



**ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL BOARDS'  
ASSOCIATION**

**Leading Education's Advocates**

**Ontario Public School Boards' Association**  
439 University Avenue, 18th Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 1Y8  
Tel: (416) 340-2540  
Fax: (416) 340-7571  
[inquiry@opsba.org](mailto:inquiry@opsba.org)  
[www.opsba.org](http://www.opsba.org)

Cathy Abraham  
President  
  
Stephanie Donaldson  
Executive Director

November 17, 2023

To: [skillsdevelopmentandapprenticeshipbranch@ontario.ca](mailto:skillsdevelopmentandapprenticeshipbranch@ontario.ca)

Re: Accelerated Apprenticeship Pathway Proposal -Ministry of Education

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Ministry of Education's proposed accelerated apprenticeship pathway proposal. Discussions were facilitated through the [Education Program Work Group](#) and included many discussions with school board trustees as well as staff with expertise in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), Cooperative Education, Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM), Dual Credits and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).

OPSBA continues to be a strong advocate for promoting the value of the skilled trades as a respected and viable long-term career pathway for students and families to consider. The labour market needs for well-qualified skilled labourers, both now and into the future, is well-established and OPSBA supports government efforts to reimagine access to this career pathway. However, targeting 15-and 16-year-olds to prematurely leave a school setting for this purpose is notably concerning and devalues the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

**Please note that throughout our consultation process there was little to no support for a new proposed accelerated apprenticeship pathway program for Grade 11 and 12 students.**

Programs such as OYAP, SHSM, and Cooperative Education have become well-established, viable programs over time, providing the opportunity for students to explore career pathways at the same time as earning an OSSD. These existing school-anchored programs have been well-supported by parents and industry partners as they ensure there are supportive knowledgeable educators and a safety net should students require additional supports or services. Strong consideration should be given to expanding placements in these existing programs to allow more students to explore career settings, including apprenticeships. This would be a more appropriate starting point than looking at a new model for this purpose.

It is important that we remember the significant learning from the pandemic years. Keeping students, especially those in this age range, well-connected to a school setting with established caring relationships with peers and adults is essential to a student's mental health and well-being. Grade 11 is a key transitional year for students who are exploring and learning about their strengths, interests, needs, and aspirations. Student social emotional development and learning also dominates this time in school and needs to be appropriately developed, supported, and nurtured.

Keeping options open for students includes ensuring they have the opportunity and access to credit courses such as Grade 11 Mathematics and Grades 11 and 12 English prior to graduation. Without directly taking these courses, which are essential to accessing multiple pathway and post-secondary destinations, students' future decision-making will be inadvertently limited. Their long-term accreditation and earning potential will also be negatively impacted. PLAR is not accepted by most post-secondary institutions for these types of credits – a further limitation.

The description for Model 1 states that the student would only be partially funded by the Ministry of Education, yet at the same time the model requires school board staff to identify and establish industry partnerships and appropriate workplace sites, conduct regular check-ins, ensure access to supports, activities and services, and potentially establishing a centralized committee. To provide the level of wrap around services needed to make this a successful option for students and their families demands no less than full funding for school boards. Some school boards, due to size, enrolment, staffing levels, and geography, are now struggling to support a wide range of student programming. The complex nature of a skilled trades workplace setting – coupled with the younger age and stage of Grade 11 and 12 students – would require an even higher level of staff support to identify appropriate industry partners, ensure health and safety standards through a rigorous inspection process, and provide sufficient preparatory work and ongoing support for students.

Skilled trades workplace environments are adult settings, and are not designed to receive and support impressionable 15-and 16-year-olds. It is the exception and not the rule that Grade 11 and 12 students would be able to easily transition into these work environments. No specific training has yet been identified for workplace partners that would appropriately prepare them for this age group of students. The actual number of journeypersons available to support apprenticeship positions is also lacking and must be addressed.

The move to de-streaming was designed to ensure that students are given every opportunity to pursue a multitude of pathways by reducing learning gaps and bias in directing students toward specific pathways too early in their educational journey. Not understanding "who" these students are and the "criteria" to select students for an accelerated apprenticeship pathway could lead to renewed streaming for racialized students, thereby creating a demographic of students who are precipitously directed to a career pathway without built-in supports and back up plans should they change their minds. Regardless of chosen programs and approach, monitoring of various student demographics is important to ensure that unintended forms of streaming do not occur.

OPSBA does not support a new accelerated apprenticeship pathway for Grade 11 and 12 students but would be very open to participating in a working group to explore how to effectively expand existing OYAP, SHSM, and Cooperative Education programs to best introduce and support students interested in the skilled trades and apprenticeship opportunities.

## **Summary**

OPSBA applauds the government's recent efforts to promote the skilled trades and apprenticeships for students in school settings, however our association does not support adding a new accelerated apprenticeship pathway for Grade 11 and 12 students.

OPSBA would like to see even more focus at the provincial and local elementary and secondary school level to help students and their families develop positive attitudes toward the trades and for students to be provided with more "hands on" and experiential learning opportunities. An

apprenticeship focus can easily be expanded and integrated into existing secondary school programs and through secondary school experiential and Cooperative Education programs, specifically OYAP and SHSMs. This will involve balancing and/or shifting funding levels for commencing an apprenticeship to secondary schools rather than only in post-secondary and employment settings.

OPSBA recommends:

- Not adding a new accelerated apprenticeship pathway for Grade 11 and 12 students.
- Supporting expanded funding and placements for the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, Specialist High Skills Major and Cooperative Education programs, and that the government expand relevant opportunities for students to begin to earn apprenticeship hours while in secondary school.
- Addressing the issue of a lack of skilled trades' education and apprenticeship options for Indigenous students in Indigenous communities.
- Incorporating appropriate funding to ensure equity of access to work placements including transportation costs especially in rural, remote and northern communities.
- Providing dedicated funding for renovations in secondary school facilities and new construction to provide shop programs to support careers in the skilled trades (Grades 7 to 12).
- Supporting amendments that will change the journeyperson to apprentice ratio for all trades to increase student access to these career opportunities.
- Continuing targeted marketing and communications, specifically directed at parents, students, educators and employers, to further elevate skilled trades to a respected and desirable pathway.
- Expanding and promoting the Pre-apprenticeship Training Program for secondary school graduates and eighteen-year-olds who are looking to reengage in their education through skilled trades.

Sincerely,



Cathy Abraham  
President, OPSBA



Stephanie Donaldson  
Executive Director

*The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the credible voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.*