

Background

Current law in Ontario permits students to drop out of school at age 16. The law was designed for an economy based on agriculture, resource extraction and manufacturing. Then, students could leave school with a basic education and find a job that provided a secure future. Times have changed. The government has recently pledged to keep students in school until age 18. This issue of *Education Watch* provides realistic ideas for encouraging students to stay in school until the age of 18.



Apprenticeship and the skilled trades

Skilled trades have always been an appropriate career path. During the 1995-2003 period, however, changes in Ontario's school system, severely curtailed that path.

Apprenticeship today is mainly part of post secondary education. With the exception of the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), there is little connection between secondary

schools and apprenticeships. In the past, secondary schools included shops where students could acquire the skills that would give them an edge when applying for an apprenticeship. Today, the broad based technology classes are few in number. The cost has become prohibitive.

OYAP allows students to attend high school and train as apprentices at the same time. Students can complete the credits needed for graduation and gain apprenticeship training leading to a certificate of apprenticeship and journey-person status.

Only students who have completed Grade 10, are at least 16 years of age and have accumulated at least 16 credits are eligible for OYAP. In 2003, only 3.4 percent participated. Participation is about twice as high for males as for females. OYAP nevertheless, is an important program for students, and needs to be expanded.

Co-op education

Between 2002 and 2003, one-third fewer Ontario students participated in co-op programs. Students are having difficulty fitting co-operative education into their programs because of the increased graduation demands of the new curriculum.

School to work programs

Secondary school students have four course level choices: university, university/college, college, or workplace preparation. A reform that could help is to change senior course types in the secondary curriculum to: university, college, skilled trades and workplace preparation.

Courses will need to be repositioned, adapted or developed with feedback from stakeholder groups.

At-risk students

The number of guidance counsellors and co-operative education teachers has been cut in recent years. The current number is insufficient to provide assistance to students facing a much more complicated educational and work environment.

In 2002, the Curriculum Implementation Partnership of the Ministry of Education made recommendations to address the needs of students at risk. As a result, the Ministry established the At-risk Work Group to develop specific suggestions. OSSTF supports these findings. Allowing students who need five or six years to complete secondary school should not be

a grant reduction exercise for school boards.

OSSTF's recent research study, *From Applied to Applause*, demonstrates the need for a smaller class size of 20 for Applied level students. More information about this study can be found on the OSSTF website www.osstf.on.ca.

Professional development

Some guidance counsellors could profit from experience in the area of apprenticeship. The Ministry and faculties of education should include guidance in the range of pre-service programming for teachers with an emphasis on apprenticeship.

Facilities

The decline in the number of technology facilities in Ontario's schools has resulted from the retirement of many experienced technical teachers, reduced investment in technology courses, lack of interest by skilled trades people teaching and the de-emphasizing of technical education by the previous government.

The \$20 million of the Technological Education Renewal Initiative to rehabilitate technological facilities is only a

fraction of what is needed for Ontario's schools. Statistics already show an alarming downward trend with respect to the graduation of males from secondary school. Many of the traditional shops are precisely the courses that attract male students.

OSSTF believes that a comprehensive study of technology-based education in Ontario is warranted. The government should establish a study group to undertake such a project.



Recommendations

- 1 THAT course choices be made available to senior students in the following areas: university, college, skilled trades and workplace preparation.
- 2 THAT if courses in skilled trades preparation are added to Grade 11 and 12 course selections, at least two specific English and two specific mathematics courses and a science course be included.
- 3 THAT an open guidance and career education course that would cover the four career destinations in some detail be added for Grades 10, 11 or 12 students.
- 4 THAT funding for guidance and co-operative education be increased significantly in order to provide sufficient teachers to provide a greater level of service to students.
- 5 THAT, depending on need, students be encouraged to take more time to complete secondary school and have access to programs that will assist them to graduate.
- 6 THAT the Ministry of Education establish a maximum class size of 20 students for the Applied level programs and provide the necessary additional funding to make this possible.
- 7 THAT guidance be included as a subject choice for students at faculties of education.
- 8 THAT more information about apprenticeship and the skilled trades be produced for school guidance departments.
- 9 THAT the Ministry of Education recognize the achievements of students in skilled trades courses by creating more scholarships and bursaries.
- 10 THAT a study group be established by the Minister of Education to make a thorough examination of the state of technology based education in Ontario's public school system.

The full report can be found on the OSSTF website www.osstf.on.ca

For further information contact Doug Little, Executive Assistant
416-751-8300 or 1-800-267-7867
littled@osstf.on.ca



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Making Ontario Secondary Schools Work For All Students

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