

Conference Report
Summer 2006

Seamless Pathways

A SYMPOSIUM ON IMPROVING TRANSITIONS FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE



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Council of Ontario Directors of Education

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1000 Sherbrooke Street West, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, Canada H3A 3R2
Toll Free: 1-877-786-3999
Fax: (514) 985-5987
Web: www.millenniumscholarships.ca
Email: millennium.foundation@bm-ms.org

Seamless Pathways: A Symposium on Improving Transitions from High School to College
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Seamless Pathways

A SYMPOSIUM ON IMPROVING TRANSITIONS FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation
Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario
Council of Ontario Directors of Education

July, 2006

Dr. Ben Levin
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Education
Mowat Block
22nd Floor, 900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

and

Dr. Philip Steenkamp
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
Mowat Block
22nd Floor, 900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Dear Deputy Ministers,

First of all, we would like to thank you for your participation in the Seamless Pathways Symposium in June of 2006. Your presence and your commentary sent a signal to the sector that you have a strong commitment to working with us to create strong links between schools and colleges. This will help to create seamless pathways for students moving from secondary to post-secondary education. We were delighted with the day and pleased that the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario and the Council of Ontario Directors of Education took the initiative to organize the symposium.

We three worked to plan the day and acted as facilitators of the symposium discussion. Afterwards, we determined that there was a compelling need to describe some recommendations to help inform policy and decision makers and to help move the discussion further forward. These recommendations, while not explicitly outlined at the Seamless Pathways Symposium, reflect the themes discussed that day.

- A. Students need to be able to move seamlessly between institutions so that they are well prepared for success in their next educational step and do not have to repeat work they have already done. Better alignment of school and college curricula, dual credit opportunities, and greater transfer options should be supported with targeted funding by government. This would allow students to develop interest in post-secondary education and gain confidence in their ability to pursue this path.
- B. Starting in 2007, we should work towards a specified target of one or two dual credit courses or programs per school created in a partnership between school boards and colleges. This would help to give senior secondary students in all school boards an opportunity to explore post-secondary options. These programs, to be effective, must be organized through a mandated active partnership between school boards and colleges.
- C. Collaboration between colleges, universities and schools is crucial in creating strategies for seamless pathways and to improve post-secondary education attainment. One approach is K-16 Councils, like those in the U.S., which are comprised of educators at all levels with the mandate to improve the success of students.

- D. Government should continue to invest in programs—both broad- and community-based—that raise awareness of post-secondary options.
- E. Teacher-training programs that help teachers and post-secondary faculty better foster successful secondary to post-secondary transitions are needed. Given that Ontario now has destination-based secondary school curricula, faculties of education and colleges should be required to work together to ensure that teacher education graduates have an understanding of colleges and the options they offer.
- F. Funding for these initiatives must be targeted to both secondary and post-secondary partners to make implementation possible.

It is critically important to build on the gains made in the first symposium by extending the dialogue. You kindly offered to host a subsequent gathering. Your leadership demonstrates the crucial nature of partnership work that must be done. We would be pleased to work with you to assist you in any way in the development of the next session. We look forward to discussing the above recommendations. We are particularly interested in hearing which of them you consider to be priorities and most worthy of our focus and energies.

Thank you again for the opportunity to engage in this most important dialogue.

Sincerely,



Sylvia Barnard
President
Cambrian College of
Applied Arts and Technology



Bill Gerth
Director of Education
Waterloo Region District
School Board



Sylvia Terpstra
Director of Education
Kawartha Pine Ridge District
School Board

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Executive Summary

Seamless Pathways: A Symposium on Improving Transitions from High School to College gathered prominent Ontario educators, policy-makers and government leaders in Toronto on June 6, 2006. The purpose of the symposium was to bring together an expert group of education leaders to:

- learn about other jurisdictions' approaches to building meaningful pathways that contribute to higher success rates in secondary school and higher participation in post-secondary education
- discuss what has been learned from current research; the School/College/Work Initiative projects; and the unique role of colleges and apprenticeship pathways in student success
- identify systemic issues and develop policy advice for creating better school-college linkages in order to raise both participation and success rates for post-secondary students.

There was a clear need for a high-level strategic discussion on the future of transitions in order to:

- follow up on the recommendations in *Ontario: A Leader in Learning* (the Rae report on post-secondary education)
- respond to the Ontario government's Learning to 18 and Student Success strategies, such as dual credits and high-skills majors.

Colleges should partner with the Ministry of Education and school boards to make sure that high school students, especially those at risk of not attending post-secondary institutions, have access to relevant and useful information about colleges.

Ontario: A Leader in Learning,
The Honourable Robert K. Rae,
February 2005, p. 45

In 2003, the graduation rate in Ontario stood at an unacceptable 68 per cent...There is more at stake than ever before for students to get a high school education that is high quality, meaningful and prepares them for a variety of post-secondary destinations... If passed, the Learning to 18 legislation would mandate that all school boards make the government's comprehensive student success programs available to students. It would also increase the school-leaving age to 18 or until graduation by keeping students learning either in classrooms or at approved out-of-school programs, including apprenticeships or co-operative education.

Ontario Minister of Education,
Gerard Kennedy





Participants at the symposium found that there were a number of compelling and innovative programs to improve student participation and success from jurisdictions outside Ontario. They concurred on a number of factors that government must consider when implementing its plans to improve post-secondary participation by creating seamless pathways from high school to college.

The Honourable Robert K. Rae gave the keynote address at the symposium focusing on the value of lifelong learning and the importance of eliminating the silos that exist in the education sectors in order to bring true leadership to the transitions between school and post-secondary education and work.

The first round of presentations in the morning focused on programs in other jurisdictions that have successfully facilitated transition.

1. Guidance Curriculum

Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance and Counselling Program

Margie Layden-Oreto, New Brunswick

In the mid-1990s the Department of Education completely revamped expectations for guidance and counselling from a service-model only for those who chose it to a comprehensive and integrated program that is integrated into the K-12 system. The program is proactive, for every student and is taught by classroom teachers and counsellors.

2. Dual Credit Option

Choice and Flexibility

Anne Longston, Manitoba

The Dual Credit Option pilot program in Manitoba was initiated in 2001 when the Department of Education restructured its graduation requirements to allow for more choice and flexibility. Through the program, students can take joint high school and college credits in order to better prepare for college.

3. Smoothing Transitions

Priority and Progress:

Seamless Pathways in the United States

Dr. Larry Warford, United States

In the United States, the College and Career Transitions Initiative is currently available at dozens of U.S. community colleges and high schools. Dr. Warford shared the findings of more than three years of this national initiative. The program involves a sequence of academic and career courses that begin in the ninth grade and lead to an associate degree, certificate, license or a B.A. and beyond.





The second group of morning presentations highlighted current research findings that focused on transition issues for college-bound students. The overall theme of the research presentations was getting to know the student body better in order to better serve it—both from a policy and program perspective.

1. Community Colleges

Who are the aspiring students?

Dr. Lorna Earl, Ontario Ministry of Education

Dr. Earl summarized research on educational aspirations and destinations of secondary school students. The research looked at 250 students who were planning to attend community college immediately after high school graduation. Among many findings, a number of them had considered leaving school entirely (14 per cent) and 2 per cent had actually quit.

2. The Ontario Secondary-Post-secondary Nexus

Creating Pathways to Success

Dr. Peter Dietsche, Mohawk College

Dr. Dietsche reviewed results of the *Pan-Canadian Survey of College Students* that profiled 29,000 new students in Canadian colleges, CEGEPs, technical institutes and university-colleges. This web-based survey was conducted during September 2005 and focused on students beginning their college studies. The results showed the vast majority (90 per cent) were continuing their education to obtain the knowledge and skills for a future occupation. At the same time, a large percentage had never taken a co-op course (52 per cent) or a course in career planning (34 per cent) during secondary school. Dr. Dietsche underlined the importance of career planning in concert with college attendance—the two must go hand in hand.

3. Preparing for College

An Analysis of Recent Surveys of College-Bound Students

Dr. Andrew Parkin, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation

Dr. Parkin's presentation reviewed recent research about the steps students take to prepare for college. Information was culled from three sources: the Survey of Secondary School Students, the High School Follow-up Survey and the College and University Applicant Survey. The presentation focused on financial planning and savings as well as on the particular needs of first-generation students (those whose parents did not attend post-secondary education). The top reasons students cite for not going on to post-secondary are financial issues (31 per cent) and career indecision (29 per cent). Poor marks were also a disincentive for many (cited by 42 per cent). First-generation students also find marks and funding to be barriers and, in addition, their plans change more frequently during high school and their parents save less money for post-secondary education.

The afternoon was dedicated to smaller group discussions on key research and policy directions as well as a final full-group discussion with key policy leaders: Ontario's Deputy Minister of Education and Deputy Minister of Training Colleges and Universities.

Symposium participants found that there are a number of factors, of which government must be aware if it is to successfully create seamless pathways from high school to college. These are:

- A **seamless system** without silos between sectors is key to developing working solutions.
- More research and more **coordinated research** is needed to help provide the best possible training and support.
- Financial **support for students** is critical to their ability to participate and complete post-secondary programs.
- **Support for faculty and teachers**—and in particular additional training—is needed so that teachers are in a position to advise students on post-secondary options.
- **Involvement of the whole community** is important to improving access rates. This means involving parents and other students, as well as reaching out to adult learners and employers.
- Encouragement for **new pilot programs** and support for other successful transition initiatives already in place are crucial to finding new ways to improve pathways.
- **Increasing public awareness** about the importance of post-secondary education and the preponderance of available options is crucial.

The symposium concluded with a group discussion, which included Deputy Minister of Education, Dr. Ben Levin, and Deputy Minister of Training Colleges and Universities, Dr. Philip Steenkamp. Both Deputy Ministers expressed their appreciation of the activity and energy currently being dedicated to bring secondary schools and colleges into closer alignment, both by the current government and most especially by the sector. They underlined their commitment to work together on this issue—and to collaborate frequently. They were also encouraged by the evidence of successful innovation in other jurisdictions—and the success in smaller initiatives taking place across Ontario. Finally, the Deputy Ministers promised to co-sponsor a workshop in the fall that would again bring symposium participants together to talk about progress and future plans.



More than 70 per cent of all new jobs created in Canada will require some form of post-secondary education and only 6 per cent of new jobs will be held by those who have not finished high school.

HRDC, Government of Canada. 2004.
Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians



Agenda

Emcee

Mr. Brian Desbiens, President Emeritus, Sir Sanford Fleming College

Introductory Remarks

Mr. Norman Riddell, Executive Director and CEO, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation

Keynote Address

The Honourable Robert Keith Rae, *Reflections on School-to-College Transitions*

Learning from other jurisdictions:

Ms. Margie Layden-Oreto, Government of New Brunswick
Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance and Counselling Program

Ms. Anne Longston, Government of Manitoba
Choice and Flexibility

Dr. Larry Warford, College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI), Phoenix, Arizona
Priority and Progress: Seamless Pathways in the United States

Learning from research:

Dr. Lorna M. Earl, Associate Professor OISE/UT, Scholar-in-residence, Ministry of Education
Community Colleges: Who are the Aspiring Students?

Dr. Peter H.J. Dietsche, Vice-President Research & Institutional Quality, Mohawk College
The Ontario Secondary-Post-secondary Nexus: Creating Pathways to Success

Dr. Andrew Parkin, Director, Research and Program Development,
Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation
Preparing for College: An Analysis of Recent Surveys of College-Bound Students

Small working group discussions

What are the key ideas from other jurisdictions that should be considered in Ontario?

What are the key ideas from research that should inform policy development?

What are the key issues that should be brought to the attention of the Ministries?

Report back and general discussion

Closing Remarks

Dr. Ben Levin, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education

Dr. Philip Steenkamp, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

Introduction

To encourage dialogue among educators on the topic of improving transitions between high school and college, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario (ACAATO) and the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) organized a one-day symposium. This report summarizes the findings of the Seamless Pathways symposium which took place on June 6, 2006 in Toronto, Ontario. The Symposium brought together senior secondary school and college administrators, policy-makers, researchers and practitioners.

Mr. Norman Riddell, Executive Director and CEO of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation launched the day's discussion by outlining the work of the Foundation in helping to break down barriers to post-secondary education. Since its inception, some 670,000 bursaries have been granted, totalling over \$2 billion dollars. The results of this investment have been compelling: the average student debt had been rising consistently since 2000, but now the growth has stopped. Research indicates that reducing debt increases persistence—and that is key to student success.

Mr. Riddell introduced some of the major themes of the symposium by underlining the importance of collaboration and breaking down the silos in the education sectors. He emphasized his strong belief in the informal relationships between people who have confidence in one another's judgment. The purpose of this symposium, he argued, was for key policy-makers and educators to build networks so that we can create better pathways from school to college.

The Honourable Robert K. (Bob) Rae gave the keynote address. Transition, he asserted, is not simply that from high school to college, but is related to lifelong learning, which starts at home at the very youngest of ages with the expectations that parents have for their children. If we can spark expectations in every family, every child will go on. Mr. Rae cited the Alberta Learning Bond, which provides funding to begin education savings, as an example of a program that encourages expectations.

Mr. Rae outlined some of the key challenges facing Ontario (and Canada): there is a substantial skill shortage, we need to have better foreign credential acknowledgement, high school and grade school students need more curriculum-based preparation for their futures, and apprenticeship needs to become a more appealing choice.

Part of the solution proposed by the current government has been to keep young people in educational programs until they are 18. However, Mr. Rae argued that the focus of attention should be less on high school and more on college. The dropout rate is a reflection of what options are available: clearly young people need more of them.



Mr. Rae cautioned against the temptation to see this as a turf war. This is a much more important issue and it requires true leadership to break down the silos. Programs must be focused on children, not jurisdictional battles. He underlined the importance of research and understanding the issues related to income in looking at dropout rates.

Finally, Mr. Rae's major concern is that the whole continuum is included in planning: from grade school to high school to college or university and on to work. Dropping out doesn't start at age 16. The seeds are planted earlier—even in grade school when education fails to speak to kids' skills or their parents' expectations. Mr. Rae concluded his remarks by pointing out the need for radically higher participation rates. It's a great opportunity for all of us to get busy.



Presentations

The first three presentations of the day focused on innovative projects that are currently in effect in New Brunswick, Manitoba and the United States. Each of the three projects addressed its respective government's concern about high school to post-secondary transition and success. Each project has now been active for several years and the results for students are starting to become evident.

Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance and Counselling Program

*Ms. Margie Layden-Oreto,
Government of New Brunswick*

Ms. Layden-Oreto described the Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance Program currently in effect in the province in New Brunswick. The program provides all students (K-12) with an opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes to enhance emotional well-being and acquire a desire for lifelong learning. In kindergarten it is about building awareness and by Grade 12 it is about planning.

Ms. Layden-Oreto highlighted the fact that one of the problems of making the transition from high school to post-secondary was that parents and principals expect guidance counsellors to talk to young people about transitions. In the traditional guidance model, she pointed out, counsellors meet one-on-one, are reactive, provide simple career information and maintain the status quo. The Comprehensive and Developmental approach, on the other hand, is a whole school approach for all students. It is proactive, delivers a guidance curriculum, includes planned daily activities and can change in accordance with student needs.

Comprehensive guidance is implemented by counsellors, administrators, teachers and para-professionals. It consists of a guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and program support. Students develop their own Career and Educational Planning Portfolio. Comprehensive guidance—and specifically, personal development, lifelong learning and career planning—is included in student report cards.



Dual Credit Option: Choice and Flexibility

*Ms. Anne Longston
Government of Manitoba*

Ms. Longston presented information on a three-year pilot program in Manitoba called the Dual Credit Option. These dual credit courses in this program provide opportunities for students working toward a high school diploma to study post-secondary courses and apply them for credit at both the secondary and post-secondary level. The agenda of the pilot is to strengthen the pathways among secondary schools, post-secondary education and work.

Based on previous research (Fincher-Ford 1997), the pilot program's benefits were anticipated to be: creating a continuum of learning; shortening the time required to complete a certificate, diploma or degree; eliminating duplication of late high school

and early post-secondary courses; sharpening students' academic preparedness; expanding academic options and enhancing college-credit options for technical students.

The pilot began in 2001 and has provided choice and flexibility for students ever since. Thirteen high school credits (of a total of 28) are optional and may include provincial or locally developed courses, dual credit, community service, distance learning or special language. High schools are responsible for approaching post-secondary institutions, providing funding, determining courses and teachers and registering the courses with the Department of Education. Currently school divisions offering the program cover the costs of registration. Independent students who enrol on their own are responsible for their own costs.

Some examples of the program include the Seven Oaks School Division (three large high schools in Winnipeg) which offers dual credits with the University of Winnipeg in Biology, Intro to Sociology, Intro to Anthropology, Intro to Calculus and English. Two high schools in the Frontier School Division partner with the University College of the North to offer courses in web page design and recreational leadership. Adult Learning Centres have been major participants with dual credits now offered from

13 sites through partnerships with Assiniboine Community College, Brandon University and Red River College.

Ms. Longston did note that there have been challenges: "How is truck driving a dual credit?" and "You aren't really a college student." The three-year pilot ended in 2004, but was so popular that it continues to be widely available. There are now six post-secondary institutions involved and, since the pilot began, some 198 different credit courses have been available.

Priority and Progress: Seamless Pathways in the United States

Dr. Larry Warford, College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI), United States

Dr. Warford opened his presentation by underlining the importance of transitions and pathway work on the future of nations. He noted that a study, the Bridge Project out of Stanford University found that students, parents and K-12 educators get conflicting and vague messages about what students need to know to enter and succeed at college. The study noted that courses at college and high school are not at all connected and that standards expected at each institution are very different. Furthermore, current



information collection systems are not equipped to handle students' needs across systems and no one is accountable for transitions.

According to the Stanford study (and the results are reflected in other studies) 63 per cent of students at two-year institutions and 40 per cent of students at four-year colleges take remedial courses. In the U.S., for every 100 ninth graders, 67 will graduate from high school on time, 38 will directly enter college, just 26 will still be enrolled in sophomore year and 18 will graduate from two- or four-year college. Dr. Warford pointed out that there are three areas for action: high school graduation, entry into college, and persistence and college graduation.

There are some promising practices across the U.S., he noted, including a P-16 (pre-school to age 16) movement, middle/early college, dual enrolment and career pathways. Dr. Warford's focus was on the College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI), a cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education and the League for Innovation in the Community College Consortium.

CCTI's purpose is to contribute to strengthening the role of community and technical colleges throughout the United States in easing student transitions between secondary and post-secondary education as well as transitions to employment; and improving academic performance at both the secondary and post-secondary levels. Through partnerships of post-secondary institutions with secondary schools and employers, the CCTI furthers the development of academically rigorous programs of study organized around broad occupational areas.

The second group of presentations of the symposium were reports on research—particularly research on both current and potential students. All the research was done here in Canada and the vast majority of the students surveyed were from Ontario. Each research project further illuminated the needs and interests of Ontario students, from greater financial aid to more career planning.



Community Colleges: Who are the aspiring students?

*Dr. Lorna M. Earl, Associate Professor OISE/UT
Scholar-in-residence, Ministry of Education*

Dr. Earl presented research on aspiring college students. Approximately 250 Grade 12 students who were planning to attend community college immediately after graduation were surveyed. The students were from 10 secondary schools from two districts: one urban, one rural, one large, one small. Fifty-five per cent of them were male, 45 per cent were female.

The majority of the students (72 per cent) were in applied-level math and 63 per cent in applied-level English. Fully 51 per cent had dropped a course and 56 per cent had added a course during high school. Fourteen per cent had thought of leaving school and two per cent had actually quit.

When asked to self-rate their skills, 73 per cent said their communication skills were good or excellent, 64 per cent said their reading skills were good or excellent and 63 per cent said their computer skills were good or excellent. Interestingly, when asked about the approach to learning that works best for them, 45 per cent cited hands-on



activities and experiments, whereas only 10 per cent cited computer technology.

Dr. Earl's research raises interesting questions about how well secondary schools and colleges serve these students and about what else schools and colleges need to know about their own student's skills and needs in order to help maximize student success.

The Ontario Secondary-Post-secondary Nexus: Creating Pathways to Success

Dr. Peter H.J. Dietsche, Vice-President Research & Institutional Quality, Mohawk College

Dr. Dietsche presented results from a Canada-wide survey designed to create a comprehensive profile of students enrolling in a program for the first time at a Canadian college, technical institute or university-college. A survey focusing on student characteristics was done at entry, while another focusing on the student experience was administered partway through the term and a third focusing on completion and enrolment was done at the end of term.

In total, 28, 932 students were surveyed from 102 institutions across Canada (68.8 per cent of respondents were from Ontario). Of those who were not first-time attendees (18 per cent), 57 per cent had changed career plans, did not like a previous

program or were interested in a new subject. A vast majority, 90 per cent of students, said that the major reason for attending college was to acquire knowledge and skills for a future occupation. Of the students who were new to Canada (19 per cent), almost half (45 per cent) had arrived since 2000.

Many students felt that they would benefit greatly from support at entry to college: 23 per cent thought they would benefit from help with writing skills, 45 per cent with study habits and 40 per cent with test taking. Forty-six per cent said financial aid would help them.

Thirty-four per cent said they would benefit greatly from support in planning for future studies. A majority across the country said that they got along well with teachers in high school and 50 per cent said that they turned to teachers for extra help often or always. Fifty-two per cent never took a co-op course and 30 per cent never took a course in career planning.

Students were clear that they wished they had decided on a career plan or path and that they wanted to better figure out if the program was the right career direction for them. Dr. Dietsche concluded the presentation by pointing out that the research demonstrates the risk of college attendance without career planning. So we all need to help students do more career planning—the current passive model does not meet the needs of the student population.

Preparing for College: An Analysis of Recent Surveys of College-Bound Students

Dr. Andrew Parkin, Director, Research and Program Development, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation

Dr. Parkin reported on several surveys of secondary school students, college applicants and university applicants. (Survey of Secondary School Students and High School Follow-up and the College and University Applicant Surveys). The majority of secondary students surveyed by these two instruments plan to go to university or college (56 and 23 per cent respectively) but just 37 per cent go on to university and 27 per cent to college.

The barriers or challenges to post-secondary education identified by students include not having enough money (30 per cent of high school students say it is a significant barrier), fear of going into debt (34 per cent of high school students), not believing it will pay off (25 per cent) and poor school marks (42 per cent). School marks, according to this survey, are a bigger barrier than financial aid. It appears that students need to feel that the effort will be worth it.

For those (from the High School Follow-Up Survey) who choose not to go on to post-secondary, the top reasons for not continuing are financial issues (31 per cent) and indecision about career (29 per cent). The top reasons for leaving a post-secondary program were lack of interest (29 per cent), program not as expected (28 per cent) and financial issues (22 per cent).

Almost 80 per cent of students currently enrolled had non-governmental sources of financial support. Families with higher incomes tend to have saved for post-secondary studies and were more likely than lower income families to have discussed college or university preparation before Grade 10. Families with lower incomes wanted more information about funding support.

In the case of first-generation students (those whose parents did not complete post-secondary training) 29 per cent fear going into debt and 30 per cent find marks to be a barrier. On average, their parents do not save as much for post-secondary education (\$5,961 versus \$8,386).

The vast majority of parents want their children to go on to post-secondary, concluded Dr. Parkin—some 90 per cent—but money is a barrier. Attitudes matter and grades matter.



Key Findings

The second half of the day was spent in discussion. The first session of the afternoon was spent in small groups, discussing the key ideas from the research and presentations that could be applied in Ontario, as well as the issues that the ministries need to be aware of. In the second session, the whole group reconvened to present their findings and have an open discussion with the Deputy Ministers on future directions for Ontario.

Key ideas from research and presentations that could be applied in Ontario

The issues that face educators, whether in Ontario, Manitoba, B.C. or the U.S., are similar—the core concepts are the same, the challenges are the same and so participants felt that many of the solutions piloted by other jurisdictions could be well applied here. There was strong enthusiasm for the New Brunswick Comprehensive and Developmental Guidance and Counselling Program, for the CCTI career planning model and for the Manitoba dual credit program.

Dual credits and more

Participants were very impressed with evidence that programs allowing students to complete high school in college have been successful. Discussions focused on the benefits—shorter programs and greater preparedness—for many students. Dual credit programs increase access to post-secondary education regardless of where the courses are delivered.

The dual credit discussion led to a broader conversation about the importance of a credit recognition system—which would make it easier to move between institutions and jurisdictions. Participants were convinced that greater engagement in post-secondary education is created by more flexibility. The definition of credit and who can deliver it needs to be more flexible. At the same





time, stronger school-college links will help students navigate application requirements. It is time to revisit the consistency and transferability of credits for the province.

Early exposure to career education

The New Brunswick and U.S. examples of proactive transition programs underlined the importance of exposing students to pathways at a very early age. It was noted that, to some extent, pathways need to be individually prescriptive, but that the introduction of career and post-secondary expectations at an early age could have a very significant positive influence.

More data needed

The presentations inspired participants to call for further research in two ways: by gathering more raw facts and by increasing coordination. College and high school educators felt that further exploration and development of a profile of learners would

help them better meet student needs. College leaders in particular noted that more research would help in the creation of more relevant college programs and services.

There was a strong call from participants for more current empirical research. Several noted that there are key information gaps in what we know about students. There was a request for further research on the importance of income levels, first-generation learners and at what point students begin—or should begin—career planning. Participants also pointed out that we should wait to measure high school completion until people reach the age of 24.

Participants agreed that there was already good research being done, but that there was little coordination across the system. They argued for an aligned system for evidence collection and sharing and communication of results. At the same time, there is also a need for forums where best practices could be shared to help with policy development. In short, there is a need for more gathering, more reporting and more collaboration.

Strategies for government

Participants emphasized the importance of articulating sector and student needs to government in a coordinated fashion. The single voice would and should identify the needs of educators and students, report on results and identify the resources and policy support needed.

Principles

There were several key principles that participants articulated throughout the day that must guide all further work in improving secondary to post-secondary transitions.

- There must be commitment at highest levels and support at grassroots levels.
- The student perspective is paramount.
- There must be joint partnership and leadership from post-secondary and secondary educators.
- Sustainable funding is crucial to success.



Seamless system

Throughout the day, participants underlined the importance of a seamless system that provides life-long learning. Participants were emphatic that a silo approach to education and training was ineffective and did not serve students well.

An integrated strategic plan and alignment of priorities is the first step toward a system that makes transitions easy. A full system view is essential. We have to take a holistic view of education, explained one participant. Long-term policy and structural commitment by government was seen as critical. Several participants noted the importance of placing initiatives in context of demographic patterns and declining enrolment.

Not only does there need to be an integrated approach to planning and priorities, but there also needs to be financial support to allow for the breakdown of silos and the reduction of competition between sectors. There should be a collaborative relationship, not a resource struggle, between the players. A mutually reinforcing funding model, said many, would go a long way to help ensure a seamless transition for students.

There were a number of suggestions for strategies to help create a more seamless system. One of them was to have regular meetings between directors of education and college presidents—communication among the players is crucial to integration. A second was to continue the Ontario Education Number (OEN) past secondary school so that students would have one number throughout their lives.

Financial support for students

Participants were impressed by the research relating income to post-secondary success. Not only is income a determinant of who will or will not go on to post-secondary, financial support is also of importance to retention. Participants were convinced that there needs to be both more funding for low-income students and a better balance of grants versus debt. Research clearly demonstrates the need for ongoing and comprehensive financial support for students.

College applicants anticipate an average debt load for their first year of college to be \$6,024. The expected debt load of many students naturally translates into concerns about funding. Forty-nine percent of applicants are “very concerned about not having enough funds to complete their education”, 47 percent of applicants are “very concerned about their level of debt upon graduation”, and 42 percent of applicants are “very concerned about their ability to repay their debts within a reasonable timeframe”. In 2002 the annual cost of college was projected to be \$11,635 by the Ontario College Application Services (OCAS).

Acumen Research Group. (2004). *Ontario College Applicant Survey*. London, ON: Acumen Research for Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. (p. 85)

Participants offered examples of innovative approaches to reducing barriers to post-secondary education. In some jurisdictions, it is possible to volunteer service in one's field (e.g. nursing) to pay back student debt. Participation rates in countries where post-secondary education is free are very high.

Clearly, other alternatives to deal with financial pressure need to be explored.

Support for faculty and teachers

Given the importance that individual teachers can play in career planning, participants were adamant that professional development, teacher preparation and faculty training in career planning would be a crucial component in successfully defining career and education pathways.

Participants suggested that there should be Ministry grants for faculty to start pilot programs. They articulated a need for mini-grants to train faculty and teachers as well as to get college and

high school faculty to talk and coordinate plans, strategies and programs with one another. Alignment of educators was seen to be key. Teachers that could teach at various levels will be in demand. Professional development days for high school teachers to be spent at colleges were suggested as one good strategy. College faculty could act as a resource for career development in secondary schools.

At the same time, participants argued that more funding was needed so that colleges and schools can offer greater variety of courses—particularly in smaller sections. Many suggested that adding technology training in high school would help make college more accessible.

Whole community involvement

High schools and colleges are very much a part of the communities in which they are located, so solutions to the challenges of transition need to go well beyond the walls of the institutions. Other key players include parents, other students, employers and adult learning centres.

In order for the Bill 52 legislation to be successful in its implementation, it is crucial that Ontario colleges continue to be engaged as active partners with the Ministry of Education and school boards in the development of Learning to 18 strategies. Among the many benefits of colleges' participation is that colleges offer adult learning environments. As well, the link to career education opportunities can be instrumental in encouraging students to complete their high school education and go on to further studies. Treating students as adults and giving them a pathway into the working world are two practical reasons to have the college system play an important role in the Learning to 18 strategies.

David Lindsay,

CEO/President, ACAATO

Letter to Ontario MPPs, April 24, 2006



It was abundantly clear to participants that parents have a key role in post-secondary education and career decision-making. There is a definite need to reach out to them, to inform them and involve them at every stage of the process. Parents need to better understand education options and to be more involved in setting career destinations.

Tutoring and mentoring by peers was seen to be important too, not just by the traditional players, but by post-secondary students to high school students. Bringing post-secondary students into high school classrooms was suggested as a valuable strategy.

Participants underlined the importance of employers in helping to ensure that education was leading to a relevant career path. Employers have an important role in defining both technical skills needed, particularly leadership and communication skills. Greater participation on the part of the employment sector could be encouraged with incentives.

In addition, participants noted that Adult Learning Centres need to be more connected to colleges. There needs to be better transitions into post-secondary education from those with non-high school backgrounds—particularly adults. Several argued that there should be a way to fast-track a secondary school diploma for those adult students.

At the same time, it was seen as important that post-secondary institutions create a climate of change—not climate change, as one participant put it. One of the means is to keep the doors open to the whole community so that high school students are frequently on campus attending college and cultural events.

Encourage pilots

Many participants gave examples of good Ontario secondary-to-college programs so there was broad acknowledgement that there are currently many successful pilot programs that help establish better pathways. One speaker, Ms. Margie Layden-Oreto, also referred to the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation's pilot projects that aim to improve access to post-secondary education for students from under-represented groups. Participants were clear that extending funding for successful pilots would be very beneficial—keeping in mind that there is a need to always consider how to expand good existing initiatives to the whole system.

Since its inception in 1997, the **School/College/Work Initiative** (Government of Ontario) has had a mandate to fund projects and forums that have focused on providing a seamless transition from secondary school to college by:

- aligning curriculum between secondary schools and colleges
- articulating pathways to college and apprenticeship programs for students
- increasing the understanding of the educational and career opportunities for students through colleges as a post-secondary destination
- linking teachers in the college and secondary panels through discussion seminars, professional development and exchange and internship opportunities, and,
- the extension in 2005–06 of the SCWI mandate to include the funding of projects to expand the availability of dual programs and dual credit programs between the two systems.

Public awareness

Participants felt that there was a strong need for greater public awareness about career and college education options and opportunities. Government needs to invest in publicizing post-secondary choices, the meaning of success, the importance of post-secondary for everyone. The audience for the message includes parents and guardians, grandparents, high school teachers, guidance counsellors, young people and adult learners. The objective, according to participants, is to create a social norm—where achieving a post-secondary degree, diploma or certificate was the absolute norm.

The ideal environment

Clearly, great work is being done in other jurisdictions and in Ontario to address the challenges of transition. But, according to participants, there is more to be done.

In an ideal environment, every student would participate in a post-secondary program. Parents, teachers and guidance counsellors would all be involved in encouraging post-secondary expectations and in career planning. Every student would have the opportunity to benefit from individual career planning and a career planning curriculum.

In high school, students would prepare both for life and for the academic expectations of a post-secondary program so that when they do attend, they have the confidence and the support to succeed in the program. Students would know how to finance their education and where to get resources to help ensure successful completion.

With adequate preparation and support, students would get more out of their college education—enjoy it more and be able to better choose the program that suits their life goals. The experience would be so engaging that at different points during their careers they would go back to learn more, to change direction and to have fun.

Lifelong learning would simply be part of Canadian life.



Conference Participants

Abramovitch, Rona
University of Toronto
Director, Transitional
Year Programme

Baldwin, Noel
Canada Millennium
Scholarship Foundation
Project Officer

Barnard, Sylvia
Cambrian College of
Applied Arts and Technology
President

Bartlett, Ted
College Student Alliance
General Manager

Berger, Joseph
Canada Millennium
Scholarship Foundation
Policy and Research Officer

Blackman, Bernice
Seneca College of
Applied Arts and Technology
Vice President,
Student Success and
Enrolment Service

Broomes, Orlena
Simcoe County District
School Board
Research Analyst

Brown, Louise
Toronto Star
Journalist

Champagne, Renée
Collège Boréal
Vice-President,
Communications and
Marketing

Charlebois, Tyler
College Student Alliance
Director of Advocacy

Charron, Jocelyn
Canada Millennium
Scholarship Foundation
Manager, Pilot Projects

Clark, Alice
Confederation College
Manager, Centre for
Learning and Teaching

Clarke, Grant
Ministry of Education
Director, Student
Success/Learning to 18
Strategic Policy Branch

Connor, Dennis
York Region District
School Board
Superintendent of Education

Cooke, Michael
George Brown College
VP, Academic Excellence +
Student Success

Cosentino, Mary
York Catholic District
School Board
Superintendent of Education

Desbiens, Brian
Sir Sandford Fleming College
President Emeritus

Dietsche, Peter
Mohawk College of
Applied Arts & Technology
Vice-President, Research and
Institutional Quality

Donovan, Rachael
Fleming College
Vice-President Academic

Earl, Lorna
OISE/UT
Associate Professor

Edmunds, Lenore
Sheridan Institute
Associate Dean

Eicher, Heidi
Ministry of Training,
Colleges and Universities
Senior Policy Advisor

Freelandt, Betty
Cambrian College
Vice President Student
Services and Strategic
Initiatives

Fromowitz, Lucy
Centennial College
Secondary Curriculum
Consultant

Garrod, Pat
Limestone District
School Board
Secondary Curriculum
Consultant



Gartland, Margaret
St. Paul High School
English Department Head

Gerth, William
Waterloo Region D.S.B.
Director of Education

Gilchrist, Lauri
Aboriginal Initiatives
Lakehead University
Associate Vice-Provost
(Aboriginal Initiatives)

Gillett, Robert C.
Algonquin College
President

Gluszynski, Tomasz
Human Resources and Social
Development Canada
Senior Research Analyst

Grandy, Angela
Upper Canada District
School Board

Greenley, Margaret
Durham College
Vice President,
Student Affairs

Hanlon, Tony
Lambton College
President

Harrison, Ken
Humber College
Associate Dean

Hatton, Michael
Humber College
Vice President, Academic

Hill, Michael
Northern College
President

Hughes, Greg
Ontario College
Application Services
CEO

Isherwood, David
Lakehead District
School Board
Student Success Leader

Jamal Reid, Megan
Post Secondary Education
Advisory Committee for
First Generation Students
Student Success Leader

Jenner, Jane
Sheridan Institute of
Technology and
Advanced Learning
Manager, Special Projects,
Office of the VP

Joudrie, Wayne
Halton District School Board
Director of Education

Kelly, Frank
Council of Ontario
Directors of Education
Executive Director

Kinasz, Sharon
George Brown College
Associate Registrar,
Admissions

Lambert, Hazel
Ottawa-Carleton Catholic
School Board
Principal, Pathways
for Success

Lapierre, Renée
Conseil des écoles publiques
de l'Est de l'Ontario
Conseillère pédagogique

Layden-Oreto, Margie
NB Department of Education
Project Manager,
Future to Discover

Levin, Ben
Ministry of Education
Deputy Minister
of Education

Liedke, Max
Sault College
President

Lindsay, David
Association of Colleges of
Applied Arts and Technology
of Ontario
President/CEO

Longston, Anne
Manitoba Education,
Citizenship and Youth
Assistant Deputy Minister,
School Programs Division

Lortie, Andrée
La Cité collégiale
Présidente

Mackey, Allan
York Catholic District
School Board
Superintendent of Education

Madhany, Shamira
Ministry of Training,
Colleges and Universities
Director, Colleges Branch

Mason, Janet
Ministry of Training,
Colleges and Universities
Assistant Deputy Minister,
Post-secondary Education

McAdam, Chris
York Region District
School Board
Superintendent of Education



McCloy, Ursula
Association of Colleges of
Applied Arts and Technology
of Ontario
Research Officer

McFarlane, Patricia
St. Clair College
Principal

Michaud, Gina
Conseil scolaire de district
des écoles catholiques du
Sud-Ouest
Principal

Miner, Rick
Seneca College
President

Morris, Judith
Lambton College
Vice President Academic

Myers, Leah
Durham College
President

Parkin, Andrew
Canada Millennium
Scholarship Foundation
Director of Research and
Program Development

Patterson, Dan
Niagara College
Executive Director

Paulin, Lise
CSC Franco-Nord
Responsable du PAJO

Pelletier, Yves
Canada Millennium
Scholarship Foundation
Manager, Pilot Projects

Piercy, Maureen
Loyalist College of Applied
Arts and Technology
President

Pipitone, Brenda
George Brown College
Director, Office of Special
Projects & Community

Piquette, Brigitte
Conseil scolaire catholique
Franco-Nord
Accompagnatrice, PARE

Presutti, Remo
Hamilton-Wentworth
Catholic District
School Board
Superintendent of Education

**Rae, The Honourable
Robert Keith**
Goodman, Phillips
and Vineberg
Partner

Rao, Michelle
Georgian College
Corporate Marketing
Officer—Special Projects

Riddell, Norman
Canada Millennium
Scholarship Foundation
Executive Director and CEO

Roberto, Nelsa
Ministry of Training,
Colleges and Universities
Senior Policy Advisor

Roseveare, Heather
Association of Colleges of
Applied Arts and Technology
of Ontario
Director, Advocacy
and Outreach

Roy, Bernard
Conseil des écoles
catholiques de langue
française du Centre-Est
Superintendent of Education

Rundle, Howard W.
Fanshawe College
President

Sauder, Robert
HRSDC
Director, Learning
Systems Policy

Saunders, Ron
Canadian Policy
Research Networks
Director, Learning
Systems Policy

Savage, Rob
Association of Colleges of
Applied Arts and Technology
of Ontario
Director, Communications

Sim, Catherine
Ministry of Education
Manager, Secondary School
Policy Unit

Simpson, Cheryl
Georgian College
Vice President, Student
& Organizational Success

Smart, Mary
Ontario Ministry
of Education
Education Officer

Smith, Michelle
United Way of
Greater Toronto

Spears, Angela
Seneca College
Program Coordinator



Steenkamp, Philip
Ministry of Training,
Colleges and Universities
Deputy Minister, Ministry
of Training, Colleges and
Universities

Summers, Bill
Association of Colleges of
Applied Arts and Technology
of Ontario
Senior Director

Susini, Sheila
Association of Colleges of
Applied Arts and Technology
of Ontario
Senior Research
& Policy Advisor

Sutton, Ann
St. Clair Catholic District
School Board
Superintendent of Education

Taylor, Barbara
Canadore College
President

Terpstra, Sylvia
Kawartha Pine Ridge District
School Board
Director of Education

Thomas, Susan
Seneca College
University Transfer Unit

Thomsen, Volker
St. Lawrence College
President & CEO

Tilly, Tony
Fleming College
President

Timmings, Joan
Ontario School
Counsellors' Association
President

Toneguzzo, Anna
Association of Canadian
Community Colleges
Senior Policy Research
Officer

Wallace, Lynn
St. Lawrence College

Warford, Larry
College and Career
Transitions Initiative
Project Director

West-Moynes, Marylynn
Mohawk College
President

Whitaker, Chris
St. Lawrence College
Vice-President Academic

Yeo, Grant
School College Work
Initiative (SCWI)
Project Officer

Zubac, Zandra
Sudbury Catholic District
School Board
Director of Education

