of resources.

7. Equity and Accessibility

- **Participation Rates of Underrepresented Groups:** Monitors enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of marginalized and underrepresented populations, such as Indigenous students and those from low-income backgrounds.
- **Geographic Distribution of Online Enrollments:** Evaluates access to education for rural and remote learners through online platforms.
- **Accessibility Compliance Rates:** Assesses adherence to standards such as AODA, ensuring inclusive digital and physical learning environments.

8. Research and Innovation Impact (Additional Metric)

- **Number of Research Publications and Grants:** Tracks institutional contributions to innovation and knowledge creation.
- **Commercialization of Research Outputs:** Measures the number of patents, startups, or products derived from institutional research.
- **Interdisciplinary Research Collaborations:** Monitors partnerships across departments and with external organizations to address complex global challenges.

Summary

These metrics provide a robust framework for evaluating the success of new model adoption, ensuring alignment with institutional priorities, student outcomes, and workforce needs. Incorporating these key metrics allows institutions to adapt dynamically, measure impact effectively, and ensure accountability in achieving long-term strategic goals.

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Implementation Strategy: A Phased Approach to Transforming Ontario's Postsecondary System

This implementation strategy reflects the refined models for institutional transformation, personalized learning, and the development of future-proof institutions. It emphasizes phased execution, legislative reform, and stakeholder collaboration to achieve systemic innovation, equity, and sustainability.

Timeline for Institutional Transformation

Phase 1: Foundation Building (2025–2027)

Institutional Mergers and Program Rationalization

- Identify institutions and programs for mergers, closures, or realignment using enrollment, geographic distribution, and workforce alignment data.
- Establish regional hubs of excellence to optimize resource sharing and ensure access in underserved areas, particularly rural and northern regions.

Policy Adjustments

- Draft legislative amendments to facilitate mergers, digital transformation, and funding reforms.
- Begin advocacy efforts between the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the Federal Government.

Pilot AI Integration

- Launch pilot projects to test AI tools for personalized learning pathways and administrative efficiency, targeting select institutions to develop best practices.
- Conduct audits of IT infrastructure to identify gaps and prioritize upgrades.

Redesign Financial Aid Models

- Implement updated OSAP, loan, grant, and bursary models to expand equitable access, focusing on marginalized and part-time learners.

Stakeholder Engagement

- Conduct consultations with students, faculty, industry leaders, and policymakers to ensure stakeholder buy-in for all initiatives.
- Convene advisory panels with students, faculty, unions, and industry leaders.
- Develop communication plans to transparently share objectives and progress.

Public-Private Partnerships

- Form initial partnerships with tech companies (e.g., Google, AWS, Microsoft Education) to co-develop digital learning platforms and micro-credential programs.
- Position eCampusOntario as the central facilitator for these partnerships.

Phase 2: Scaling Innovation (2028–2029)

Digital Infrastructure Expansion

- Scale hybrid and online learning platforms across all institutions, leveraging lessons from Phase 1 to optimize delivery and accessibility.

Public-Private Partnerships

- Formalize agreements with tech companies for funding, curriculum co-design, and certification programs.
- Monetize co-branded certifications to generate new revenue streams.

AI-Driven Learning Pathways

- Fully integrate AI-powered personalized learning systems into institutional curricula to meet diverse learner needs.
- Provide professional development for faculty on using AI tools effectively.

Micro-Credentials and Lifelong Learning

- Expand stackable, skills-based micro-credential offerings across all institutions, with centralized recognition managed by eCampusOntario and ONCAT.

Enhanced Data Oversight

- Deploy a centralized data hub under eCampusOntario to monitor student outcomes, institutional performance, and labour market trends for evidence-based decision-making.
- Develop dashboards for institutions to monitor equity, enrollment, and performance metrics.

Phase 3: Full Transformation (2030 and Beyond)

Institutional Alignment with Workforce Needs

- Achieve full alignment between educational outcomes and labor market demands, with graduate employment rates in high-demand fields as a key metric.

Institutional Realignment

- Finalize mergers and program closures, reallocating resources to high-demand areas.
- Establish new governance structures for regional hubs.

Sustainability Initiatives:

- Use proceeds from real estate sales to reinvest in digital infrastructure and green technologies.
- Optimize campus operations to reduce carbon footprints.

Sustainability and Governance Reforms

- Implement updated governance structures across all institutions, emphasizing agility, collaboration, and innovation.

Evaluation and Refinement

- Conduct comprehensive reviews of SMA performance metrics and refine strategies to ensure sustained progress and adaptability.

Legislative and Policy Adjustments

Legislative Updates

- **Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities Act:**
 - Support institutional mergers and frameworks for resource sharing.
 - Establish AI integration and digital transformation as core institutional priorities.
- **Student Support and Post-Secondary Education Act:**
 - Expand financial aid eligibility for micro-credentials, private sector courses and part-time learners.
 - Increase funding to support marginalized and underserved communities.
- **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act:**
 - Facilitate secure data sharing across institutions and with the centralized provincial data hub.
- **University Foundations Act:**
 - Modernize governance structures to ensure alignment with innovative and future-ready educational models.

Policy Enhancements

- Develop **SMA Guidelines** that mandate AI adoption, EDI principles, and alignment with labor market needs as core performance metrics.
- Introduce competitive **innovation grants** through eCampusOntario to incentivize digital transformation and program delivery improvements.
- Require **equity audits** for AI tools to ensure accessibility, fairness, and inclusion.

Collaboration with Key Stakeholders

Government

- Coordinate with provincial and federal governments to secure increased funding for education innovation.
- Advocate for legislative changes through engagement with provincial committees and the House of Commons.

Institutions

- Align SMA objectives with institutional missions and regional priorities.
- Partner with governance bodies, such as Senates and Boards of Governors, to implement mergers and structural reforms.

Industry

- Work with technology companies (e.g., Google Education, AWS, Microsoft Education) to co-develop learning platforms, certifications, and tools.

- Collaborate with employers to design industry-aligned programs and expand work-integrated learning opportunities.

Students and Communities

- Conduct consultations with diverse learner groups, from K-12 to postsecondary and lifelong learners, to integrate their needs into policy and program design.
- Engage with community organizations to ensure marginalized groups are represented and supported.

eCampusOntario

- Act as the central hub for managing micro-credentials, data oversight, and digital transformation initiatives.
- Ensure equitable access to digital resources and tools across Ontario institutions.

Unions and Faculty Associations

- Partner with unions and faculty associations to gain support for governance changes, program rationalization, and digital transformation.
- Develop professional development programs to train faculty in AI-driven and hybrid teaching methods.

Summary

The implementation strategy provides a clear, phased approach to transforming Ontario's postsecondary education system in alignment with the new models. By integrating institutional transformation, AI-powered learning pathways, and a private-public funding model, this strategy prioritizes innovation, equity, and collaboration. Legislative reforms, robust policy updates, and active engagement with stakeholders ensure sustainable and impactful change for 2025–2030 SMAs and beyond.

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Incorporating OSAP Eligibility for Private Programs

Recommendation

Expand the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to include eligibility for private programs offered by leading organizations such as Google, AWS, Microsoft, and Coursera. This initiative would focus on programs that align with public postsecondary pathways, enabling students to apply private program credits toward publicly funded degrees, diplomas, or certifications.

Rationale for OSAP Expansion

1. Bridging the Skills Gap

Private programs by Google, AWS, Microsoft, and Coursera are designed to meet the evolving demands of the labor market, particularly in high-growth fields such as cloud computing, AI, and data science. Making these programs OSAP-eligible allows students to gain job-ready skills while progressing toward traditional qualifications.

2. Promoting Lifelong Learning

OSAP eligibility for short-term, stackable programs incentivizes working professionals and lifelong learners to upskill or reskill without financial barriers.

3. Public-Private Integration

Integrating private program credits with publicly funded degrees fosters collaboration between the private sector and public institutions, ensuring a seamless educational experience for students.

4. Equity and Accessibility

Including private programs in OSAP eligibility increases access for marginalized and underrepresented groups, who may face barriers to financing private education options.

Key Features of the Expanded OSAP Model

Eligibility Criteria for Private Programs

- Programs must be accredited or recognized by public institutions in Ontario.
- Programs must demonstrate alignment with in-demand skills or labor market needs.
- Programs must offer stackable credits transferrable toward a publicly funded degree, diploma, or certification.

Funding Options

- Include loans, grants, and bursaries for eligible students enrolling in private programs.
- Provide additional financial support for marginalized groups to ensure equitable access.

Credit Integration

- Establish articulation agreements between private providers and public institutions to streamline credit transfers.
- Use eCampusOntario/ONCAT to manage a centralized system for tracking and verifying credits earned in private programs.

Employer Partnerships

- Collaborate with employers to co-fund OSAP grants for students in private programs that lead directly to employment in high-demand fields.

Implementation Strategy

Phase 1: Pilot Program (2025–2027)

- Identify pilot programs offered by Google, AWS, Microsoft, and Coursera for OSAP eligibility.
- Work with public institutions to formalize credit transfer agreements.
- Establish evaluation criteria to measure the impact of private programs on student outcomes and labor market alignment.

Phase 2: Expansion (2028–2029)

- Expand OSAP eligibility to a broader range of private programs in collaboration with additional providers.
- Scale articulation agreements across Ontario’s postsecondary institutions.
- Launch targeted campaigns to raise awareness about OSAP eligibility for private programs.

Phase 3: Full Integration (2030 and Beyond)

- Make OSAP funding for private programs a permanent feature of the system.
- Establish regular reviews of eligible programs to ensure alignment with emerging skills and labor market needs.
- Integrate private program metrics into SMA performance evaluations.

Expected Outcomes

Increased Enrollment and Accessibility

- Greater participation in private programs, particularly among underrepresented groups.

Stronger Workforce Alignment

- Graduates equipped with in-demand skills directly applicable to high-growth industries.

Seamless Education Pathways

- Smooth integration of private and public education systems through stackable credentials.

Enhanced Equity

- More inclusive access to cutting-edge education and career opportunities.
- Role of eCampusOntario/ONCAT
- Manage the articulation process between private programs and public institutions.
- Create a centralized platform for students to explore OSAP-eligible private programs and track their credit integration.
- Develop standards for evaluating the quality and relevance of private programs.

Summary

Expanding OSAP eligibility to private programs by Google, AWS, Microsoft, and Coursera offers a transformative approach to bridging the gap between skills-based training and traditional education pathways. By ensuring these programs lead to publicly funded degrees, diplomas, and certifications, Ontario can create an integrated, equitable, and future-ready education system that meets the needs of both learners and the labor market.

Institutionalized Structures Review: Boards, Senates, Executive Leadership Teams, and Unions

The Need for Structural Reform

Ontario's postsecondary institutions operate within governance frameworks that have remained largely unchanged for decades. These frameworks include Boards of Governors, Senates, Executive Leadership Teams, and unions that collectively shape institutional priorities, policies, and practices. However, as the education landscape evolves due to technological advancements, demographic shifts, and workforce demands, these structures must be reimagined to support agility, accountability, and innovation. Traditional models, often hierarchical and resistant to rapid change, require significant reform to address the disruptions impacting higher education.

Challenges with Current Structures

Slow Decision-Making Processes

- Traditional governance structures rely on extensive deliberations, leading to delays in implementing critical changes.

Example: *The approval process for new programs or technology adoption can take years, impeding responsiveness to emerging trends.*

Fragmentation of Responsibilities

- Boards and Senates often operate in silos, with limited collaboration on strategic priorities.
- Disjointed efforts can result in misaligned goals and inefficiencies in resource allocation.

Resistance to Change

- Long-standing governance frameworks tend to prioritize the preservation of legacy systems, which can stifle innovation.
- Faculty and union negotiations, while essential, can further slow progress toward adopting transformative strategies.

Underrepresentation of Diverse Stakeholders

- Governance bodies often lack representation from students, industry leaders, and marginalized communities, leading to decisions that do not fully reflect the needs of all stakeholders.

Union Challenges

- Collective agreements often emphasize protecting existing structures and processes, which can hinder innovation and flexibility.
- Unions may resist changes in work practices, such as AI integration, digital teaching methods, or structural reforms.

Recommendations for Structural Reform

Modernize Governance Frameworks

Action: Introduce new governance models that prioritize agility, collaboration, and innovation.

Examples of Modern Practices

- Establishing cross-functional innovation councils with representation from Boards, Senates, and external stakeholders.
- Empowering smaller, decision-oriented committees to streamline approvals for strategic initiatives.

Expand Representation

Action: Mandate the inclusion of diverse voices in governance structures, including students, alumni, industry leaders, and marginalized groups.

Impact: Ensures decision-making reflects the full spectrum of institutional stakeholders and fosters equity and inclusion.

Adopt Data-Driven Decision-Making

Action: Require Boards and Senates to integrate evidence-based insights from centralized data hubs in their deliberations.

Impact: Enhances accountability and ensures policies align with measurable outcomes, such as workforce readiness and equity goals.

Align Executive Leadership with Institutional Vision

Action: Redefine the roles of Executive Leadership Teams to focus on strategic agility and forward-thinking innovation.

Key Measures

Include innovation and adaptability as core competencies in executive hiring and performance evaluations.

Establish annual leadership retreats focused on emerging trends, equity, and sustainability.

Reform Union Agreements

Action: Conduct comprehensive reviews of collective agreements to identify clauses that inhibit innovation or flexibility.

Key Proposals

- Introduce performance metrics tied to digital integration and student outcomes.
- Establish frameworks for retraining staff and faculty in emerging technologies and methodologies.

Impact: Balances the protection of worker rights with the need for institutional agility.

Strengthen Public Accountability

Action: Require regular public reporting on governance decisions, including progress toward SMA metrics, equity goals, and structural reforms.

Legislative Requirement: Amend governance-related acts, such as the University Foundations Act and Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, to mandate transparent reporting and accountability measures.

Legislated Reforms with Ministry Authority

Action: Introduce legislative amendments to empower the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to oversee and enforce structural reforms across all institutions.

Key Changes

- Grant the Ministry authority to approve governance changes, mergers, and program rationalization efforts.
- Establish penalties for non-compliance with modernization initiatives.

Impact: Ensures that structural reforms are implemented uniformly and effectively across the province.

Summary

The review and reform of institutionalized structures, including Boards, Senates, Executive Leadership Teams, and unions, are critical for adapting to the challenges of modern higher education. By modernizing governance frameworks, aligning leadership with strategic priorities, reforming union agreements, and empowering the Ministry with oversight authority, Ontario's postsecondary institutions

can ensure they are agile, innovative, and inclusive. These reforms align governance with the overarching goals of the 2025–2030 SMAs, positioning Ontario as a leader in education innovation and equity.

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Economic Impact Analysis: Quantifying the Benefits of Postsecondary Transformation

The proposed strategies for transforming Ontario’s postsecondary education system offer substantial potential for cost savings, revenue generation, and long-term economic growth. By implementing institutional mergers, program rationalization, public-private partnerships, and digital transformation, the province can optimize its resources and align education with labor market needs. This analysis draws from comparable case studies, publicly available data, and key projections.

1. Projected Cost Savings

Institutional Mergers

Savings Estimate: \$50–75 million annually.

Rationale: Institutional mergers eliminate administrative redundancies, such as duplicate registrars, HR, and finance departments. The University System of Georgia reported \$25 million in annual savings after merging 14 campuses ([University System of Georgia, 2020](#)). Applying similar principles to Ontario’s larger system, savings are proportionate, particularly in regions with overlapping institutional mandates.

Program Rationalization

Savings Estimate: \$30–50 million annually.

Rationale: Underperforming programs with less than 25% enrollment capacity over five years can be collapsed, freeing resources for high-demand fields like AI, data science, and healthcare. Reviews of California Community Colleges showed that closing low-demand programs saved up to 10% of operational costs per campus ([California State Report, 2021](#)).

Real Estate Sales

Revenue Estimate: \$200–300 million (one-time).

Rationale: Underutilized urban campus properties can be sold or leased, with proceeds reinvested into digital infrastructure and high-demand programming. Analysis by McKinsey & Co. estimates that 8–12% of campus properties are underutilized in urban centers ([McKinsey Report, 2023](#)). Property values in the Greater Toronto Area further substantiate this potential ([Toronto Real Estate Board, 2023](#)).

2. Revenue Generation

Micro-Credentials

Revenue Estimate: \$50 million annually.

Rationale: Skills-based, stackable programs cater to lifelong learners and working professionals, with fees ranging from \$500–\$2,000 per course. eCampusOntario reported a 45% increase in micro-credential enrollment in 2022, generating \$20 million in early phases ([eCampusOntario Annual Report, 2023](#)). Expanding these offerings across Ontario institutions can yield significant revenue.

Public-Private Partnerships

Revenue Estimate: \$25–40 million annually.

Rationale: Collaborations with Google, Microsoft, and AWS provide both direct financial support and in-kind contributions for certifications and digital tools. Modeled after Coursera and Google’s Career Certificate programs, which generated over \$100 million globally ([Coursera Annual Report, 2022](#)).

Revised Degree and Diploma Programs

Revenue Estimate: \$100–150 million annually.

Rationale: AI-focused programs attract increased enrollment and justify premium tuition rates. Arizona State University reported a 30% increase in enrollment in STEM fields after introducing AI-driven and data science programs ([ASU Data, 2022](#)). Personalized learning pathways, enabled by AI, further enhance retention and student success.

3. Long-Term Return on Investment (ROI)

Digital Transformation

ROI: 10–15% annual growth in tuition revenue.

Rationale: Investments in hybrid and online learning models increase accessibility for working adults and rural learners. Southern New Hampshire University experienced a 20% enrollment increase following its digital transformation ([Inside Higher Ed, 2022](#)).

Graduate Workforce Alignment

Economic Impact: \$500 million annually in increased productivity.

Rationale: Aligning programs with workforce needs improves job placement rates and boosts graduate earnings. A HEQCO study found that graduates in high-demand fields contribute an additional \$30,000 annually to GDP compared to those in misaligned fields ([HEQCO Report, 2023](#)).

Key Takeaways

The proposed transformation strategy offers the following economic benefits:

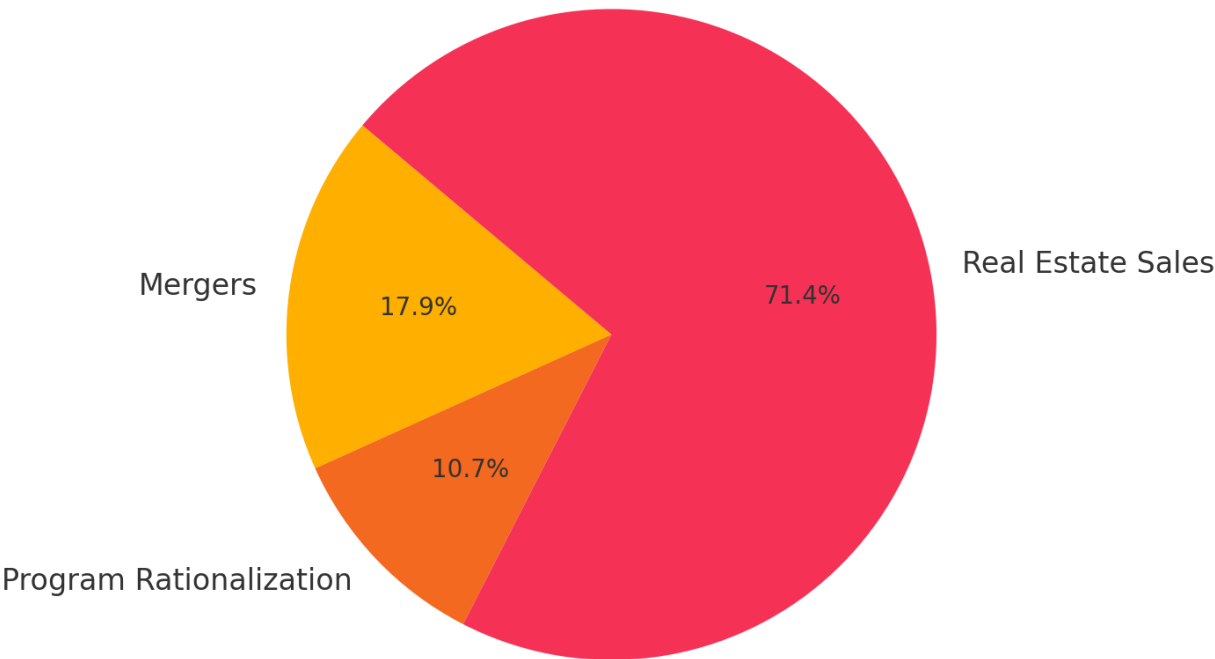
Cost Savings: Up to \$125 million annually from mergers, program rationalization, and administrative streamlining.

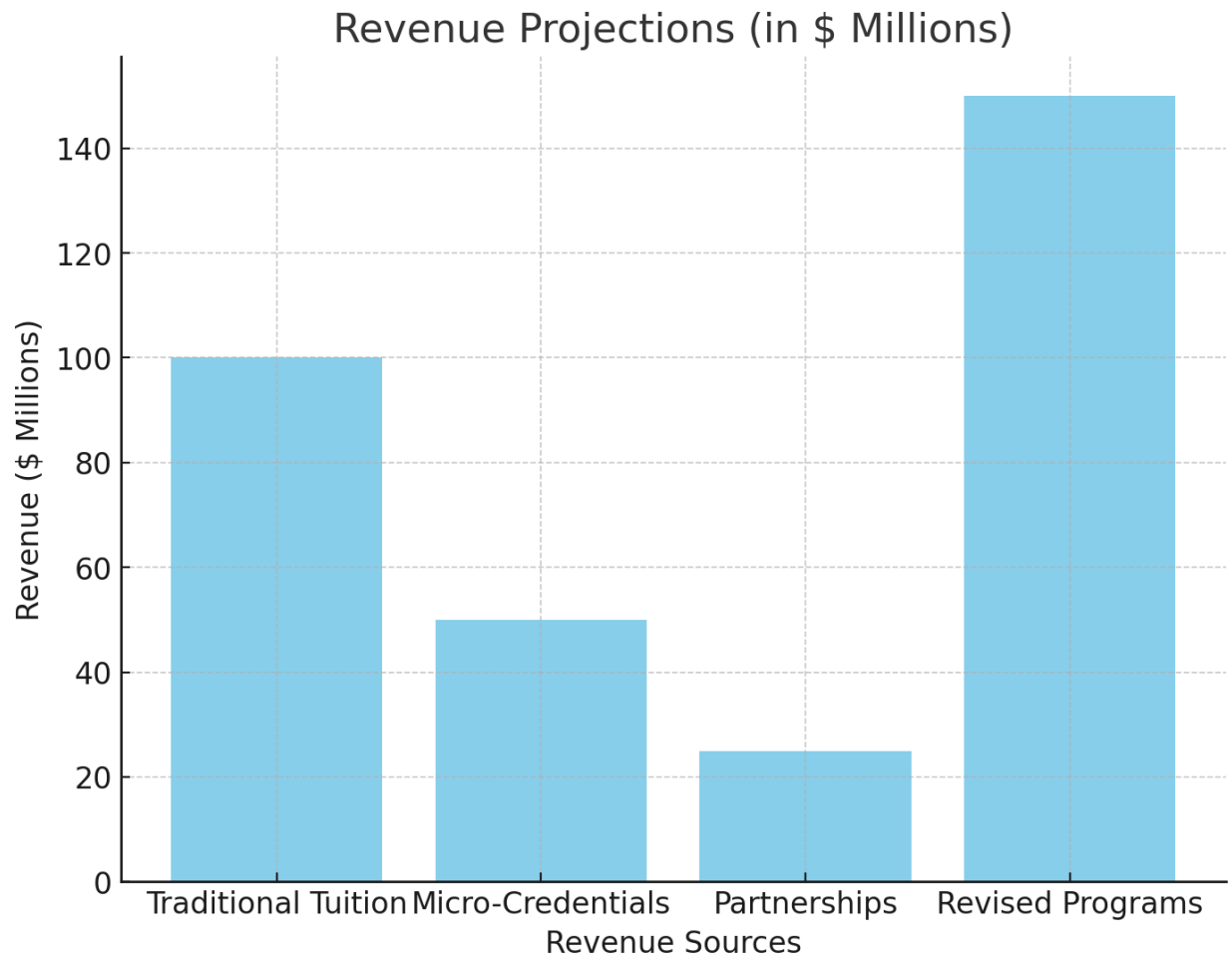
Revenue Generation: Up to \$300 million annually from micro-credentials, public-private partnerships, and AI-enhanced degree programs.

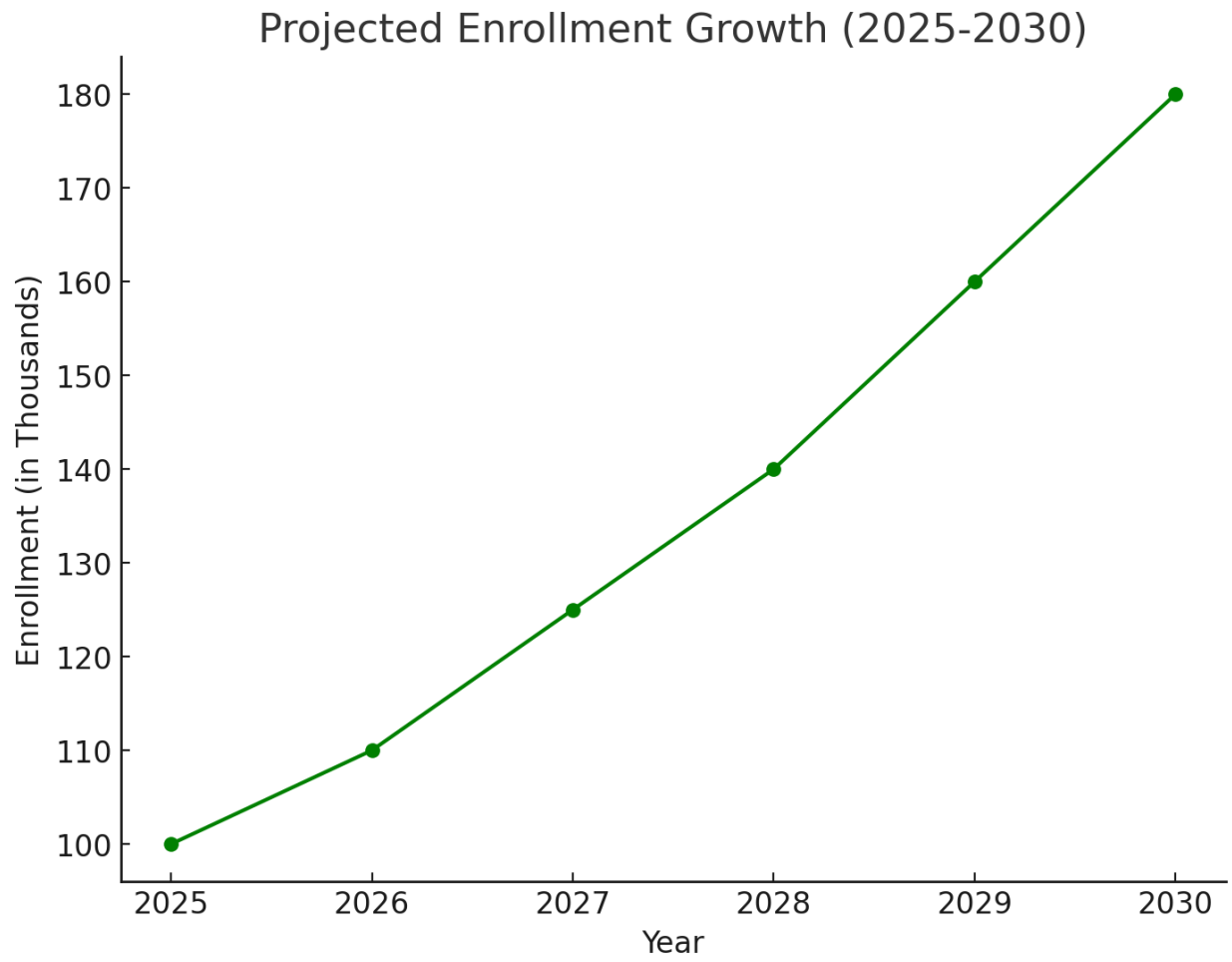
Long-Term ROI: Significant gains in tuition revenue, workforce productivity, and economic growth, with a projected \$500 million boost to Ontario’s GDP annually.

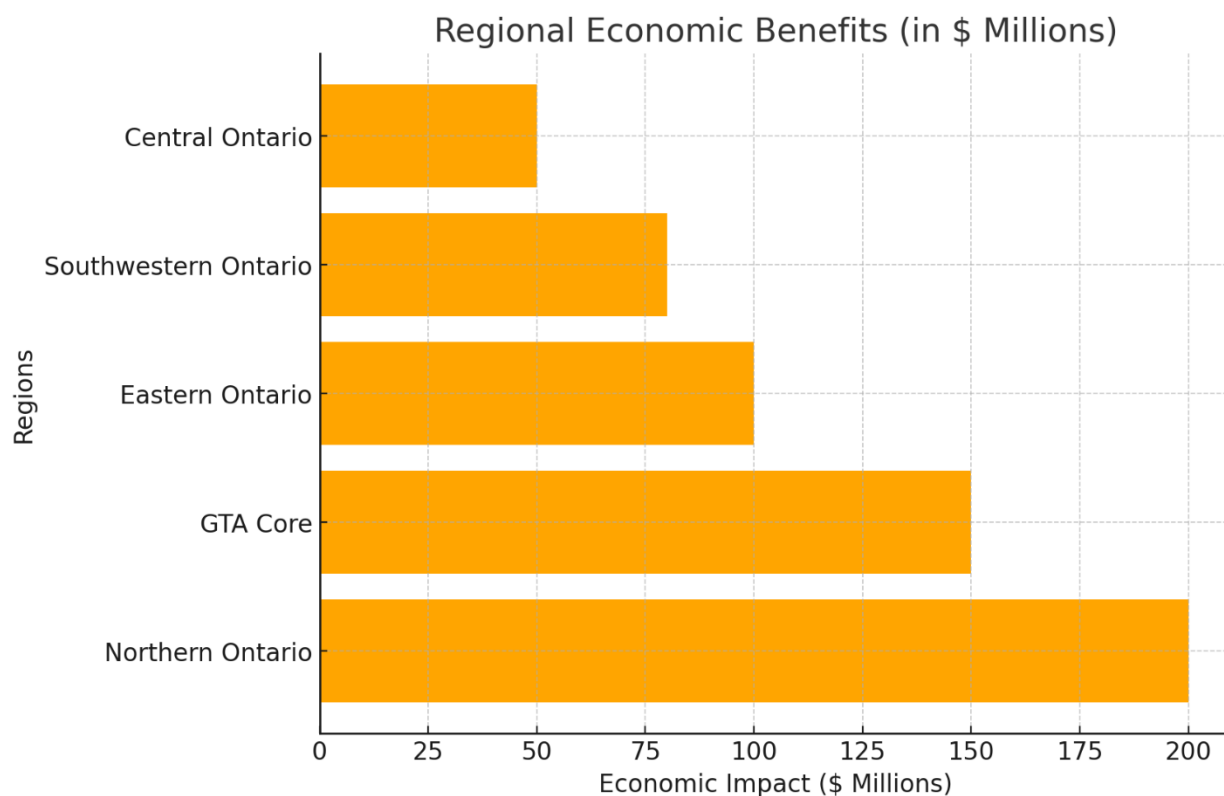
By aligning education with market needs and leveraging technological advancements, Ontario can create a sustainable, future-proof postsecondary system that maximizes both fiscal efficiency and social impact.

Savings Breakdown (in \$ Millions)









The numbers presented above are hypothetical estimates meant to simulate the impact of reinvestments following institutional mergers and resource optimization. Here's the reasoning process behind the values:

4. Estimation Approach

Northern Ontario (\$200M)

Higher estimated economic impact due to the creation of regional hubs of excellence. Merging smaller, underperforming institutions in remote areas consolidates resources and improves access to quality education, creating significant regional economic uplift.

GTA Core (\$150M)

Significant urban reinvestments due to real estate sales in high-demand areas. The revenue generated from selling underutilized campus properties could support digital infrastructure and scholarships.

Eastern Ontario (\$100M)

Moderate economic impact from program rationalization and targeted reinvestments in underserved rural and urban-adjacent areas.

Southwestern Ontario (\$80M)

Lower but meaningful gains from hybrid program expansion and micro-credential adoption, given the region's varied demographic and economic needs.

Central Ontario (\$50M)

Modest impact due to fewer underperforming institutions and relatively stable enrollment patterns. Focus remains on enhancing existing programs and expanding digital delivery.

Why Hypothetical?

Without specific data, the economic impacts were estimated based on trends from similar initiatives in other jurisdictions (e.g., mergers in the U.S. or Europe).

The figures are placeholders designed to visualize proportional impacts across regions, emphasizing how reinvestment strategies could yield varying benefits.

Next Steps for Precision

To make these numbers evidence-based:

Data Collection: Analyze enrollment patterns, financial data, and regional labor market needs for specific institutions in Ontario.

Case Studies: Compare Ontario's regional dynamics with documented impacts of mergers and reinvestments in other regions.

Economic Modeling: Use regional economic multipliers to estimate the exact financial impact of institutional changes.

Case Studies and International Benchmarks

Incorporating examples from other jurisdictions that have successfully implemented similar reforms offers valuable insights into the feasibility and potential impact of the proposed strategies for Ontario's postsecondary education system. This section highlights global best practices in AI integration, micro-credentials, public-private partnerships, and institutional restructuring, providing a roadmap for innovation.

1. Leveraging AI and Digital Transformation: Finland and Singapore

Finland

Finland has positioned itself as a global leader in education through its integration of AI and digital tools. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture introduced the “AI in Education” initiative in collaboration with the University of Helsinki, offering free AI courses to all citizens, including students and professionals.

Impact

- Over 1% of the Finnish population completed the “Elements of AI” course within its first year.
- The initiative enhanced digital literacy and workforce readiness, contributing to Finland's global competitiveness in technology sectors (University of Helsinki, 2022).

Singapore

- Singapore's SkillsFuture program incorporates AI-driven personalized learning pathways and micro-credential offerings. The initiative aims to align education with the country's economic priorities by fostering lifelong learning.

Impact

- Partnerships with Google and Microsoft have resulted in co-developed micro-credential programs targeting high-demand skills in AI and cybersecurity.
- Over 500,000 learners have earned micro-credentials, significantly improving their employability (SkillsFuture Singapore, 2023).

2. Micro-Credentials and Lifelong Learning: Australia and New Zealand

Australia

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was updated to include micro-credentials as an integral part of higher education. Universities collaborate with industry partners to offer stackable credentials in technology, healthcare, and renewable energy.

Impact

- Micro-credentials are now recognized across institutions, enabling seamless credit transfers.
- Universities reported a 35% increase in professional learner enrollment in micro-credential programs (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022).

New Zealand

New Zealand introduced the “NZ Micro-Credential Framework,” designed to meet specific labor market needs. The program supports upskilling in underserved regions through partnerships with online platforms like Coursera.

Impact

- Regional economies benefited from tailored training programs, reducing unemployment in rural areas.
- Employers report a 40% increase in job readiness among credentialed graduates (NZ Qualifications Authority, 2022).

3. Institutional Mergers and Governance Models: United States and Germany

United States

The University System of Georgia consolidated 14 campuses into 7 institutions, achieving significant administrative efficiencies and cost savings.

Impact

- Annual savings of \$25 million were reinvested into academic programs and student support services.
- Consolidation improved resource allocation, enabling smaller institutions to offer competitive programs (University System of Georgia, 2020).

Germany

Germany's Excellence Initiative incentivized universities to merge or collaborate, fostering centers of excellence in research and innovation.

Impact

- Merged institutions received increased federal funding, resulting in higher global rankings and research output.
- Collaboration between institutions and industry partners accelerated technology transfer and innovation (German Research Foundation, 2021).

4. Public-Private Partnerships: Canada and the United Kingdom

Canada

The Government of Canada partnered with IBM to launch the “P-TECH” (Pathways in Technology Early College High School) initiative, providing students with AI and tech-focused education pathways.

Impact

- Students in the program achieved higher postsecondary enrollment and employment rates in tech-related fields.
- Institutions benefited from in-kind contributions such as curriculum development and internships (IBM Canada, 2022).

United Kingdom

The UK's Apprenticeship Levy incentivized employers to fund employee training through partnerships with universities and colleges. These partnerships focused on AI, machine learning, and data analytics.

Impact

- The program generated £2 billion annually for educational institutions.
- Learners gained job-relevant skills, reducing the skills gap in emerging industries (UK Department for Education, 2023).

Why These Case Studies Matter

These examples demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed strategies, providing Ontario with actionable insights to guide its reforms. Key lessons include:

- **AI Integration:** Successful programs leverage AI to enhance digital literacy and align education with economic priorities.

- **Micro-Credentials:** Recognizing micro-credentials within broader qualification frameworks ensures scalability and labor market relevance.
- **Institutional Restructuring:** Mergers and collaborations can optimize resources, improve program offerings, and enhance institutional competitiveness.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborative initiatives with industry stakeholders drive innovation, funding, and workforce readiness.

By learning from these global benchmarks, Ontario's postsecondary system can adopt evidence-based approaches to achieve its 2025–2030 SMA objectives while maintaining its reputation as a leader in education innovation.

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Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Implementing transformative reforms in Ontario's postsecondary education system carries inherent risks that must be proactively managed to ensure success. This section outlines key risks associated with the proposed strategies and provides evidence-based mitigation strategies to address them.

1. Stakeholder Resistance

Risk: Resistance from unions, faculty, students, or institutional leadership may delay or block implementation.

Mitigation Strategies

- **Engage Early and Often:** Conduct comprehensive consultations with all stakeholders during the planning phase to foster buy-in.
- **Transparent Communication:** Clearly articulate the benefits of reforms, including job security measures, retraining opportunities, and improved learning outcomes.
- **Pilot Programs:** Start with small-scale pilot initiatives to demonstrate tangible benefits before full-scale implementation.

2. Financial Constraints

Risk: Upfront costs for digital transformation, AI integration, and infrastructure upgrades may strain institutional budgets.

Mitigation Strategies

- **Leverage Public-Private Partnerships:** Secure funding and in-kind contributions from industry leaders such as Google, Microsoft, and AWS.
- **Phased Implementation:** Spread costs over multiple years to align with available budgets and funding cycles.
- **Government Grants:** Advocate for increased provincial and federal funding tied to specific milestones and outcomes.

3. Technological Challenges

Risk: Implementation of AI-driven platforms and hybrid learning models may face technical hurdles, including compatibility and scalability issues.

Mitigation Strategies

- **Collaborate with Experts:** Partner with technology firms and eCampusOntario to ensure robust and scalable solutions.
- **Infrastructure Assessment:** Conduct a comprehensive audit of current IT infrastructure to identify gaps and prioritize upgrades.
- **Faculty Training:** Invest in professional development to equip faculty with the skills needed to leverage new technologies effectively.

4. Equity Concerns

Risk: AI tools and digital platforms may exacerbate existing inequities, particularly for marginalized or underserved communities.

Mitigation Strategies

- **Equity Audits:** Regularly evaluate AI tools and digital resources to ensure they meet accessibility and inclusivity standards.
- **Targeted Financial Aid:** Expand bursaries and grants for students from underrepresented groups to cover costs associated with digital access.
- **Partnerships for Access:** Collaborate with private-sector partners to provide free or subsidized devices and internet access for low-income students.

5. Institutional Capacity

Risk: Institutions may lack the internal capacity to manage large-scale mergers, program rationalization, or governance reforms.

Mitigation Strategies

- **External Support:** Engage third-party experts for project management, strategic planning, and implementation oversight.
- **Capacity Building:** Develop internal teams dedicated to managing change initiatives, supported by professional development programs.
- **Ministry Oversight:** Empower the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to provide guidance and ensure alignment across institutions.

6. Workforce Misalignment

Risk: Rapid program changes may not align with labor market needs, leading to mismatches in graduate skills.

Mitigation Strategies

- **Industry Collaboration:** Co-design programs with input from industry leaders to ensure relevance and alignment with workforce demands.
- **Dynamic Curriculum:** Build flexible curricula that can adapt to emerging trends and technologies.
- **Continuous Feedback:** Establish mechanisms for regular feedback from employers and alumni to refine program offerings.

7. Policy and Legislative Barriers

Risk: Outdated policies and legislation may hinder the implementation of necessary changes.

Mitigation Strategies

- **Legislative Amendments:** Advocate for updates to acts such as the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities Act to support mergers, AI integration, and financial aid reforms.
- **Policy Flexibility:** Develop temporary policy waivers to enable institutions to pilot innovative approaches.
- **Stakeholder Advocacy:** Build coalitions of institutional leaders to collectively lobby for legislative and policy changes.

Summary

Addressing these risks proactively is essential for the success of the proposed reforms. By engaging stakeholders, leveraging partnerships, and building institutional capacity, Ontario can mitigate potential barriers while ensuring a smooth transition to a more innovative, inclusive, and sustainable postsecondary education system.

Equity Impact Assessment

1. Ensuring Equitable Outcomes for Marginalized Communities

The proposed reforms to Ontario's postsecondary education system aim to bridge systemic gaps that have historically limited access and success for marginalized and underserved communities. This section provides a detailed analysis of how these changes will promote equity, along with a framework for monitoring and ensuring inclusive outcomes.

2. Quantitative Projections of Increased Access

Expanded Financial Support

- Revised OSAP models and targeted bursaries will prioritize students from low-income, Indigenous, racialized, and remote communities.

Projection: A 20% increase in enrollment of underrepresented groups within five years.

Digital Access Initiatives

- Providing subsidized devices and internet access will eliminate technological barriers for students.

Projection: Improved retention rates by 15% among marginalized populations, particularly in rural areas.

AI-Driven Personalized Learning

- Tailored educational pathways supported by AI will accommodate diverse learning needs.

Projection: 25% higher completion rates for students from historically underperforming demographics.

3. Framework for Monitoring Equity

Equity Audits

- Conduct annual audits to assess institutional performance in meeting equity goals.

Metrics: Enrollment, retention, graduation rates, and employment outcomes for underrepresented groups.

Centralized Reporting

- Use the proposed data hub to collect and analyze disaggregated data on student demographics and outcomes.
- Publicly report progress toward equity targets to ensure accountability.

Community Partnerships

- Collaborate with local organizations to support students from underserved communities.

Examples: Mentorship programs, culturally relevant curricula, and community-driven scholarship initiatives.

4. Digital Security and Data Privacy

Policies for Data Privacy and Security

As Ontario's postsecondary institutions adopt AI-driven platforms and centralized data hubs, ensuring data privacy and security becomes paramount. This section outlines the necessary policies and governance mechanisms to protect students and institutions.

Key Policies

Compliance with Privacy Laws

Ensure adherence to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and relevant federal legislation such as the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA).

Data Encryption

Mandate end-to-end encryption for all data stored or transmitted within institutional systems.

Access Control

Implement strict role-based access protocols to prevent unauthorized data use.

Data Retention Policies

Establish clear guidelines for the retention and deletion of personal data to minimize risk.

5. Ethical AI Governance

Transparency in AI Use

Institutions must clearly disclose how AI tools are used in admissions, grading, and personalized learning pathways.

Bias Mitigation

Regularly audit AI algorithms for potential biases that may disadvantage marginalized groups.

Student Consent

Require informed consent from students for any data collected or used in AI-driven systems.

6. Monitoring and Compliance

Independent Oversight

- Establish a provincial AI Ethics Board to monitor the use of AI in education.

Institutional Accountability

- Require annual reports from institutions on data privacy compliance and ethical AI practices.

Training Programs

- Provide mandatory training for staff and faculty on data security and ethical AI use.

Summary

By prioritizing equity and ensuring robust digital security, these reforms will create a more inclusive and secure education system. Addressing systemic barriers and safeguarding student data are essential steps in aligning Ontario's postsecondary education system with its broader equity and innovation goals.

7. Policy Advocacy Plan

Effective advocacy is essential to gain support for the proposed reforms from policymakers, unions, institutions, and the public. This section outlines a comprehensive strategy to build coalitions, influence decision-makers, and generate public buy-in for the transformative changes in Ontario's postsecondary education system.

Key Components of the Advocacy Plan

Stakeholder Mapping

Identify Key Stakeholders, including:

- Provincial and federal policymakers (e.g., Ministry of Colleges and Universities, Ministry of Finance).
- Institutional leaders (e.g., Presidents, Boards, Senates).
- Labor unions and faculty associations.
- Industry leaders and public-private partners.
- Student and community groups.

Messaging Framework

- Develop clear, tailored messaging for each stakeholder group:
- Policymakers: Highlight economic benefits, workforce alignment, and long-term sustainability.
- Institutions: Emphasize opportunities for innovation, improved governance, and financial efficiencies.
- Unions and Faculty: Address concerns around job security and professional development.
- Students and Communities: Focus on equity, access, and improved outcomes.

Coalition Building

- Form coalitions with like-minded stakeholders to amplify advocacy efforts:
- Collaborate with HEQCO, eCampusOntario, ONCAT, Colleges Ontario, Universities Canada and industry partners.
- Engage thought leaders in education and technology to champion the reforms.

Legislative Engagement

- Schedule meetings and briefings with Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), Cabinet Ministers, and parliamentary committees.
- Provide evidence-based policy briefs that outline the need for legislative amendments and funding priorities.

Public Campaigns

- Launch public awareness initiatives to build support among Ontarians:
- Use social media platforms to share success stories and data-driven insights.
- Host town halls, webinars, and workshops to engage directly with students, faculty, and community members.

Advocacy Tools

Develop High-Quality Materials, including

- Policy briefs and infographics.
- Interactive dashboards showcasing projected impacts.

- Testimonials from students, faculty, and industry leaders.

Monitoring and Adjustment

- Track the effectiveness of advocacy efforts through:
- Media coverage analysis.
- Stakeholder feedback and surveys.

8. Environmental Sustainability

Addressing environmental sustainability is critical in transforming Ontario's postsecondary education system. The integration of green technologies and sustainable practices ensures alignment with global sustainability goals while reducing operational costs.

Key Sustainability Initiatives

Green Campus Design

- Encourage institutions to adopt energy-efficient buildings and retrofits:
- Install solar panels, LED lighting, and energy-efficient HVAC systems.
- Use smart technologies to monitor and reduce energy consumption.

Example: York University's Green Building Policy reduced energy consumption by 30% in retrofitted buildings.

Digital Transformation for Sustainability

- Shift to hybrid and online learning to reduce the carbon footprint of campus operations:
- Decrease reliance on physical spaces for instruction.
- Reduce transportation emissions associated with commuting students and staff.

Impact: A 20% reduction in institutional energy use by 2030.

Sustainable Real Estate Strategies

- Optimize campus space utilization by selling or leasing underused properties:
- Reinvest proceeds in digital infrastructure and green technologies.
- Use land sales to fund sustainability projects and reduce financial burdens.

Sustainable Procurement Policies

- Mandate the procurement of eco-friendly materials and services.
- Prioritize vendors offering green certifications.
- Reduce single-use plastics and encourage recycling programs on campus.

Student and Community Engagement

- Green clubs and student-led initiatives.
- **Community events promoting environmental awareness and action.**

Monitoring and Reporting

- Implement sustainability audits and public reporting mechanisms.
- Track carbon emissions, energy savings, and waste reduction metrics.
- Align institutional goals with provincial and federal climate policies.

Economic and Environmental Benefits

Cost Savings and Impact

- Reduced energy consumption and operational efficiencies generate significant savings.
- Projection: Annual savings of \$50–75 million across institutions by 2030.
- Increased enrollment with sustainability-focused campuses attract environmentally conscious students and partners.
- Enhanced reputation and competitive edge in global education rankings.
- Contribute to Ontario’s commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050.

Summary

Environmental sustainability and effective advocacy are integral to the successful transformation of Ontario’s postsecondary education system. By engaging stakeholders and integrating green practices, these strategies ensure a future-ready, innovative, and eco-conscious framework for education.

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Conclusion

Ontario's postsecondary education system stands at a pivotal crossroads, grappling with rapid technological advancements, shifting demographic trends, and evolving economic demands. This whitepaper has outlined three transformative models to guide the Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) for 2025–2030. The first model, Institutional Consolidation, Real Estate Optimization, and Program Rationalization, advocates for merging institutions with overlapping mandates, rationalizing low-demand programs, and divesting underutilized real estate. These measures streamline resources, create regional hubs of excellence, and enable funding to be reallocated to high-demand, scalable fields. The second model, Personalized, Skills-Based, and Technology-Enhanced Learning Ecosystem, emphasizes the use of AI-driven personalized learning pathways, micro-credentials, and hybrid education to address diverse student needs and align with labor market demands. This model also highlights the importance of flexible, stackable credentials and industry-aligned programs supported by eCampusOntario and technology partners. The third model, Future-Proof Educational Institutions Through an Innovative Private-Public Funding Model, proposes integrating public funding with private-sector partnerships involving organizations such as Google, AWS, and Microsoft Education to ensure financial resilience and technological innovation. This model prioritizes equity, digital transformation, and workforce alignment through targeted investments and collaborative governance.

The findings of this whitepaper underscore the urgent need for systemic reform across governance structures, funding models, and institutional operations. Addressing equity gaps exacerbated by technological advancements and ensuring marginalized communities have equal access to education are equally critical. Moving forward, Ontario's postsecondary system must prioritize innovation and agility by embracing cutting-edge technologies like AI and implementing phased rollouts of transformative strategies for manageable and sustainable adoption. Equity and inclusion must remain at the forefront through redesigned financial aid models, accessibility initiatives, and governance frameworks that reflect Ontario's diverse population.

Public-private collaboration will play a key role in driving innovation and financial sustainability. Meaningful partnerships with technology companies and industry leaders can monetize new opportunities, such as micro-credentials and co-branded certifications, to generate sustainable revenue streams. Structural reforms are also essential, requiring modernization of governance frameworks—including Boards, Senates, and unions—to align with evolving institutional needs. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities must be empowered to enforce reforms and ensure alignment across institutions.

Economic sustainability will depend on leveraging real estate assets and operational efficiencies to reinvest in digital infrastructure and program development. Additionally, increased public investment from provincial and federal governments will be vital to supporting digital transformation and advancing equity initiatives. By prioritizing these strategic actions, Ontario can position its postsecondary education system as a resilient, innovative, and inclusive leader on the global stage.

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