

Ontario Works Policy Directives

8.2 Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP)

Legislative Authority

Sections 4, 7(4) and 16(2) of the Act.

Sections 2(3), 10 and 26(9) of Regulation 134/98.

Audit Requirements

Documentation is on file to support the following:

- Individual LEAP service plans are present for all 16 and 17 year olds with one or more dependent children and any voluntary participants aged 18-25 years with one or more dependents.
- Service plans include activities for each of the three LEAP elements (learning, earning and parenting).
- Service plans include a minimum of 35 hours in an approved parenting program.
- Documentation is on file to support payment of the financial incentive including written acknowledgement of receipt of the bursary and a written undertaking to use it for the specified purpose.
- An **Appointment of Trustee** form must be completed and placed on file for all LEAP participants who are under the age of 18 ([see Directive 3.6: Trusteeship](#) for more information).

Application of Policy

Parents aged 16-25 who have not completed high school are eligible to participate in LEAP.

In order to remain eligible for assistance, all LEAP participants must be on the path to completing their high school diploma or equivalent.

LEAP participants' will continue to be eligible for assistance, regardless of age, as long as they continue to participate, make satisfactory progress in LEAP requirements and continue to meet eligibility requirements.

Staff will complete an Individual Service Plan (ISP) for each LEAP participant which will outline activities to be completed as part of the three elements of LEAP: learning, earning and parenting.

LEAP participants are provided with supports to cover expenses associated with participation in the LEAP program.

A \$500 bursary is provided to participants who successfully complete the LEAP requirements. This acts as an encouragement and motivation for the individual participant to complete the program.

Mandatory Participants

Participation in LEAP is mandatory for parents aged 16 and 17 who have not completed high school and who are Ontario Works participants or are part of a benefit unit receiving financial assistance under Ontario Works.

LEAP participants aged 16 and 17 may be deferred from participating in LEAP for a period of maternity leave following the birth of their child. They should be encouraged to participate in LEAP as soon as possible following childbirth, focusing initially on the parenting and child development component of the program.

Voluntary Participants

Parents aged 18 up to and including 25 who have not completed high school and who are Ontario Works participants or part of a benefit unit receiving financial assistance under Ontario Works are encouraged to participate in LEAP.

Parents aged 16 up to and including 25 at the time of entry to the LEAP program, who have not completed high school, and who are receiving financial assistance only for their child(ren) under Ontario Works may participate in LEAP and should be encouraged to do so.

Individual Service Plan (ISP)

The LEAP ISP is an addendum to the Participation Agreement, and outlines the activities that LEAP participants will complete.

The ISP is based on individual needs and circumstances and outlines how participants will access and carry out activities. Each ISP should identify and set out measures to deal with barriers participants may face.

The ISP:

- outlines parents' participation in each LEAP element;
- describes roles and responsibilities;
- identifies service providers;
- ensures that positive outreach occurs; and

- includes maternity leave if appropriate.

The ISP should also describe the plan to support the participant's transition from school to employment or further educational opportunities they plan to pursue beyond high school as they near graduation.

Participants are involved in all aspects of developing the ISP. They provide input and make choices about the activities and services in their plan. Participants can also provide feedback about the services provided to them.

Staff need to make frequent contact with LEAP participants, either monthly or more regularly if required, to monitor the implementation of the ISP.

Three Elements of LEAP

Learning

The learning element of LEAP requires participants to regularly attend an educational program leading to a high school diploma or equivalent; or attendance at a post-secondary institution as a mature student.

Sometimes alternative programs to high school, such as an adult education program or a supervised correspondence program may be appropriate. A phased approach to returning to school may also be necessary under exceptional circumstances.

Participants with barriers to learning such as English as a second language issues, literacy/numeracy problems, or learning disorders may require special educational arrangements.

Earning

LEAP participants have access to the full range of employment supports to develop employment skills and become job-ready.

Some options may include participation in school co-op programs, the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), community placements and other work experience activities such as job shadowing. Opportunities for students to gain work experience could also include part-time work, the province's Summer Experience or Job Connect Programs, or other programs as approved by the Administrator.

Parenting and Child Development

The parenting and child development element of LEAP promotes children's growth and development and supports parents to become better caregivers and educators for themselves and their children.

Parenting and child development activities are scheduled at times convenient for participants and focus on the parenting needs of the LEAP target group. ISPs outline a minimum of 35 hours of participation in an approved parenting program.

The parenting component is intended to:

- enhance parenting skills;
- develop parents as teachers and role models for their children;
- foster healthy child development;
- improve parental self-esteem and coping skills; and
- alleviate parental depression.

Requirements for parenting programs are set out in the **Ontario Works Learning, Earning and Parenting Guidelines**.

If possible, parents should be encouraged to participate in parenting activities together with other caregivers who play a role in looking after the participant's child. Parenting and child development programs should also be sensitive to the cultural needs of participants and their children.

Program Supports

LEAP program supports may be used to cover the following expenses:

- child care
- transportation
- school supplies
- school clothing
- educational trips
- graduation fees
- tutoring
- counseling
- fees for recreational activities
- other measures which provide positive reinforcement and recognition of achievements

LEAP participants have access to child care before, during and after school to enable parents to prepare for exams, complete homework, and participate in parenting and earning activities and to provide for emergency parent relief.

Child care supports continue for as long as the LEAP participant is considered a "person in need" under the **Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014**.

LEAP Incentive

LEAP provides participants with an incentive to complete the program. LEAP participants who graduate high school, complete approved parenting and child development activities and complete required earnings activities are eligible to receive a \$500 bursary.

The bursary is a payment under the **Ministry of Community and Social Services Act, 1990** and is exempt as income or assets in the determination of eligibility for Ontario Works or child care fee subsidy.

Once the \$500 bursary is received, LEAP participants must provide written acknowledgement of receipt of the bursary and a written undertaking to use it for the specified purpose.

There are two investment options for the bursary as outlined below.

Option 1

The \$500 bursary is used to pay for post-secondary education or other training at a university, community college or an institution registered under the **Private Career Colleges Act, 1990**.

Option 2

The \$500 bursary is held in trust for the education of the participant's child.

Participants with more than one child who choose this option must decide if and how to divide the incentive between the children.

Participants should be encouraged to increase the value of the incentive by putting the money in a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) which may then be eligible for a Canada Education Savings Grant of 20% from the federal government.

Where the \$500 bursary is invested into an RESP for the LEAP participant's dependent(s), a Canada Education Savings Grant paid into the RESP is exempt as income. In addition, that portion of the interest earned from the RESP or

Canada Education Savings Grant and reinvested into the RESP is exempt as income.

Planning Transition from LEAP

Participants nearing high school graduation develop plans outlining transition from the LEAP program to enrollment in further education or employment.

A transition plan:

- identifies which investment option the participant chooses for the \$500 bursary;
- outlines the steps for carrying out the transition, and the timeframe for completing it; and
- outlines the kinds of support participants need to make the transition to further education or employment.

Participants may require support or assistance with:

- filling out application and registration forms;
- getting referrals to career counseling and assistance networks;
- arranging visits to post-secondary institutions;
- enrolling in financial management training (i.e., learning how to manage OSAP funds);
- finding child care;
- arranging continued health benefits; and
- assistance with setting up an RESP.

Some LEAP participants may continue in the LEAP program following graduation from high school in order to complete the other components of the program such as parenting and child development activities or earning activities such as employment preparation courses. In these cases, the transition plan should identify the projected date for the completion of the LEAP program.

Participants who are not entering post-secondary education or exiting to employment should continue participating in employment assistance activities.