

Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)

Reach Every Student

Student Success is about meeting the individual learning needs of each and every student. Schools are providing students with more opportunities to customize their high school experience and build on their strengths and interests through a variety of new and enhanced learning options.

What Is a Specialist High Skills Major?

- A Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) is a type of ministry-approved specialized program. A SHSM allows students to focus on knowledge and skills that are of particular importance in certain economic sectors, and to obtain certifications recognized in those sectors, as they work towards meeting the requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). Students who graduate with a SHSM designation on their diploma are prepared for success in a particular sector and in the postsecondary destination of their choice, whether it be apprenticeship training, a college or university program, or the workplace.
- Every SHSM must include the following five components, which are outlined in detail in ministry-approved frameworks developed for each area of specialization:
 1. A package of 9–11 required credits (the majority earned in Grade 11 and 12 courses) that constitute a pathway to one of four possible destinations: apprenticeship training, college, university, or the workplace. The package must include:
 - four credits – called the “major” credits – for courses that provide knowledge and skills closely related to the particular sector of specialization, which are specified in each of the frameworks;
 - three or four additional required credits for courses in English and other relevant disciplines (e.g., science, mathematics, or business studies), as specified in each of the frameworks, which include units of study that are customized to the particular sector. Some credits (e.g., English) may be used to meet compulsory credit requirements for the OSSD;
 - two cooperative education credits, which may be used to meet two of the 18 compulsory credit requirements for the OSSD;
 - one-half credit for the Grade 10 Career Studies course (which also meets a compulsory half-credit requirement for the OSSD).
 2. Compulsory certifications, which are identified in each SHSM framework
 3. Experiential learning through job shadowing, work experience, and a minimum of 2 credits earned through cooperative education
 4. Use of the Ontario Skills Passport (OSP) to document demonstration of essential skills and work habits
 5. “Reach ahead” opportunities, which allow students to experience learning in their intended postsecondary destination and which can range from a day of attendance at a college, a university, or a workplace to the completion of a dual credit

“When I told my parents about this program they were very happy that I was starting to plan my life and consider a career path. I am now thinking about going to college as well as apprenticing for a local company.”

Student, Windsor

How Will the Specialist High Skills Major Benefit Students?

- A SHSM allows a student to experience a range of customized, career-focused learning opportunities. It enables a student to take courses in an area of interest related to a particular sector while working towards an OSSD.
- The focused learning experiences of a SHSM program give students the opportunity to explore, identify, and refine career goals and make informed decisions related to postsecondary education, training, and next steps towards a career.
- The experiential learning opportunities provided in a SHSM enable students to refine their skills and improve their work habits, gain confidence in their ability to succeed, and see the connections between their studies, the real world, and their future careers. Students are also able to begin to establish relationships and networks in their chosen fields.
- Students who graduate with a SHSM can look forward to improved prospects after secondary school because of the recognition of and support for the SHSM framework content from a variety of representatives from the economic sector, apprenticeship training programs, colleges, and universities.

“We are lucky enough to get our Smart Serve certification and our First Aid and CPR certificates. This is great, because I want to get a better job and these will help. Also, I’m going to college in two years, and you need the First Aid and CPR to get into the program I want.”

Student, Brampton

How Is the Specialist High Skills Major Being Delivered?

- In the 2006–07 school year, 27 school boards have been given approval by the ministry to launch SHSMs related to five different economic sectors. The “majors” being offered are in arts and culture, construction, hospitality and tourism, manufacturing, and primary industries (agriculture, mining, forestry, and landscaping).
- Starting in September 2007, implementation of the SHSM will be expanded as additional boards are given approval by the ministry to launch SHSMs. It is anticipated that, by September 2008, SHSMs will be available in all school boards across the province.
- Frameworks for SHSMs in additional economic sectors will be provided in the future. As well, broader system-level consultations with the university sector will take place to increase opportunities for SHSM students who are pursuing pathways to university.
- More information about SHSMs is available at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/6ways/welcome.html>.

How Can the Specialist High Skills Major Help Students Meet Diploma Requirements?

- The 9–11 credits that students must earn for a SHSM meet a significant number of the optional credit requirements (12) for the OSSD. In some cases, credits required for a SHSM, such as English, can be used to meet compulsory credit requirements (18) for the OSSD.
- Successful completion of a SHSM will be indicated on the Ontario Student Transcript (OST) and on the diploma. Students will also receive documentation of the credits, the sector-related certificates, and other credentials they have earned as a part of their SHSM.

How Do I Find Out More About Local Opportunities?

