



The Conference Board
of Canada

CASE STUDY 10

A core product of the Employability Skills Forum, National Business and Education Centre

Program
Government

Date Established
Proposed secondary school and apprenticeship reforms have yet to be fully implemented.

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Name of Program
Ontario Ministry
of Education
and Training's
Secondary School
and Apprenticeship
Reforms

Skills Developed

- Academic
- Personal Management
- Teamwork
- Science Literacy

Developing secondary school students' employability skills

ONTARIO'S SECONDARY SCHOOL AND APPRENTICESHIP REFORMS

Enhancing the Public Education System

BY KURTIS KITAGAWA

August 1998

The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training is enhancing the capacity of the province's public education system to meet the challenges of the new economy by developing secondary students' generic employability skills.

Overview

The Government of Ontario has launched a comprehensive series of initiatives to overhaul elementary and secondary school programs and revamp apprenticeship.

The overarching purpose of all these provincial initiatives is to enhance the quality, effectiveness and accountability of Ontario's public education system to prepare youth to be responsible and productive citizens in a highly competitive global economy.

The purpose of the present case study is to analyse the Government of Ontario's initiatives to reform the secondary school and apprenticeship systems. Such reform will play an important part in establishing a seamless web of learning for all youth. In this study, specific emphasis is placed on the tendency of these initiatives to develop youth employability skills—the connecting

link between the education of youth understood as developing the whole person and the provision of a learning system that integrates the education of youth with the imperatives of the global economy.

Reforms to the elementary system included the implementation of challenging new curricula with clear, measurable standards for all grades. The emphasis on assessment and reporting is very useful from an employability skills development point of view, since teacher awareness of students' strengths and weaknesses and learner awareness of areas that need improvement are critical to the success of any skills development initiative.

The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (OMET) is building on these changes and on this renewed emphasis on assessment, and has consulted broadly on its 1996 booklet *Excellence in Education* with all major education stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, business, colleges and universities). It is proceeding with a renovation of the secondary school system with important links to employability skills development. Central reforms include introducing a new, graduated curricula streaming process starting in Grade 9; and increasing the number of compulsory credits and refocusing these

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NBEC Mission

We help business and education leaders work collaboratively to promote the development of a learning society that will prepare Canada's young people for a changing world.

credits on math, language, science and preparation for responsible citizenship.

Reform of the apprenticeship system or of the secondary school system are not ends in themselves but a means to accomplish broader structural and systemic change relating to the transition of youth from school to work, adulthood and further education. Ideally, the present reforms represent steps toward a seamless public learning and support system for youth that prepares them for the world of work, addressing their own personal aspirations while meeting the human resource requirements of a rapidly changing economy.

OMET already supports school-to-work and apprenticeship programs for in-school youth through its funding for Bridges projects and for the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). Through Bridges, the Ministry funds partnerships involving multiple school boards and employers that provide structured school-to-work transition programs through progressively more intensive workplace experiences for in-school youth as they move through Grades 10 to 12. OYAP funds individual board-employer partnerships that offer apprenticeship opportunities to secondary school students. The Ministry has a school-to-work transition committee that is looking at how best to integrate school-to-work policies and programs, such as Bridges, OYAP and Job Connect (which offers out-of-school youth opportunities to make the transition into the labour market).

Objectives

The overarching objective is to help youth make the transition from school to work to adulthood. Specific objectives are as follows.

Secondary School Reform

- Increase emphasis on math, language and science.
- Prepare students to be responsible citizens.
- Equip students with the employability skills they need to succeed in a highly competitive global economy through co-operative education, work experience,

school-to-work and youth apprenticeship transition programs.

- Introduce a new model of curricula streaming that gives all students a more rigorous foundation and allows for specialization in the senior grades.

Apprenticeship Reform

- Make youth aware of employment opportunities in the trades and associated apprenticeship training.
- Expand apprenticeship to new trades and new areas of economic growth.

Groups Served

- Students, educators, employers and society at large.

Activities

Secondary School Reform

Streaming

Ontario is introducing a new model of curricula streaming starting in Grade 9. Starting in Grade 7 and continuing through to Grade 12, teachers and parents will help students explore their future goals and course choices by helping them prepare annual education plans. In Grade 9 students take academic courses or applied courses or both and move into an academic or applied stream; they may transfer out of this stream in subsequent grades upon completing the relevant transfer courses. This graduated, flexible type of streaming is designed to avoid the high dropout rates associated with the old restrictive streaming practice and ensures that work-bound students (who make up approximately 50 per cent of all students who enter Grade 9) will be prepared for the workplace during their secondary school years.

Compulsory Credits

Ontario is increasing the number of compulsory credits from 16 to 18 (out of a total of 30), placing renewed emphasis on math, language and science and requiring students to take one credit in civics and career studies.

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The Employability Skills Forum Mission

We are committed to improving the productivity and quality of life for individuals, organizations and society by enhancing the employability skills of the current and future workforce of Canada.

This study was made possible through funding by members of the Employability Skills Forum.

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Provincial Partnership Council

The Minister of Education and Training will appoint representatives from government, education, business and the voluntary sector to (1) expand work experience, co-operative education and school-to-work and youth apprenticeship programs and (2) increase private sector involvement in them. These programs help students to make decisions about their future goals based on real-life experiences.

Teacher-Advisors

Teacher-advisors will complement the work of guidance counsellors and other teachers. These teacher-advisors will monitor the progress of small groups of students in Grades 7 to 11, having regular contact with each student in the groups for which they are responsible; helping students as they make the transition from elementary to secondary school and choose courses in line with their future goals; and providing a key point of contact for parents.

New High School Curriculum

A new secondary school curriculum is being developed in consultation with universities, colleges and business to ensure that courses actually prepare students for post-secondary education and the world of work.

Apprenticeship Reform

New Apprenticeship Training Act

- Shift focus from employment conditions to skills training and certification.
- Emphasize training outcomes by making the duration of apprenticeships depend on industry's judgement of how long it takes to achieve the standard, instead of insisting on a two-year minimum.

Making Youth Aware of Careers in Skilled Trades

- Provide secondary school teachers and guidance counsellors with more information to help students decide whether apprenticeship training is the best path for them.

- Make youth, educators and parents aware that careers in the skilled trades are personally fulfilling and well paid.

New Funding Model

- Provide tax incentives to qualifying employers to offset the considerable investment (up to \$110,000 per apprentice) they make in the on-the-job training component of apprenticeship training.

Stronger Role for Industry

- Form industry-education partnerships to increase youth interest and participation in apprenticeship training and strengthen guidance and career education programs in Ontario's secondary schools.

Links Between Apprenticeship Training and Postsecondary Learning

- Facilitate student mobility between apprenticeship, college and university programs.

Resources Required

Ontario is developing a new funding model for public education.

Achievements/Outcomes

- Enhancing the employability skills and employment prospects of participating students through the connections they make with, and the impressions they make on, employers.
- Developing educational programming that integrates employer-validated workplace expectations with secondary curricula.
- Funding of 18 Bridges projects for up to \$200,000 per year in each of three years, involving 34 district school boards (representing 63 former school boards); these boards are developing local community models and generating best practices that OMET will use to implement province-wide school-to-work transition programming.
- Enlarging the discussion about school-to-work transition programming from a focus on local innovative practices to a strategic level that integrates the analyses.

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Our grateful thanks to our interviewee:

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Benefits

Students

- Develop employability and industry-specific skills.
- Secure employment or get a start in self-employment.
- Test out career interests and make informed choices about their careers.
- See how classroom learning is relevant to the world of work.

Employers

- Meet with prescreened local students, who come with a system of support (their school) and who can potentially meet their recruitment needs.
- Have an opportunity to become involved in connecting their workplace expectations with secondary school curricula.

Innovation

OMET's innovation lies in its apprenticeship and secondary school reforms; its Bridges and OYAP programs for in-school youth; its Job Connect program aimed largely at out-of-school youth; and its plans to integrate all of these reforms and programs into a seamless learning system for youth making the transition to employment. These initiatives are innovative because they involve employers in the development, validation and delivery of curricula that reflect workplace expectations; expand the capacity of business, education and governments to develop youth employability and industry-specific skills; and will enhance employer participation and co-operation in a provincial partnership council.

Keys to Success

- Mobilizing employers to engage with each other and with education and government to validate curricula that incorporate workplace expectations.
- Increasing the capacity of local communities to share power, responsibility and accountability for what happens to students by crafting co-operative education, work experience and school-to-work transition programs that integrate workplace expectations with secondary school curricula.
- Changing the attitudes of parents, students, education and business to reflect the value of career-oriented programming.
- Showing that career-oriented programming contributes to a strong educational system.
- Governments, business and education demonstrating leadership.

Greatest Challenge

Perhaps the greatest challenge in generating a seamless learning system lies in overcoming the persistent view that all "good" jobs are built upon a formal college or university education. That being said, the key to overturning that prejudice lies in enhancing skills development in secondary school and increasing the number and scope of business-education partnerships to provide secondary school students and out-of-school youth with programs and opportunities that will prepare them for successful entry into the labour market.

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NBEC Publications Relating to Employability Skills Development and Assessment

Employability Skills Profile

Science Literacy for the World of Work

Best Practices in Assessing and Developing Employability Skills—20 Case Studies (Sept. 98)

The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace, 206-97 Report.

Enhancing Employability Skills: Innovative Partnerships, Projects and Programs, 118-94 Report.

Linking Teachers, Science, Technology and Research: Business and Education Collaborations That Work, 144-95 Report.

1998 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

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1996 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook