

Submission to the Ministry of Education

Accelerated Apprenticeship Pathway Program

November 2023

ONTARIO ENGLISH
**Catholic
Teachers**
ASSOCIATION

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) represents the 45,000 passionate and qualified teachers in Ontario's publicly funded English Catholic schools, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.01** The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) welcomes the opportunity to offer input, on behalf of 45,000 teachers working in Ontario's publicly funded Catholic schools, as the Ministry of Education seeks feedback from stakeholders on two potential models for an accelerated apprenticeship pathway.
- 1.02** At a press conference on March 8, 2023, Premier Doug Ford – joined by Education Minister Stephen Lecce; then-Labour, Immigration and Skills Development Minister Monte McNaughton; and Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy – announced the government's intention to make significant changes to publicly funded education, by providing students in Grade 11 the option to transition to a full-time, skilled trades apprenticeship program.
- 1.03** As is customary, a news release was distributed shortly after the press conference. The release included quotes from 13 individuals – almost exclusively representatives of various industries – who extolled the virtues of the government's plans. Conspicuously absent from a news release about changes to the education system, was any quote of support from an education stakeholder.
- 1.04** Indeed, the Association was neither consulted nor advised ahead of the announcement. As will become evident throughout this submission, a number of issues and potential problems that plague the government's proposed approach might have been pre-empted had the government sought the expertise of teachers, education workers, and their representatives ahead of time.

- 1.05** In addition, by proposing two models for an accelerated apprenticeship pathway, and then seeking input on those models, the government has set arbitrary boundaries around the topic, which serve to limit discussion. This, to borrow a construction term, is a bad foundation to build upon – and ultimately raises more questions than it answers.
- 1.06** Nevertheless, the Association will bring to bear its considerable expertise in education, pedagogy, and student development, in an effort to raise critical points that the government must consider if it is to continue moving forward with its plan to broaden pathways to the skilled trades.
- 1.07** The accompanying *Consultation Paper (2023)* provides a series of guiding questions with regard to the two proposed models. This submission will offer comment on those questions, where necessary, while raising additional issues and questions throughout.
- 1.08** This submission is organized into the following sections:
- Introduction
 - Skilled trades and the purpose of education
 - Description of the proposed models
 - Fundamental issues with the Employer Supervised Apprenticeship model
 - Comments on the Equivalent Apprenticeship Learning model
 - Additional and unanswered questions

2. SKILLED TRADES AND THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

2.01 As the government considers potential models for accelerated apprenticeship pathways, we must remember that any program or pathway that allows students to leave high school to pursue an apprenticeship, and decreases the likelihood of obtaining a high school diploma, could have the unintended consequence of narrowing those students' long-term financial and career opportunities.

There have been many recent news reports on the growing labour shortage in skilled trades, both in Ontario and across Canada, as the proportion of skilled trades workers aged 55 or older has reached an all-time high (CIBC Capital Markets 2023). This issue is particularly acute in the construction industry, where an estimated 300,000 workers will retire within the next decade (Butler 2023).

2.02 To a certain extent, this trend was anticipated well in advance. Economists such as Armine Yalnizyan have long forecasted that an aging "Baby Boomer" population would come to put pressure on the labour market – and notes that the best structural antidote to this is to significantly increase wages and improve working conditions (Crawley 2023). The Ford Conservative government has, thus far, resisted such policy options.

2.03 It is also true that publicly funded education has a role to play in promoting the skilled trades as a rewarding career option. It is a longstanding and unfortunate reality that perceptions of the skilled trades remain disproportionately negative among youth, who often view this path as a "last-resort option for post-secondary education" (Menard 2022; Ministry of Labour 2021). Undoubtedly, there is work to do in order to create improved access and supportive pathways for youth to enter

the skilled trades – including updates to existing programs, such as the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP).

- 2.04** At the same time, it is easy to fall into a reductionist trap and to view education solely as a means through which to obtain a career. This view is shortsighted and narrow. We must always remember that the overarching goal of publicly funded education should be to prepare students with a broad range of values and competencies that will enable them to successfully adapt throughout their lives.
- 2.05** Laying a foundation of job-related abilities should be one function of the publicly funded education system. However, young people are entering a rapidly evolving labour market, and they will need to continually upgrade their knowledge and technical skills throughout their lives to meet the requirements of jobs that do not yet exist (World Economic Forum 2023; Segovia and Checa 2021). Thus, we must remain focused on the needs of students and the public, broadly – rather than the narrow and current desires of business interests.
- 2.06** It certainly should not be the expectation that every graduate will go on to university. Many of the jobs that will be most in demand over the next few decades will require a high level of skills, but not necessarily a university degree. Public awareness campaigns and labour market information should be used to promote the skilled trades as viable and potentially lucrative career options. More resources should be provided for guidance counselling, to help students and families make informed choices about post-secondary goals and planning (Ministry of Labour 2021; Sorensen 2013).

2.07 However, it has long been the case that a high school diploma serves as a prerequisite for the strong majority of well-paying jobs, and those who complete high school continue to enjoy a significant advantage in median annual earnings compared to those who do not possess a high school diploma (Statistics Canada 2017).

2.08 As we consider the promotion of skilled trades within publicly funded education, we must ensure that “job-readiness” does not become the main objective. Students who are taken out of the classroom for any length of time after Grade 10 will lose out on the competencies, knowledge, and broader social experiences that occur within schools during Grades 11 and 12 – and are vital to a student’s holistic development.

2.09 Parents, teachers, education workers, and the general public want students to be prepared to move the economy forward, but publicly funded education should be about much more. We must continue to seek a balance between instilling hard skills, encouraging collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving, and fostering the development of thoughtful, creative, caring, well-rounded, and engaged citizens.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED MODELS

3.01 The government has proposed two models for consideration, which will form the basis of feedback from stakeholders. Both models involve full-time apprenticeships for students who are at least 16 years old and have completed at least 16 high school credits (Ministry of Education 2023).

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