



New Adult Education Strategy

On May 30, 2006, the Provincial Executive passed a motion endorsing, in principle, the following new vision and strategy for the delivery of adult education, and it authorized the development of a survey to gather data regarding existing adult education daytime programming.

Background

In the years 1995-1999, when funding for adult day schools was slashed by 70% and school boards consequently eliminated most of the adult daytime programs, OSSTF/FEESO ran high-profile lobby campaigns to save adult education. We surveyed our schools for solid data. We documented the fact, for example, that 83% of adult day school leavers went into a job or into post-secondary studies within 6 months, that welfare rates were cut in half, and that the devastating funding cuts shrank adult enrolments by 90% in less than a decade. The OSSTF/FEESO campaign achieved sympathetic press and good will, but did not reverse the Conservative government's cuts.

The Liberal government has paid some attention beyond lip service to lifelong learning and adult education, including appointing Kathleen Wynne to write the report *Ontario Learns: Strengthening our Adult Education System*, setting up the new *inter-ministry Adult Education Policy Unit* headed by Tim Douglas, and creating a **Sub Group** of the Working Table on Learning to 18 for adult education issues. However, it is clear that there is no appetite for increasing the funding for students over age 21, much less going back to the days of full funding.

It is clear, then, that OSSTF/FEESO must change our approach. If we genuinely believe in equal access for all students, regardless of age, to the full service school and a real secondary school diploma, we cannot simply continue to lobby for full funding as the only way to achieve these goals. Moreover, our continuing education teachers and continuing education instructors languish behind every other employee group in salary, benefits, and ability to transfer readily to other jobs. We owe it to these members to adopt a new creative campaign and strategy to reform adult daytime credit course programs to achieve both our goals and the government's goals at the same time.

The Preferred Model: Mixed or Blended Classes

A few creative school boards such as the Kawartha Pine Ridge Board have successfully operated schools for years using a mix of at-risk students under age 21 with adults over age 21, employing only fully grid-salaried teachers (not continuing education teachers) to deliver the programs. Others such as Ottawa-Carleton have kept salaried teachers in adult-only schools but at the cost of very high class sizes. Classes of mixed age can be smaller.



The mixed model works because of the funding rules, which allow schools using only salaried teachers to use the regular day school register for calculating FTE (ADE) enrolments regardless of the age of the students. The day school register does not count daily attendance, but takes two snapshot dates of Oct. 31 and Mar. 31 and allows each student taking 3 full credits on that date to count as 1 FTE.

Each FTE day student over age 21 (adult) attracts a grant of \$2528, plus some accommodation grants. Of course each FTE student under age 21 attracts more than twice that amount in various grants. In the mixed model, this allows the under-21's to subsidize the cost of necessary school attributes such as support staff, administration, equipment, and textbooks, none of which are funded under the adult grant. Programs for adult students are enriched without drastic changes to the funding formula. At-risk students benefit from having adults in the school, and from the ability to access the adult education model of education.

The student mix may vary depending on facility and programs offered, but it is likely that about 35-40% of the student body in a mixed model need to be under 21 for the school to be self-funding.

In contrast, those school boards which use only continuing education teachers to deliver adult credit course daytime programs must determine FTE/ADE using the continuing education register, which penalizes students for missing a class and requires a total of 950 hours of in-class attendance to count as 1 FTE. The over-21 grant of \$2528 per FTE therefore amounts to far less funding using this register. A high premium is placed on retention, and because there are no other sources of funding beyond attendance, class sizes of 45-50 are not uncommon, especially at the start of a program.

At present, although continuing education adult education day schools generally target students over age 21, some do allow students under the age of 21 to take the courses. In fact, as far as curriculum and OSS policy is concerned, an adult or mature student is defined as one who is over 18 and has been out of school one year (in contrast to the funding definition based on age 21). "Adult" focused curriculum thus is recognized as beneficial to at risk students over 18, so mixed classes are desirable. However, most such mixed programs use only continuing education teachers, so are forced to use the continuing education attendance register miss out on all of the funding for those 18-21 year old students that they could otherwise be accessing using our preferred model.

Why the Mixed Model Will Help Student Success

The mixed delivery model fits well into the government's goal of increasing creative approaches to supporting/retaining at-risk students. A full-service school where each community has an accessible Adult/Alternative School, offering seamless programs from entry-level non-credit ESL (where there is demand) and job-retraining programs delivered through adult-model credit courses and includes opportunities such as dual credit articulation agreements, access to Specialist High Skills Majors, specific job-preparation courses and a strong focus on cooperative education will lead to increased student success/graduation rates, employability, and options for attending post-secondary destinations. Multiple sources of funding including federal HRDC and LINC funds as well as provincial MTCU, MCI and EDU funds.



Not only will adult students have access to a more complete program and smaller class sizes, but the under-21's will benefit as well. Clearly, the government has recognized that many students will not graduate by age 18, and that the paramount goal should be that every student regardless of age can achieve a high school graduation diploma. School boards and the government alike need to realize that student success targets will be more readily achieved by using this community school, full service program with mixed-age classes. Some of the anticipated benefits to at risk students under age 21 include:

- At risk students benefit from adult role models; this is perhaps even more important in cities where multicultural at-risk youth could benefit from the very multicultural adult school population.
- We believe (although we need to collect data to prove it) that there will be improved behaviour of at-risk youth in an adult classroom environment and that attendance and retention rates should rise.
- Academic success for at-risk youth should improve because of the more job-focused and skills-focused curriculum developed and offered in adult schools.
- The Ministry's new High Skills Major programs, focusing on increased student success through bundles of courses in job-focused programs, are ideally suited to both at-risk youth and young adults.
- Full service programs with mixed classes of students over age 18 would also facilitate an improved PLAR process that genuinely recognizes life experiences and helps students graduate more quickly. The proposed recognition of external credentials in the Learning to Age 18 program is actually far better suited to students who have had at least one year out of school than to adolescents.
- EQAO scores should rise in these communities. An OECD/UNESCO research finding in 2003 was quoted by the Wynne report as follows: "Adult education and training can contribute directly to the goals of higher performance for underachieving students in the K to 12 system when the adults in their lives gain the language, literacy and numeracy skills that they need to effectively participate in their children's education."

The OSSTF/FEESO Adult Education Survey

OSSTF/FEESO has no data on adult daytime school enrolments, programs, teacher types, timetables, or student success since 1999, and so our first step needs to be to gather current data. This data will then be collated to determine the current status of adult daytime programs across the province. Ultimately, the goal is to develop an action plan for promotion of this model and bargaining strategies that can be used to implement this model province-wide for the benefit of our Continuing Education Teacher members.