

Ministers bring free tuition, OSAP news to Aurora students



By Brock Weir

Ontario students will have more affordable opportunities to attend college and university this fall with free tuition for over 150,000 students.

Cabinet Minister Liz Sandals, President of the Treasury Board, brought the news to St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School last Wednesday.

Demonstrating a new online tuition calculator for OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) to Grade 12 students was Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, Minister of Housing, as Ms. Sandals outlined significant changes to the program, which provides grants and loans to Ontario students seeking post-secondary education.

"We need to make sure we have a simple plan to create jobs so people have jobs and grow the economy and help people in their everyday lives," said Ms. Sandals to a group of students in the St. Max library. "We know, first of all, if you're going to get a good paying job, you're going to need an education. Today, almost all of the jobs that are out there involve some sort of post-secondary credential, especially [as] a young person coming into the job market for the first time. Seven out of ten jobs are going to require a college or university degree.

"In response to that reality of what it is you as young people finish high school and move onto the next, we want to make college and university more affordable. The fact is post-secondary education opens doors, provides more career choices, and higher earning power. That is why I am proud to announce our government has implemented the most ambitious reform in student aid in North America."

With these changes, students from families with incomes of \$50,000 or less will receive free college or university tuition. Shifts in the program will also make tuition more affordable for young adults from middle income families.

"If your family earns more than \$50,000 per year, the new OSAP is still there to help," said Ms. Sandals. "In fact, tens of thousands of students from middle income families will also benefit from more generous OSAP grants and many will still be eligible for tuition. We estimate that over 210,000 students will receive more in grants than they will need to pay for tuition – in other words, free tuition, providing them with money for other costs including books, and close to 230,000 students will be finishing their school year with less debt than they would currently rack up under the old OSAP program."

Since 2004, Ontario's high school graduation rate has gone from 68 per cent to over 85 per cent. Additionally, 67 per cent of high school graduates have attained post-secondary education, higher, Ms. Sandals said, than any other countries part of the OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

"We have a great deal to be proud of, but there is still more work to do," she said. "We know that currently in Ontario students from the lowest income families are about four times less likely to go onto post-secondary education than those from the highest income families and that means there is a lot of potential we're wasting. The new OSAP will help remove financial barriers to higher education and build a more fair and inclusive society. The new OSAP will change lives right here in Newmarket-Aurora."

On their tour of St. Max, the Ministers met with calculus students, visited the auto-shop, an aesthetics lab, and participated in a

demonstration of St. Max's robotics program.

?This is one of the biggest schools I have been in,? said Ms. Sandals, who once served as Ontario's Minister of Education. ?What that means is when you have a really large student body, there is actually the opportunity to provide a wide range of programs. It is the recognition it isn't one size fits all at high school. You have to provide a range of educational paths for students because some students like the kids in the calculus class are great at doing the theoretical academic learning, some students thrive with more practical learning and if we want everyone to graduate, we have to be able to provide the whole spectrum and a big high school like this can do that.?