

## **Where Are We Now? Changing Admission Rates for Underrepresented Groups in Ontario Teacher Education**

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### **Abstract**

Equitable representation is an ongoing challenge for Canadian teacher education. While university educators recognize that a diverse teaching force supports both student outcomes and teacher retention, various groups – including first-generation students, students with disabilities, students of Aboriginal descent, and other racialized minorities – are underrepresented in Ontario’s colleges and universities. Further, while many Canadian teacher education programs identify equity and diversity as key values, these values do not always result in rates of representation that reflect the student population. This study therefore examines the changes in application and acceptance rates of self-identifying underrepresented groups in Ontario’s new four-semester teacher education programs. Such data will enable teacher educators to better understand rates of representation, and will be of interest to stakeholders from across Canada as they work to address the complex task of increasing equity and access for underrepresented groups in their programs.

*Keywords: access, equity, teacher education, underrepresented groups, admissions*

### **Introduction**

While many Canadian teacher education programs identify equity and diversity as key values (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008), these values do not always result in equitable representation (Brown & Scott, 2014). Canadian teacher education programs have been criticized for preparing largely homogenous cohorts of teachers (Childs & Ferguson, 2016; DeLuca 2015), to the extent that the Ontario Human Rights Commission “identified the lack of representativeness as a possible contributing factor to the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of racialized students and students with disabilities” (Childs et al., 2011, p. 4). This is troubling, particularly because specific groups remain underrepresented in our colleges, our universities, and our classrooms (Archibald, Pidgeon, Janvier, Commodore, & McCormick, 2002; Childs et al., 2011; Childs, Ferguson, Herbert, Broad, & Zhang, 2016). This is not to suggest that a diverse teaching force is a panacea for inequity in our classrooms (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, ONABSE, 2015). Instead, we contend that a diversely representative teaching force benefits our students and our profession, and that by examining gaps in representation, we are better able to examine which practices truly support articulated goals of access, equity, and diversity.

### **The Case for Equitable Representation**

As Kotzee and Martin (2013) contend, “universities have a moral and political obligation to work in ways to ensure that traditionally excluded groups have opportunities to contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding” (p. 638). This perspective on equity stems from the belief that any sufficiently

qualified individual<sup>1</sup> should be able to pursue a career in teaching, regardless of their socioeconomic background, cultural capital, or racial/cultural identity (see Wang & Shulruf, 2013). A representative teaching force that reflects the diversity of the student population supports both student outcomes and teacher retention (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Such teachers are well positioned to foster culturally-informed relationships, have high expectations of students, and take up (and keep) teaching assignments in difficult-to-staff communities (Minister's National Working Group on Education, MNWGE, 2002; ONABSE, 2015; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Indeed, teacher educators across Ontario recognize that all students benefit when we work to improve the equity and accessibility of our programs (Petrarca & Kitchen, 2017).

With these benefits in mind, proponents of equitable representation argue that Canada's diverse students should see themselves reflected in a diverse teaching force (see Childs & Ferguson, 2016). By extension, our teacher education programs should be admitting teacher candidates that also reflect this diversity: while admissions are not the only barrier to equity in teacher education (see Lemisko & Hellsten, in press), if Canadian teacher candidates are a largely homogenous group, Canadian teachers will be as well. As we describe in the following section, the purpose of this study is to examine the current state of representation for underrepresented groups in Ontario teacher education following a series of contextual changes in the province's programs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

To our knowledge, there are no current, public data related to rates of representation in Ontario teacher education. Ontario's Teacher Education Application Service (TEAS, 2016) provides annual statistics identifying the number of applicants, applications, and acceptances to Ontario's publicly funded teacher education programs, however, TEAS does not provide these statistics for members of specific underrepresented groups. While Finnie, Wismer, and Mueller (2015) draw on the Youth In Transition Survey to discuss representation, these data are for all of Ontario postsecondary education, and may not be consistent with teacher education specifically. The purpose of this study, then, was to gather descriptive statistics as described by Mertens (2015), and to provide baseline data for Ontario teacher educators seeking to make decisions about their programs. While further quantitative analysis would be valuable, such analysis was not a primary goal of this study. Reflecting Mendelson (2006), "this [study] is diagnostic: it uses the available data to provide an accurate picture of the state of affairs as it stands now and to suggest what should be our focus for the future" (p. 1). This purpose was pursued through the following research questions:

- What are the application, admission, and acceptance rates of underrepresented groups within Ontario's existing four-semester teacher education programs?
- How do these application, admission, and acceptance rates compare to the rates within the two-semester program structure?
- If the application, admission, and acceptance rates have changed, are there variations between different underrepresented groups?

Before we discuss the methods we used to pursue these questions, in the following section, we outline the context for the present study, including recent changes to Ontario's teacher education programs as well as existing research into equity and access in teacher education admissions.

### **Equity, Access, and Admissions for Underrepresented Groups**

This study draws on two related but distinct areas of research: access to postsecondary studies and teacher education admissions. Access studies are typically concerned with whether students are able to participate in higher education (Bowen & Bok, 1998), whereas admissions studies tend to investigate how the decision of participation is made (Childs & Ferguson, 2016). Taken together, these research areas contend that admissions processes should be designed in such a way that members of underrepresented groups are equitably represented in the student population, and that admissions and access barriers should not disproportionately affect these groups (Stead, 2015).

Examining equity at the time of admission is particularly important because most Ontario teacher candidates are admitted, at least in part, using longstanding cognitive tools like grade point averages (see Thomas, Alexander, & Eckland, 1979). Such tools, while useful, have been criticized for creating barriers

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<sup>1</sup>Importantly, different institutions assess candidate quality in different ways. See Holden, Kitchen, Petrarca, & LeSage (2016) for an exploration of the most common methods in Canadian teacher education.

ers for underrepresented groups who would otherwise contribute to a diversely representative teaching population (Archibald et al., 2002). Importantly, equity and student quality are not mutually exclusive: programs need not choose between a diverse population and a qualified one. As DeLuca (2015) suggests, equity and quality are “two interrelated conditions” (p. 270), in that teacher educators should be striving for both attributes in their programs. Guinier (2003) similarly observes that a diverse student population may be “more likely to fulfil the institution’s public and forward-looking goals” (p. 42). Integrating equity perspectives may therefore be particularly useful for aligning admissions processes with the equitable goals articulated by many of Canada’s teacher education programs (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).

Equitable admissions also offer benefits for both the teaching profession and society in general (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). Niemann and Maruyama (2005) note, for example, that diverse classrooms have “positive effects on retention, college satisfaction, self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and leadership” (p. 412). Despite concerns that students admitted under equity policies will not perform well, researchers from a number of postsecondary contexts have found that equitable admissions also benefit members of underrepresented groups. Cortes (2010), for example, found that minority students who attended more selective institutions (that is, institutions with higher academic thresholds) achieved higher grades and graduated more often than students in less-selective programs. Writing from a medical education context, Searle (2003) similarly observed that “while these students had lower entrance scores, their performance was the same as matched controlled students on entering residency [later in the program]” (p. 290).

While minoritized students benefit from attending post-secondary education (PSE), and while such students can contribute to our programs and their own communities, our colleagues are nevertheless concerned about “the homogenization of the teaching population” (Holden & Kitchen, 2017, p. 69). This is a timely issue for teacher educators. As Mendelson (2006) notes, “improving educational outcomes is critical right now, and cannot wait for many years. The educational failures sown today will be the social and economic costs reaped tomorrow – and in this case, tomorrow is not a distant future” (p. 5). Again, this is not to suggest that non-minoritized teachers do not support outcomes for underrepresented students. Instead, as Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli (2009) contend, a representative and qualified teaching force is required to advance student success while also understanding, communicating with, and identifying with minoritized students in ways that homogenized groups of teachers may not be able to (p. 595).

Who, then, do we mean when we discuss equitable representation for underrepresented groups? Underrepresentation differs between provinces and across international contexts (Black, Cortes, & Lincove, 2015; Cortes, 2010; Finnie, Childs, & Wismer, 2011b). In Ontario, groups that are underrepresented in PSE include students from low-income families; rural or remote students; students from single-parent families; first- and second-generation immigrants; students of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit ancestry<sup>2</sup>; students with disabilities<sup>3</sup>; first-generation students<sup>4</sup>; visible minorities; and racialized minorities (Falkenberg, 2015; Finnie et al., 2011b; Wang & Shulruf, 2013). These populations are difficult to measure during the admissions process, however. Such measurements rely on applicants’ willingness to self-identify, which can be affected by how equity admissions sections are constructed and perceived (Oloo, 2007; Thomson et al., 2011). As the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE, 2014) notes, “it is important to be cognizant of how our policies and practices determine who is included and who is excluded from educational opportunities” (p. 4). Representation measurements should therefore be strengthened (Thomson et al., 2011). To understand whether our efforts are succeeding, however, we would do well to continue examining who participates in our programs.

In the Ontario PSE context, 45.5% of the population accesses university by the age of 21. By comparison, only 25.2% of youth from low-income households do so, and first-generation youth enrol at a rate of 25.7%. Youth with disabilities participate at a rate of 22.1%. Only 17.8% of Aboriginal youth in Ontario access university by 21, the lowest Aboriginal participation rate in Canada (Finnie et al., 2011b). While

<sup>2</sup>First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples participate in PSE at different rates and have vastly different shares of Ontario’s Aboriginal population (Mendelson, 2006). To our knowledge, however, no institution reports on these populations as separate groups, and instead report on overall rates of Aboriginal participation (see Holden & Kitchen, 2017).

<sup>3</sup>As Finnie and colleagues (2011b) describe, students with disabilities are those students who self-identify as having various “physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities” (p. 17).

<sup>4</sup>First-generation students are those students who are the first in their family to attend postsecondary studies (Childs et al., 2016).

some immigrant and visible minority groups participate at higher rates than the general population, this is not consistent across population groups (Finnie, Childs, & Wismer; 2011a; 2011b). These gaps in participation are noteworthy because the diversity of Ontario's teacher candidates affects which students have access to the economic benefits of postsecondary school as well as the graduates that school boards are able to choose from during the hiring process (Archibald et al., 2002; Cortes, 2010). As a result, Sedlacek (2004) argues that "we need to think of the cultural context and experiences of some people differently from those of the group in power if we wish to be fair to them" (p. 5). Equitable access perspectives are rooted in this notion of fairness in a given context. In the following sections, we detail the context of admissions in Ontario teacher education, and outline how the present study attempts to provide further insight into admission rates for underrepresented groups in our teacher education programs.

### Examining the Ontario Context

Research on equity admissions in Canada teacher education is relatively limited, particularly within individual provinces. As recently as 2011, Childs and colleagues observed that little or no research existed investigating equity of access in Ontario teacher education (p. 3). For example, the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC, 2016a) does not provide provincial statistics for the number of applications made by members of underrepresented groups, and while the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) does identify the number of males and females certified to teach in the province, they do not report on how well the teaching population reflects student demographics (OCT, 2015). This lack of data runs contrary to articulated goals of equity and access (see Crocker & Dibbon, 2008); if these are core program goals, then presumably teacher educators and other stakeholders should be able to draw on relevant data to support their decision-making processes.

As Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) suggest, "while it is important to acknowledge and honour historical advances, contemporary times call for new policy efforts to solve persistent problems" (p. 410), particularly the continued underrepresentation of racialized and Aboriginal teachers (Archibald et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 2009). We contend that Ontario's teacher education programs are well positioned to build on the successes of current equity practices while also considering how these equity practices may be refined in the context of four-semester teacher education. Examining participation rates in the Ontario context will also support stakeholders as they craft policies for their programs (see Finnie et al. 2011b), providing both immediate data and a clearer picture of Canadian teacher admissions practices (see Cottrell, Prytula, & Orlowski, 2015).

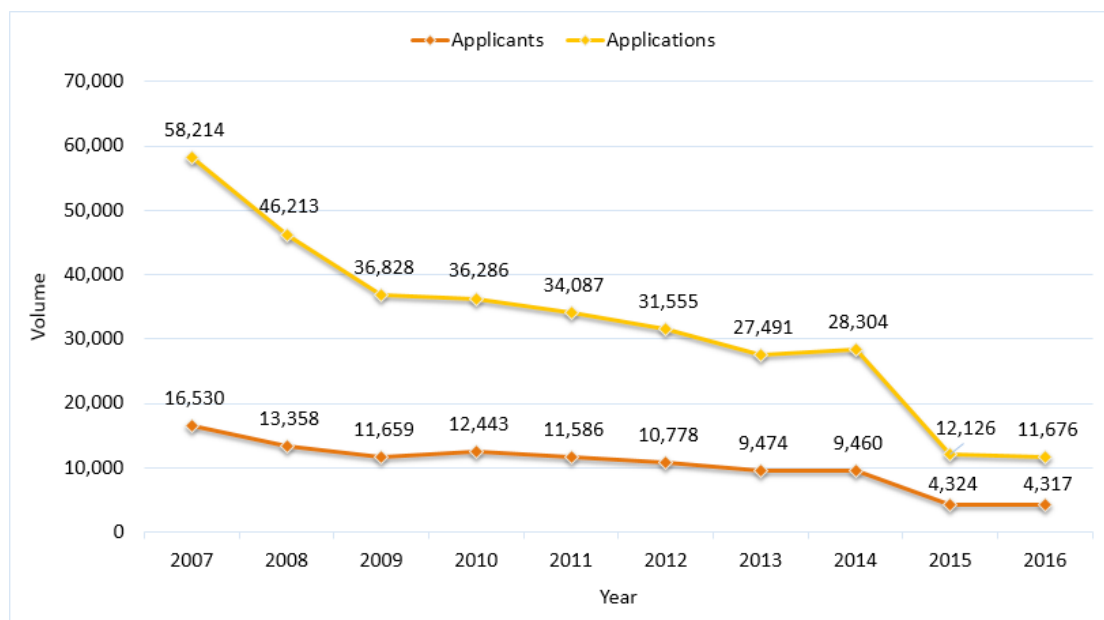


Figure 1. Applicants and applications to Ontario teacher education programs by September of each year (OUAC, 2016a).

Since conversations about access and equity are situated in the broader context of teacher education admissions, it is useful to explore current trends. As is well known, Ontario's admissions landscape has changed significantly in recent years. Figure 1 identifies the number of applications and applicants to Ontario's 13 publicly-funded faculties of education as of September of each year. As Holden and Kitchen (2016) observe, significantly fewer applications are being made to the four-semester programs (2015 and 2016) than were made under the two-semester structure (2014 and earlier). Ontario's applicant numbers fell from 9,460 as of September 2014 to 4,324 as of September 2015, representing the largest decrease in the number of applications year-over-year since at least 2007 (OUAC, 2016a). Figure 2 illustrates that these changes have also affected the number of students confirming (i.e., accepting) their admission offer. Owing to the 50% reduction in the number of admission spots (OME, 2013a), the number of students who had confirmed their offer of admission by September fell from 6,362 in 2014 to 2,823 in 2015 – a decline of more than 55% (OUAC, 2016b).

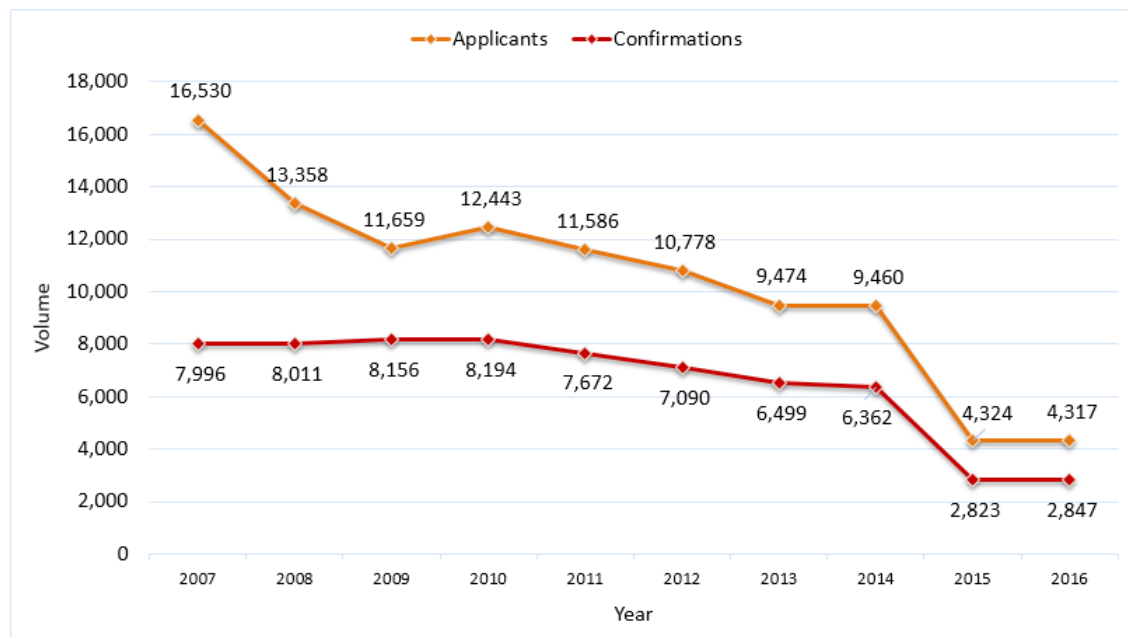


Figure 2. Applicants and confirmations to Ontario teacher education programs by September of each year (OUAC, 2016b).

Importantly, however, the declines observed in applications, applicants, and confirmations did not continue into 2016. Ontario's teacher education programs saw only 3.7% fewer applications year-over-year in 2016, compared to 57.2% fewer the year before, and in fact saw an increase in the number of students who confirmed an offer of admission (OUAC, 2016a; 2016b). Thus, while these numbers represent a significant change from previous admissions rates, recent admission rates seem to have stabilized. The question for the present study, then, is whether these overall changes in admission rates have affected rates of representation. As our colleagues have wondered, have our new programs changed the makeup of student demographics, or made teacher education less appealing to students from underrepresented groups (Petarca & Kitchen, 2017)? In the following section, we present our methods, which serve as a starting point for exploring participation rates and equity in teacher education admissions.

## Methods

This study, which is part of a broader research project into equity and admissions (Holden & Kitchen, 2017), extends from our investigation of admissions policies in Ontario's four-semester teacher education programs (Holden et al., 2016). The preceding study provides a context for teacher education admissions in the province, including existing equity admissions policies. As we have described, however, participation rates, access, and equity vary between underrepresented groups, and these issues have not been examined provincially for Ontario teacher education. Thus, a subsequent study was necessary. For the



present study, we gathered descriptive statistics (Mertens, 2015) from participating universities across Ontario. Totals and proportions were gathered for the number of self-identifying students who applied, were offered admission to, and entered each program, based on the underrepresented groups tracked by each institution. This process is detailed further in the following sections.

### *Selection of Sites*

To provide a province-wide scope, we sought to include every institution offering teacher education programs in Ontario since the introduction of Regulation 283/13 (OME, 2013b). We identified 15 such institutions, including 13 publicly-funded faculties of education and two additional institutions recognized by the OCT (Casey & Childs, 2011; OCT, 2015). This provincial perspective was valuable for fostering inter-institutional conversation and collaboration. As DeLuca (2015) describes, “institutions and networks of institutions also create new ways of knowing” (p. 273). As we have described elsewhere (Holden & Kitchen, 2016), we believe that these collaborative conversations are valuable ways to improve Ontario’s teacher education programs and the research emerging from our programs.

Invitations were sent to stakeholders at each of the 15 institutions. These stakeholders included deans and acting deans of education, program chairs and directors, university registrars, and university or department admissions officers. Stakeholders at each institution were invited to participate in the study and provide descriptive statistics for their programs. Thirteen universities ultimately participated in the study. One institution (Windsor) did not respond, and so was not included. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) declined to participate in the study. OISE’s teacher education program recently changed from a Bachelor of Education to a Master of Teaching (Holden et al., 2016), and so OISE did not have access to consistent data sources that would facilitate their participation. While data from OISE and Windsor are not included, the present study includes roughly 95% of the current undergraduate teaching candidate population, based on the number of students who accepted their offers of admission in 2016-2017 (OUAC, 2016b).

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Each institution tracks application, acceptance, and admission rates individually. As DeLuca (2012) notes, each university collects and tracks this data differently. Each university also tracks this data according to different equity policies and values (Holden et al., 2016). Thus, we invited participating universities to provide anonymized data specific to their contexts. Participants were asked to provide the following statistics:

- The number of applicants who self-identify as a member of an underrepresented group
- The number of such applicants who are offered admission to the program
- The number of such applicants who accept the offer of admission to the program

Stakeholders were invited to share this data for both cohorts of the four-semester teacher education program (Fall 2015 and Fall 2016), and for the preceding three years of their two-semester teacher education program (2012-2015). Stakeholders were asked to identify these data for each underrepresented group students choose to self-identify with, including first-generation students, mature students, students with disabilities, students of Aboriginal descent, and other racialized minorities (Finnie et al., 2011b; Ogilvie & Eggleton, 2011).

As each university responded, their data were tabulated according to academic year and the reported underrepresented groups. Proportions were calculated using the provided data as well as publicly available TEAS data for each program. For example, to determine the percentage of all applicants who self-identified as a member of a particular underrepresented group, the reported number was divided by the total number of applications that program received that year. That is, if 20 first-generation applicants self-identified in an applicant pool of 1,000, the reported first-generation proportion would be 2.00%. At times, the TEAS data differed slightly from total applicant/admission figures provided by the institution. In these cases, institutional data were used instead, as most of the calculated proportions draw on institutional data for self-identification rates from those confirmation pools. Importantly, such differences were often minor (such as 12 more applications in an applicant pool of 1,000).

### *Assumptions and Limitations*

As with all studies, this paper includes a number of assumptions and limitations. We assume, for example, that the teaching population does not reflect the diversity of the teaching force (Childs & Ferguson, 2016), and that ensuring equitable representation benefits teacher education, our students, and the students they will one day teach (Bowen & Bok, 1998; DeLuca, 2015). This study's methodology is also rooted in the belief that teacher education programs are largely responsible for teacher quality (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008), and that admissions practices are a significant process for determining how qualified candidates are admitted to a program (Denner, Salzman, & Newsome, 2001). In gathering data from each university, we assume that these sources are able to provide accurate information. That is, given their positions as deans, program directors, registrars, or other internal stakeholders, we assume that our participants have provided truthful data based on the information that they have access to through their institution. We assume, finally, that by providing multiple stages of clarification for our participants, that the resulting data forms a clearer picture of access and equity in Ontario teacher education.

These assumptions lead necessarily to the study's limitations. This study only includes data from 13 teacher education programs in Ontario, and is not designed to generalize to all teacher education programs (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). These descriptive statistics do not explain why particular groups are underrepresented (Finnie et al., 2011b), but instead present a picture of which groups are underrepresented in different programs. Most importantly, these data reflect the number of students who choose to self-identify to these institutions. Applicants decide to self-identify (or not) within the context of admissions, using tools that are different at each institution (Holden et al., 2016), within categories that may not fully capture their identities. As Stead (2015) notes, stakeholders should exercise caution in examining this data, "because the percentages of identified minorities within the total candidate pool might only be estimates given that some candidates prefer not to sustain the risks associated with minority affiliation" (p. 327). Thus, while examining rates of participation is important, we must also continue to examine how these measures might be strengthened (see Thomson et al., 2011).

### **Results and Discussion**

The results in this section – provided by our colleagues from across the province – are meant to provide baseline data on the state of equitable representation in Ontario. We have arranged the most pertinent data into four pairs of tables. These tables identify the proportion of students who self-identify with a specific group at two phases: during application, and once students accept their offers of admission and enter the program. Applicant proportions, which appear first in each table pairing, represent the percentage of the applicant pool that self-identified with that underrepresented group. Acceptance proportions, which appear second, represent the percentage of students entering a program who self-identify with the same group. The tables therefore allow for comparison between the proportion of applicants who identify with a group, and the proportion that group represents in the pool of students who ultimately enter the program. The presented tables include proportions for the most commonly tracked underrepresented groups in Ontario, with data from the five most recent academic years for each university that actively collects data on each group. Additional data, including raw data for each institution as well as the number of students who receive and accept their offers of admission, are available in the full report that this study is based on (see Holden & Kitchen, 2017).

#### *Students of Aboriginal Descent*

Students of Aboriginal descent, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit applicants, are the most tracked underrepresented group in Ontario teacher education. Every participating university that tracks data for underrepresented groups allows students to self-identify as Aboriginal, and all but one of these universities actively tracks the rate of representation for Aboriginal students in their programs. While the number of universities measuring Aboriginal admission rates is promising, some results are not. As illustrated in Tables 1a and 1b, no university has reported an Aboriginal proportion above 4.51% in the past five years. Further, most universities reported proportions lower than the Aboriginal share of the population in

Table 1a  
Changes in the Proportion of Aboriginal Students as a % of all Applicants

Year	Lakehead	Laurentian	Nipissing	Queen's	Trent	UOIT	U Ottawa	York
2012	Unavailable	0-0.39 <sup>a</sup>	0.39	Unavailable <sup>b</sup>	Unavailable	0.38	0.28	1.40
2013	Unavailable	0-0.50	0.29	1.11	0.98	0.46	0.04	1.17
2014	Unavailable	1.40	0.50	Unavailable	0.96	0.40	0.02	1.09
2015	Unavailable	3.56	0.13	1.01	1.45	0.92	0.97	1.16 <sup>c</sup>
2016	Unavailable	1.49	0.15	1.99	2.59	0.81	1.29	1.14

<sup>a</sup>Laurentian did not disclose application numbers when those numbers were equal or less than five (5). A range of possible proportions is therefore listed for these years  
<sup>b</sup>Data were not available for 2012 or 2014 for Queen's  
<sup>c</sup>York reported consecutive and concurrent participation rates for every year except 2015. In 2015, York only received applications for their consecutive teacher program, and so the 2015 data presented in this table represent participation rates for only their consecutive program.

Table 1b  
Changes in the Proportion of Aboriginal Students as a % of all Applicants

Year	Lakehead	Laurentian	Nipissing	Queen's	Trent	UOIT	U Ottawa	York
2012	3.95	Unavailable	0.92	Unavailable	Unavailable	0.00	0.08	1.42
2013	4.51	Unavailable	0.61	0.90	1.49	0.00 - 0.80 <sup>a</sup>	0.00	1.52
2014	3.51	Unavailable	0.64	Unavailable	2.45	0.00	0.08	1.66
2015	4.08	Unavailable	0.52	1.71	2.84	0.00	0.47	1.53
2016	Unavailable	Unavailable	0.55	2.93	2.61	0.00	1.14	1.08

<sup>a</sup>Our colleagues at UOIT reported that less than 3 (i.e., 0-2) self-declaring Aboriginal students accepted their offer of admission in 2013. Precise numbers were reported for the remaining years

Ontario (2.3%, MNWGE, 2002). Some universities also reported proportions lower than, or close to, the Aboriginal share of Ontario's teaching force (0.5%, MNWGE, 2002). This means that many universities do not have enough self-identifying Aboriginal teacher candidates to keep pace with the Aboriginal population, or to improve Aboriginal rates of representation among the teaching population.

Importantly, several universities have reported positive rates of representation that contrast with the low overall rate of Aboriginal representation. Lakehead University, for example, reports rates of representation that are consistently higher than the Aboriginal share of the population in Ontario and Canada. Similarly, representation has increased at Queen's since the shift to the four-semester program. Trent's rate of representation, which was already among the highest under the two-semester program, has also increased, particularly in the proportion of applicants who self-identify as Aboriginal. Ottawa has also reported an increased rate of representation; while no students who enrolled in 2013 identified as Aboriginal, Ottawa's rate of Aboriginal representation now exceeds both Nipissing and York.

As with all admissions data, the stories behind these figures are complex. York, for example, has offered admission to proportionally more Aboriginal students each year, yet the proportion of those students who ultimately accept their offer has been decreasing (Holden & Kitchen, 2017). While it is unclear why Aboriginal applicants have become less likely to accept offers to York's program, these data point to the reality that the number of underrepresented students depends on more than the number of those students who are offered entry into a program. Nipissing's data – now the second lowest of those universities that track Aboriginal applications – reinforce the York example. Nipissing has consistently offered admission to at least 80% of its Aboriginal applicants, and in most years, at least 75% of Aboriginal students who received an offer went on to accept that offer (Holden & Kitchen, 2017). These higher offer and acceptance rates have done little to improve representation rates, however, because of the consistently low rate of application. The program has not received more than nine self-identifying Aboriginal applicants in the last five years. UOIT, similarly, has had no self-identifying applicants enter their program in four of the



past five years. This begs two fairly obvious questions: why are Aboriginal students not applying, and if they are, why aren't they self-identifying?

We are unable to assess why Aboriginal participation rates remain low. Three possibilities exist: Aboriginal peoples may be choosing not to apply, they may be choosing to apply but apply to programs where their participation is not tracked, or they are applying but choosing not to self-identify. This is not to suggest that Ontario's universities are not working to increase access for students of Aboriginal descent. Rather, we contend that this participation gap identifies an area of improvement so that students of Aboriginal descent may be better represented in our programs and in the profession. Since low Aboriginal participation rates are at least in part due to low application rates, simply increasing the number of spots available for students of Aboriginal descent will not increase the number of Aboriginal students in our programs. The University of Ottawa, for example, reserves 2% of their program seats for students of Aboriginal descent. While participation rates at Ottawa have improved noticeably since the re-opening of their Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (or ATEP), only 1.14% of students entering the program self-identified as Aboriginal. Thus, additional strategies are necessary to ensure that Aboriginal students are able to participate in our programs in rates that reflect their share of the population. Teacher educators would therefore do well to examine the successes offered by Lakehead, Queen's, and Trent. Participation rates at these institutions suggest that their access initiatives are successfully contributing to increased Aboriginal rates of representation in our programs.

### *First-Generation Students*

Unlike Aboriginal applicants, first-generation students are only tracked by three of Ontario's teacher education programs. These data are presented in Tables 2a and 2b. Because of wide variations between proportions at individual institutions, it is difficult to make any province-wide statements about the admissions rates for first-generation students in teacher education. Indeed, first-generation students are between 9.7 and 60 times more represented at Lakehead than at Trent – a variation in population that makes province-wide generalizations untenable.

Table 2a

Changes in the Proportion of First-Generation Students as a % of all Applicants

Year	Lakehead	Laurentian	Trent
2012	Unavailable <sup>a</sup>	9.56	Unavailable <sup>b</sup>
2013	Unavailable	10.09	0.53
2014	Unavailable	5.97	0.64
2015	Unavailable	9.37	2.02
2016	Unavailable	8.15	2.59

<sup>a</sup>Lakehead does not track data for underrepresented groups until registration, and so applicant proportions are not available.  
<sup>b</sup>Trent did not report data for 2012.

Table 2b

Changes in the Proportion of First-Generation Students as a % of all Acceptances

Year	Lakehead	Laurentian	Trent
2012	44.02	Unavailable <sup>a</sup>	Unavailable
2013	45.07	Unavailable	0.75
2014	49.05	Unavailable	0.82
2015	55.17	Unavailable	5.67
2016	Unavailable <sup>b</sup>	Unavailable	7.19

<sup>a</sup>At Laurentian, proportions are traced by underrepresented group only at the applications stage. At the acceptance stage, proportions are only tracked for general equity students, not for individual underrepresented groups.  
<sup>b</sup>Lakehead did not have data for 2016 at the time of this study.

Despite these limitations, the data provided by Trent may be of particular interest to stakeholders concerned with first-generation representation. Since 2013, the proportion of Trent students self-identifying as first-generation has increased noticeably. When comparing 2016 to 2014, self-identification rates are four times as high at the application phase, and nearly nine times as high at the acceptance phase. As we discuss in our broader report (Holden & Kitchen, 2017), Trent's rate of representation has increased because more first-generation students have been applying to the program, and because those students are now twice as likely to accept their offers of admission.

Lakehead's data is particularly commendable, as the program has reported that between 44.02 and 55.17% of their students are the first in their family to attend postsecondary. This proportion also exceeds Finnie and colleagues' (2011b) sample, where first-generation students represented 29.05% of the population. With this in mind, teacher educators should consider the ongoing successes at Lakehead, as well as more recent improvements at Trent, when considering what practices might transfer to their own programs.

### *Students with Disabilities*

Tables 3a and 3b provide an overview of the four Ontario teacher education programs that formally track participation rates for applicants with disabilities. Importantly, several universities that did not report data for these students explained that student development centres often track students with disabilities, not the faculty of education. Thus, while a lack of data limits our ability to make province-wide assessments of representation, it does not mean that Ontario's universities are not supporting these students.

The available data are nevertheless of interest because of recent shifts in the proportion of students with disabilities in some programs. At Lakehead, for example, a 53% decrease in the

Table 3a

Changes in the Proportion of Students with Disabilities as a % of all Applicants

Year	Lakehead	Nipissing	U. Ottawa	York
2012	Unavailable	0.98	0.93	6.99
2013	Unavailable	0.58	1.36	5.83
2014	Unavailable	0.83	1.28	4.99
2015	Unavailable	0.90	1.35	5.30
2016	Unavailable	1.02	1.20	4.55

Table 3b

Changes in the Proportion of Students with Disabilities as a % of all Acceptances

Year	Lakehead	Nipissing	U. Ottawa	York
2012	4.44	0.76	1.07	6.56
2013	2.25	1.02	1.56	8.08
2014	4.69	0.85	1.19	6.90
2015	8.15	0.52	1.09	6.14
2016	Unavailable	3.85	1.79	5.03

program's size between 2014 and 2015 contributed to a 3.47% increase in the proportion of students self-identifying as having a disability. Nipissing saw a similar increase of 3.33% in 2016, owing to a noticeably higher proportion of students with disabilities accepting their offers of admission (see Holden & Kitchen, 2017). York University's 2016 data are also noteworthy, in that the rate of representation for students with disabilities was lower in 2016 than in any of the four previous years. Unlike in other cases, this decrease is not due to a sizeable shift in offer or acceptance rates. Indeed, York was more likely to offer admission to these students in 2016 than in any other year under investigation (Holden & Kitchen, 2017). The more important shifts occurred at the application stage: the number of self-identifying students

applying to York's consecutive program fell by 18.7%<sup>5</sup>, while the total number of students entering the program grew by 36.83%<sup>6</sup>.

Whether the reported proportions are equitable depends on the reader's comparison group, as proportions for students with disabilities vary from study to study. For example, 10.11% of Finnie and colleagues' (2011b) Ontario sample were students with disabilities. By comparison, Holmes (2005) reports that 4.3% of Canadians aged 20-24 report having a disability, and the most recent data from Statistics Canada (2015) note that 4.4% of Canadians aged 15-24 report having a disability. No university reported a participation rate as high as Finnie and colleagues' sample. York has consistently reported participation rates above those reported by Holmes and Statistics Canada, while Lakehead has reported participation rates above 4.4% in 2012, 2014, and 2015. No other university reported similar participation rates, though Nipissing's recent increase is noteworthy.

Because universities also support students with disabilities through centralized accessibility offices, we suspect that some students are identifying through these central services, rather than through the teacher education application process. This makes it difficult to assess whether universities with lower rates of participation, such as Ottawa, instead see students with disabilities access services outside of the admissions process. If faculties of education are not able to monitor total participation rates for students with disabilities, however, it may be difficult for them to measure whether their access initiatives are increasing the number of students who are successful in applying to, entering, and completing their programs.

### *Visible Minorities and Racialized Persons*

Three of Ontario's teacher education programs track application rates for visible minorities or racialized persons. While visible minorities and racialized persons are not interchangeable populations, we have chosen to include these figures in the same table for comparison, in part because York is the only teacher education program that actively tracks racialized persons in their admissions process. York's data is presented alongside data from Nipissing and Ottawa in Tables 4a and 4b.

Table 4a

Changes in the Proportion of Visible Minority/Racialized Students as a % of all Applicants<sup>a</sup>

Year	Nipissing	U. Ottawa	York
2012	1.61	17.59	25.51
2013	0.75	21.81	23.37
2014	1.33	22.65	21.22
2015	0.90	26.46	20.49
2016	0.15	23.21	20.28

<sup>a</sup>Nipissing and Ottawa track application and admission rates for students who self-identify as visible minorities. York, alternatively, traces data for racialized groups, which they define as "a group of people who may experience social inequities on the basis of their perceived racial background, color and/or ethnicity, (or) faith, and who may be subjected to differential treatment in society and its institutions." While these are distinct definitions, we have included them together in this table for comparison.

Table 4b

Changes in the Proportion of Visible Minority/Racialized Students as a % of all Acceptances

Year	Nipissing	U. Ottawa	York
2012	1.22	16.40	30.50
2013	0.41	19.00	29.80
2014	0.43	19.16	28.61
2015	2.07	22.00	26.34
2016	0.00	24.72	25.85

<sup>5</sup>91 applicants self-identified in 2015; 17 fewer self-identified in 2016.

<sup>6</sup> 535 students entered York's consecutive program in 2016, compared to 391 in 2015.

The most obvious difference in these data is the significant gap between Nipissing's rates of representation and those of Ottawa and York. This is not entirely surprising, as Ottawa and Toronto are both identified by Statistics Canada (2016) as significant centres for diversity. Despite this geographic factor, we are still troubled by the small number of self-identifying visible minority students applying to Nipissing's program since the change to a four-semester program. Only one student self-identified with this group when applying in 2016, and this student did not ultimately enter the program. We are further concerned that many universities do not track visible minorities or racialized students at all. While it may be argued that York or Ottawa's proportions support the contention that visible minorities are not actually underrepresented in postsecondary education (see Finnie et al., 2011b), there is no evidence to suggest that York and Ottawa's successes are the norm in Ontario. Indeed, as our participants shared in a separate part of this study, some universities may be closer to Nipissing's lower rate of representation (see Holden & Kitchen, 2017).

Ottawa's visible minority data are interesting because of noticeable differences between their English and French teacher education programs, reported here in aggregate. The proportion of visible minority students in Ottawa's French program has nearly doubled since 2012, whereas the proportion in the English program has decreased slightly over the same period. That is, much of the growth in Ottawa's overall rate of representation has occurred in their French teacher education program.

York's rate of representation for racialized students has decreased since 2013. Despite this change, their data are still noteworthy. In particular, it should be noted that for every year in the past five years, at least a quarter of the students in their program have chosen to self-identify as a racialized person. Further, for the past five years, one in five students who apply to the program self-identifies, contributing to York's comparatively high levels of diversity. Other teacher education programs would do well to look to York's efforts when reviewing their own access and equity strategies.

Statistics Canada (2016) notes that "19.1% of the total population ... identified themselves as a member of a visible minority group" (para. 6). Both York and Ottawa report higher proportions in their programs. Since 2015, both universities have reported proportions between 22.00 and 26.34%. As most other teacher education programs do not track participation rates for visible minorities and racialized persons, we are unable to report on whether these high rates of participation exist across the province. This appears to be a uniquely Canadian predicament: admissions literature in the United States is particularly concerned with participation rates of visible and racialized minorities (Black et al., 2015; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Cortes, 2010). While Canadian teacher education programs regularly articulate a commitment to equity, most programs in Ontario do not track application and admissions rates from visible minorities or racialized persons. Such commitments are difficult to fulfil if we do not have access to data to inform our policy decisions.

## **Recommendations and Final Thoughts**

Diversifying Canada's teaching force to better reflect the population of schools is a priority for Canada's education system. Consistent with previous studies' concerns, the present data suggest that much can be done to enhance access and representation for members of underrepresented groups (Childs & Ferguson, 2016; DeLuca 2015). Again, these recommendations do not serve to critique our colleagues, their programs, or the work that they are doing. We recognize that this discussion is newly emerging in the Ontario context, and so necessarily we may yet improve the way we are supporting and measuring equity across our programs. As teacher educators, university administrators, government policymakers, and teacher education researchers, we must examine what approaches will support the needs of diverse populations. We must align our admissions practices with the programs that they serve, and in particular, align our policies to the equity goals that are central to our programs and our philosophies of teaching. The recommendations that follow are rooted in this challenge.

As we have written elsewhere (Holden & Kitchen, 2016; 2017; Holden et al., 2016; Kitchen & Petrarca, 2015; 2016; Petrarca & Kitchen, 2017), openness and collaboration across institutions is key to improving equity across the province. Teacher educators should continue sharing descriptive practices with one another (see Falkenberg, 2015; Petrarca & Kitchen, 2017), and should seek out cross-institutional conversations. In particular, it would be valuable for institutions to share successes in enhancing the accuracy and sensitivity of self-identification tools (see Thomson et al., 2011). The Canada Research Chairs program offers a number of recommendations that would be helpful in this area (see Government

of Canada, 2017). Openness between institutions will also allow teacher educators to consider key questions from new perspectives: What is working? What do you find challenging? If your participation rates are high or are improving, why is that? What have you done to address local challenges?

University administrators, including deans, registrars, program managers, and other key personnel are well positioned to support teacher educators in these endeavours. Most importantly, university administrators should track participation rates for underrepresented groups more comprehensively, using strategies from successful institutions as a model for best practice. As we suggested for teacher educators, administrators should follow Stead (2015) and Sedlacek's (2004) recommendation to not limit statistical data to specific categories – including those groups most frequently mentioned in this report. Instead, universities track the groups that students do identify with, so that richer, more accurate data is available at each institution. At no point should programs use proxies to measure participation rates of underrepresented groups (Long, 2015). Just as socioeconomic status has proven to be a weak proxy for race in the United States (Cancian, 1998), if institutions are committed to increasing the racial diversity of their programs, other proxies should not be used to replace direct measurements of student self-identification rates.

University administrators should also actively support teacher educators in gathering participation data. While some faculties have access to rigorous admissions data, the data available to other teacher educators is limited. Our colleagues also identified institutional challenges when faculties of education did not collaborate with central administration offices, and vice versa. As teacher educators reconsider their equity policies and the ways that participation rates are measured, it seems appropriate to also consider how faculties and central services might move forward together with these challenges.

Government policymakers should also be interested in ensuring teacher education programs better reflect the diversity of the student population. Universities and faculties of education need support if they are to address longstanding equity issues, particularly if equity and access are a priority for Ontario and other governments (Wynne, 2014). Teacher educators are not able to track the diversity of the teaching profession directly, and indeed only have the direct ability to track participation rates within their own institutions. Wider collaboration is needed if we want to truly answer questions about the profession's representativeness, or to address challenges and limitations within our programs. The Ministry of Advanced Skills and Educational Development (MAESD) and OME are well positioned to provide such support at a provincial level.

Further research on changing rates of participation is also necessary. This study, which was intended as a diagnostic baseline for Ontario teacher education, does not present a full picture of participation rates across the province. In large part, this is due to the nascent field of equity admissions research in Ontario (see Childs et al., 2011), as well as the inconsistent data available at each institution. Continued investigation of provincial participation rates would greatly improve our understanding of how participation rates may be changing over time.

Access and equity are complex issues that require continued attention and effort. Teacher education programs cannot address these issues in isolation; the applicant pool is influenced by socialization generally and their experiences in education. Admissions processes may have implicit biases. Hiring considerations by boards will also affect how equitable schools are in terms of the diversity of their teachers. Thus, while the discussion of access and equity in admissions is itself complex, it must also be nested in a larger dialogue. There are many challenges that we ought to consider as we work to integrate our equity and access policies within our larger program goals. It is our hope that the information in this study prompts teacher educators and other stakeholders to continue the conversation. The purpose of this study was to provide baseline data about rates of representation in Ontario teacher education as they are currently measured. We hope this information – initial as it is – enables stakeholders to reflect on their own practices; share their approaches, successes, and struggles across institutions; and make adjustments to how teacher candidates apply and self-identify, how we measure quality and diversity, and how we align our admissions practices with articulated goals of diversity and equity. We believe that these are reasonable goals, and suggest that by examining and sharing our progress, we will be better positioned as a profession to achieve them.



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