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Trading up – High School and Beyond: Five Illustrative Canadian Case Studies

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The need to improve the quality of trades training for secondary school students in Canada is critical. Educators and policymakers need to make this a priority because of the projected shortages of skilled trades and the overall need for better pathways from school to work for all young people.

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) commissioned the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education (SAEE) to examine innovative models providing career pathways training for secondary school students as part of CPRN's two-year multi-pronged study of *Pathways for Youth to the Labour Market*. This report focuses on case studies of five Canadian secondary schools currently providing trades training.

Methodology

The researchers undertook document reviews, direct observations of programs, interviews with appropriate personnel, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to produce this report. In addition to interviews, other sources of data included Web sites, videos, newspaper articles, pamphlets, posters, student information booklets, and student application process packages. Minutes of meetings and other print resources were reviewed. Data collected in each province were referenced to the appropriate legislation concerning issues that affect the implementation and continued growth of trades training programs in the schools.

The schools chosen represent a diversity of programs serving urban and rural communities, new and established programs, differing socio-economic regions, and student populations. These schools are: North Peace Secondary School, Fort St. John, British Columbia; Rutland Senior Secondary School, Kelowna, British Columbia; Mistassiniy School, Wabasca, Alberta; Olds Junior Senior High School and Community Learning Campus, Olds, Alberta; and White Oaks Secondary School, Oakville, Ontario. While the basic aim of career pathway training programs in secondary schools is similar throughout Canada, i.e. to facilitate the transition for students from secondary to post-secondary training and employment in the trades, it is important to understand the actual context in which these programs occur when examining each case study.

Overview of Report

In the case studies, a few programs from each site are presented as illustrative examples. The community context for each school is described drawing on comparative data from Statistics Canada 2000 census and the standard trades and apprenticeship programs offered in each province are outlined. A cross-case analysis examines the characteristics of effective programs, perceived program effects, and issues of program design. This paper concludes with recommendations to educators and policymakers for effective career pathway programs to meet the needs of secondary school students, and the demands of the Canadian economy for a highly skilled workforce.

Findings

The case study for each school highlights aspects of the programs offered to students. A number of program design issues were observed as critical to viability of programs and the success of students including: population base; influence of legislation and regulations; personnel; gender; transportation; issues arising when two institutions jointly deliver programs; and economic influences. While each of the programs is unique in how they serve their student populations within very diverse contexts, there appeared to be some commonalities in “what works” across the five sites studied. The following appear to be major characteristics contributing to the effectiveness of these programs: vision and support; active partnerships; flexible delivery options, program design, and scheduling of instruction; marketing, recruitment and selection processes; and early career awareness and development programs. The overarching issues Taylor identifies in *Pathways for Youth to the Labour Market: An Overview of High School Initiatives* (2007) are similar to what we present in this report.

Recommendations

Improving the quality of and opportunity for trades training for secondary school students in Canada needs to be a high priority. Projected skilled worker shortages will not be addressed by the current level of programming. Further, the need for appropriate pathways from school to work for all young people must also be considered.

By intervening during the high school years with career pathways programs that have the potential to increase high school graduation rates and prepare students for skilled jobs, more skilled labour will be available to address projected trades shortages and students will have access to increased earning potential throughout their lifetimes.

The case studies examined in this report constitute a very small sample from which it is not possible to make sweeping generalizations with respect to best practices and policies in trades training programs. Notwithstanding this limitation, the study reveals that many similar barriers to effective career pathways training programs exist in the three provinces studied, despite differing legislation, funding and credentialing mechanisms and policies. There is a need for a more consistent effort to replicate best practices in programs, adapting as appropriate for local conditions so that all secondary school students in Canada can access various types of trades training.

The study recommends:

More Seamless Delivery – Those government departments responsible for secondary and post-secondary education and training should work with each other and the community in unison to ensure seamless transitions for trades students and appropriate funding for institutions to cooperatively offer programs.

Expanding Dual Credit Programs – All provinces should have training programs offering secondary students the opportunity to earn some post-secondary credentials along with their credits towards high school graduation. This will require the cooperation of all those involved in educating and employing skilled trades in Canada.

Councils (Regional and National) to Advance Trades Training to Youth – Whether at the school, district or regional level, councils representing the local community, industry, employee representatives, post-secondary institutions and secondary schools should establish formalized agreements as to how they can cooperate to offer programming to secondary school students. At the national level a council to facilitate pan-Canadian initiatives would be beneficial.

Linking Economic Forecasts with Program Offerings – All levels of government should proactively monitor economic trends and provide funding and economic forecasts to allow institutions to adjust their offerings accordingly.

Increasing Access for Women – When considering training programs for secondary and post-secondary students, more emphasis should be placed by all levels of government on establishing programs that encourage participation by female students either by offering more traditionally female trades programs or by continuing to implement strategies to ensure female students are comfortable enrolling in male-dominated, non-traditional career area programs. Research on what programs might be most successful in encouraging female secondary school students to enter the trades may provide suggestions for these initiatives.

Trade Specific Professional Development – Instructors for trades programs should be able to access professional development training related to learning and pedagogy readily. In order to keep current with industry innovation, teachers should also have the opportunity to attend recognized trades specific upgrading and training.

Government Incentives and Support – Governments should provide incentives (e.g. wage subsidies, tax breaks, training allowances) to encourage local businesses to participate in trades training and apprenticeship type programs in order to increase opportunities for student worksite placements. Support for partnership work can maximize benefits for students through provision of diverse programs. Funding for a national council would facilitate initiatives to promote best practice throughout Canada.

Career Awareness and Development – A focus on career awareness and development activities in the earlier grades needs to be continued and expanded in order to provide students the necessary skills and knowledge to make informed choices when considering entry to trades training programs in the secondary school system. Parents also need this information.

Research to Identify and Share Best Practices – Research to build a cohesive, pan-Canadian approach to identify best practice and dissemination of this knowledge should occur throughout Canada to enhance trades training for secondary school students.

Establishing Evaluation Systems – Systems need to be established to evaluate the outcomes and impacts of secondary school career pathways programs as there is a dearth of quantitative outcome data. Funding and coordination of these systems needs to occur both provincially and nationally due to the mobility of the young adults being studied.

Thoughtful implementation of trades training programs in secondary schools creates valuable career opportunities for Canadian youth and it is the responsibility of government, employers, unions, schools and ministries of education and advanced education across Canada to develop ways to enhance career pathways programs in Canada's secondary schools.