



*Ontario Association*  
*of* **YOUTH**  
**EMPLOYMENT**  
*Centres*

**School to Work Transitions  
for Youth to 18  
Background Paper**

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A report prepared by the Ontario Association of  
Youth Employment Centres for the Ontario Ministry  
of Training, Colleges and Universities



**OAYEC**

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## **School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper**

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A report prepared by the Ontario Association of Youth Employment  
Centres for the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

# School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

## Table of Contents

- 01 | Purpose of Background Paper
- 01 | Introduction
- 03 | The Knowledge Economy
  - 04 | Human Capital and Education & Training
  - 05 | Essential Skills
- 06 | School to Work Transitions
  - 06 | Definition
  - 07 | Links Between School and Work
  - 07 | Going the Way of the Typewriter
- 08 | Alternation
  - 08 | Definition
  - 08 | Alternation Program Models
- 10 | Alternation and Early School Leavers
- 11 | Alternation – A Cross National Perspective
- 12 | School to Work Transitions in Canada – Vocational Education
  - 12 | Polarization and the Forgotten Half
  - 13 | Stigma Against Non-Academic Education and Re-Culturing of Schools
  - 13 | Alternation Models in Canada
  - 14 | New Brunswick
  - 15 | Ontario
- 17 | School to Work Transitions in Canada – The Labour Market
  - 17 | Overview of Youth in the Canadian Labour Market
- 19 | Ontario's Job Connect Program
  - 19 | Overview
- 20 | Job Connect and School to Work Transitions
  - 20 | Strengths of Job Connect to Support School to Work Transitions for Youth 16-18
  - 24 | Gaps in Job Connect to Support School to Work Transitions for Youth 16-18
  - 25 | Alternatives and Enhancements within Job Connect to Support School to Work Transitions for Youth 16-18

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

27 | Conclusion

28 | Endnotes

30 | References

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### Purpose of Background Paper

This Background Paper was created for the purpose of informing discussions at the upcoming “School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18” Retreat in Kingston, Ontario in February, 2005. The retreat discussions will focus on the role that Job Connect can play in supporting youth aged 16-18 to complete high school and thus be in a much better position to make successful transitions from school into working life. We focus on this area in an effort to explore opportunities for policy and program recommendations to promote high school completions and effective school to work transitions for youth under 18.

### Introduction

‘School to work transitions’ traditionally encompasses many considerations from both an educational and labour market perspective. The term “school to work transitions” and the policy and programming surrounding it has, at times, been related to youth, youth-at-risk, the education system, the youth labour market, the economy, as well as how these groups and areas all relate to each other.

This background paper attempts to provide an overview of the considerations surrounding school to work transitions through a review of the existing literature on the subject, as well as preliminary consultations with education experts and youth employment service providers. It begins with a picture of the world’s changing economies and a discussion of the ramifications these changes have for the requirements of work, education, training, and skill acquisition for young people. One of the main ramifications, as will be discussed, is the importance of completing high school. A secondary school diploma is increasingly considered essential to a successful transition into work in the new economy.

The paper then moves into a review of school-to-work transition program models in Europe, Canada, and finally Ontario. The highlighted school to work transitions program models for Canada are divided into two categories: initiatives in the education sector and initiatives in the employment sector.

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

Finally, the paper moves into an overview of Ontario's Job Connect program, an employment and training program funded by the provincial government and delivered by community-based agencies and colleges. The focal point of this section is the role that Job Connect, as an employment and training program, can play in supporting youth aged 16-18 to make successful transitions into the world of work. The focus is narrowed to youth aged 16-18 for two reasons. Firstly, this is the age at which most youth are nearing completion of their secondary education, and, secondly, the current Ontario government has recently announced its intentions to encourage high school completions through supporting more youth to stay in school up to age 18. **Thus, our focus is further defined to the role that Job Connect can play in supporting this age group to complete high school or remain in secondary education until the age of 18.**

The discussion of the role that Job Connect can play in supporting youth to remain in high school until they graduate or turn 18 is broken into three specific areas of inquiry:

- Strengths that the program can bring to this effort
- Gaps in the program which can be addressed
- Alternatives and enhancements within the program to further strengthen its capacity to support youth to remain in high school.

The points this paper makes in reference to these three areas of inquiry are based on preliminary consultations with Job Connect deliverers, and **should be identified as talking points, designed to stimulate feedback and debate at the retreat. As such, it is our hope that they will be understood as preliminary suggestions and open-ended springboards for discussion requiring further critical analysis at the retreat.**

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### The Knowledge Economy

The economies of North America and of the world's industrialized nations are changing. As we move further into the post-industrial age, the economies of these nations are progressing towards what is currently referred to as "information" or "knowledge" economies.

"The notion of the 'post-industrial' or information economy – and much of what we understand about what that means for employment – originates with Touraine (1971), Bell (1973), Porat (1977), and Machlup (1980). In describing this economy, these writers tended to emphasize the shift from goods to services and from blue-collar to white-collar occupations. They also speculated on the growth of information- and knowledge-intensive employment."<sup>1</sup> While some of this language is slightly outdated, i.e., "blue collar" and "white collar", the ideas captured here still apply. Put in modern terms, the growth of the knowledge economy is characterized by a growth in the number of jobs in the labour market that require higher level skills and knowledge, and a decrease in the number of jobs requiring fewer skills and knowledge.

The emergence of the knowledge economy is intimately intertwined with the growth of technology in society (particularly information technology) and the effect it has had on the nature of work and the production of national wealth. ENTERWeb.org, an internet-based information clearinghouse on enterprise development, business, finance, international trade and the economy, provides historical context:

For the last two hundred years, economics has recognized only two factors of production: labour and capital. This is now changing. Information and knowledge are replacing capital and energy as the primary wealth-creating assets, just as the latter two replaced land and labour 200 years ago. In addition, technological developments in the 20th century have transformed the majority of wealth-creating work from physically-based to "knowledge-based." Technology and knowledge are now the key factors of production.

In a report titled *Training for the New Economy*, Betcherman et al of the Canadian Policy Research Networks provide further insight into what it means for technology and knowledge to be the new key factors of production:

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

Economic theorists and business gurus alike agree that the key to the new economy is intangible assets. While forests, mines, and “physical” capital (i.e., plants and equipment) continue to generate income and some jobs, they are no longer the main sources of growth. Knowledge generation, innovation, networking capabilities, the ability to invent new products, research and development – these are the intangible factors that increasingly determine economic success for individuals, for firms, and for communities, regions, and entire nations. Physical capital still matters, but invisible forms of capital, including human capital, matter just as much and probably more.<sup>2</sup>

### Human Capital and Education & Training

The emphasis on human capital and knowledge-based work in the new economy has tremendous ramifications for education and training. As work changes, so must the means by which young people prepare for work, i.e., education and training. “The skills required for many conventional occupations are changing rapidly, and many skills are quickly becoming dated as new jobs, new technologies and new industries emerge. For example, truck drivers now need to know how to use global positioning systems, students work online in “networked” classrooms, crane operators work with sophisticated onboard computers, and individual investors conduct stock market transactions from their home computers.”<sup>3</sup> In order to remain competitive as nations in the global movement towards knowledge-based economies, countries must ensure that their education and training programs adequately prepare their young people for the increasing demands of work. “The key thing about invisible capital is that it is driven by the skills and knowledge of the people. Thus, it is a short step from acknowledging the primacy of intangible assets in the new economy to emphasizing the importance of human capital investments through education and training.”<sup>4</sup>

How does the changing face of the world’s economies affect young people aged 16-18? Youth in this age group are usually in secondary school, and given that the requirements for work are increasing, they are affected primarily in terms of the education and employment preparation they receive while in high school. **Youth who are at risk of not completing high school are affected adversely in that they are in danger of not receiving the secondary school credentials that are considered to be the basic minimum requirement for participation in the new economy.**<sup>5</sup>

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

Before delving into the considerations surrounding youths' transitions from school to work in the new economy, let's take a closer look at the kinds of skills that are of growing necessity for success in the new economy.

### Essential Skills

Recently, HRSDC conducted a national survey of thousands of workers in various occupations. The survey asked each worker to describe the skills required for their job. The survey results were compiled into a list of nine Essential Skills that form the foundation for success in the labour market. Essential skills are described as **enabling skills** that:

- Help people perform the tasks required by their occupation and other activities of daily life
- Provide people with a foundation to learn other skills
- Enhance people's ability to adapt to workplace change

HRSDC's nine Essential Skills are:

- Reading Text
- Document Use
- Numeracy
- Writing
- Oral Communication
- Working with Others
- Thinking Skills
- Computer Use
- Continuous Learning <sup>6</sup>

Essential skills are not technical skills, meaning they are not related to specific tasks or techniques. Rather, they are “the skills people use to carry out a wide variety of everyday life and occupational tasks.”<sup>7</sup> They are the foundational abilities that allow citizens to participate and advance in life and work, and are also referred to as “employability skills” because they are the basic skills needed to operate as an employee.

It is interesting to note that none of the essential skills are related to skills needed for physical labour, such as strength, dexterity, etc. **This speaks further to the point that the nature of work is changing, including the nature of physical labour, and the skill requirements associated with *any* type of work are heightening.**

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### School to Work Transitions

We have thus far seen a picture of the world wherein advances in technology are driving the activities related to employment towards further sophistication. The changing nature of work has implications for the way in which young people are prepared for work, as well as the way in which young people enter and participate in the labour market. In other words, the new economy has implications for youths' *school to work transitions*.

#### Definition

School to work transitions can be understood in a broad sense as the process a person, usually a youth, goes through when making the transition from the world of education to the world of work. Defined generally, school to work transitions can encompass *any* pathway a youth follows to employment, including pathways through college or university.

**For the purposes of this background paper, we are focusing on the *direct* transition from secondary school to the workforce, i.e., no stopover in post-secondary education or training.**

The reasons behind focusing on this narrow definition of school to work transitions have to do with considerations about the specific circumstances surrounding school to work in Canada presently, namely the growing polarization of educational attainment of Canadian youth.<sup>8</sup> While this will be addressed in detail below, suffice it to say for now that there is a growing need in Canada to address the needs of youth who are not planning to attend post-secondary education or training. Thus, our focus in research about school to work transitions should be tightened on this particular youth population, and our choice of focus should highlight it.

However, before moving into a discussion on school to work transitions in Canada specifically, let's unpack the broader concept of school to work transitions, defined generally as the process of moving into the workforce from education. What's behind the need to address this transition, and what shape do programs designed to support the transition take?

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### Links between School and Work

Behind the need to address the school-work transition is the need to ensure strong links between education and employment. “School-to-work assumes that one purpose of schooling – though not its only purpose – is broad preparation for work.”<sup>9</sup> To prepare youth for work through school, there must be connections between what is learned in school and what is undertaken in work, i.e., the content of school-based learning must be relevant to the activities performed when employed later in life.

### Going the Way of the Typewriter

It is interesting to note that the need for connections between education and employment is growing in conjunction with the growth of the knowledge economy. As Olson points out: “Twenty years ago, the need to connect school and work was less urgent. Young people could finish high school with a minimal education and few skills and expect to enter the same factory where their parents worked. They could anticipate earning a decent, middle-class wage there for most of their working lives. But stable, well-paying jobs that do not require advanced training are going the way of the typewriter”<sup>10</sup> Thus it is up to the education and training systems of a country to impart these advanced skills to its youth, its future labor force.

The task charged to education of ensuring the relevance of school-based learning to workplace activities is towards the end of strengthening human capital. “Human capital – having a highly-educated labour force that possesses the knowledge and skills needed for innovation and productivity growth that is flexible and adaptable in the face of ongoing change – is the cornerstone of success for societies living and working in today’s knowledge-based, globalized environment”<sup>11</sup>

But how exactly is education supposed to ensure this relevance? “There is no unanimity in the public debate, some analysts stressing the increased value of cognitive learning, and hence more schooling, while others emphasize the need for “applied” skills and knowledge, and hence more practical, experiential learning”<sup>12</sup> The **answer seems to lie in combining the two philosophies of learning into “forms of instruction that combine experiential and cognitive learning...Such hybrid forms – in which classroom and workplace learning are combined - are often called “alternation”**<sup>13</sup>

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### Alternation

#### Definition

The alternation approach to learning assumes that the context in which knowledge and skills are applied, i.e., the workplace, is critical to their acquisition. “The principle of alternation emphasizes the notion of “learning by doing”, but in conjunction with and informed by a theoretical understanding of the task or problem at hand. Alternation education thus combines practical skill development with the acquisition of more formally organized, theoretical knowledge. The term “alternation” describes the combination, or integration, of the two principal places and two modes of learning.”<sup>14</sup> It is so called because when put in practice, what occurs is an alternating of the two modes of learning – classroom setting for a while, workplace setting for a while.

#### Alternation Program Models

Alternation models are models of programs designed to clearly and concretely relate content learned in school to activities performed in the workplace, and thus ease youth’s transitions from school to work. Following Schuetze (2003), three main types of alternation education can be identified: Remedial education, work experience, and systematic training.

##### *Remedial Education*

Remedial education, from a school to work transitions standpoint, is an alternative education route directed at students who have low academic interest or achievement and thus are not bound for university or college. This approach is “thought not only to facilitate learning by those who are not academically inclined or gifted but also to encourage them to discover their own self-sufficiency and self-esteem and re-establish the positive self-image and desire to learn that previous educational experiences often have eroded.”<sup>15</sup>

##### *Work Experience*

Directed at secondary and college/university students, this form of alternation encourages an appreciation and validation of school-based

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

education by relating it to applications in the workplace. Examples include work-experience programs like co-operative education or internships for secondary and post-secondary students.

### *Systematic Training*

The primary objective of this type of alternation is the attainment of occupation-specific, or vocational knowledge. It is closely associated with apprenticeship training and is essential in occupations for which the workplace is, given the particular nature of the knowledge and skills required, a central place of learning. This is most obviously the case with craft occupations, such as baker or carpenter, but also occurs in some academic professions such as physicians and lawyers.

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### Alternation and Early School Leavers

There are many factors that affect a youth's likelihood of completing or not completing high school. These factors can be divided up into four main categories: family-related, community-related, student-related, and school-related.<sup>16</sup> Incorporating an alternation approach to education can successfully mitigate some of these factors, but not all.

Under family-related, we find factors such as low socio-economic status, dysfunctional home life, non-English speaking home, ineffective parenting/abuse, no parent involvement, low parental expectations, and high mobility. Other than offering a student the possibility to make money through job placement, and thus advance socio-economic status, alternation can have little or no direct bearing on these factors, as they exist outside of the school.

Under community related situations that place students at risk of dropping out, we find factors such as a lack of community support services, high incidences of criminal activities, and lack of school-community linkages. The most obvious place for alternation to have an impact here is in school-community linkages. The very principle behind alternation is to link a student's school life with the community by connecting the student with employers and the labour force.

Under student related factors, we find poor school attitude, low ability level, attendance/truancy, behavior/discipline problems, pregnancy, substance abuse, poor peer relations, non-participation, friends have dropped out, illness/disabilities, and low self-esteem. Offering an alternative approach to education that incorporates work-experience can positively impact a student's school attitude, and can provide a better fit to the student's ability-level, thus improving interest, attendance, participation and self-esteem.

Finally, under school related factors we find conflict between home/school culture, ineffective discipline system, lack of adequate counselling, negative school climate, lack of relevant curriculum, passive instructional strategies, inappropriate use of technology, disregard of student learning styles, retentions/suspensions, and low expectations. As discussed above, alternation addresses the issue of relevant curriculum directly. It also has the potential for a better fit to various learning styles, and to foster a more positive perception in students regarding what their instructors expect of them and think them capable of.

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### Alternation – A Cross National Perspective

The alternation approach to education and training is much more integrated into European culture than in North American.<sup>17</sup> Many countries in Europe, such as Germany, France and Britain, have education systems designed to offer highly differentiated pathways to specific occupations, as opposed to countries such as Canada and the United States where education is designed to be more general.<sup>18</sup> Germany, in particular is known for its highly stratified, “dual” system of education. When leaving secondary school, 70% of German students take a course of vocational training, mostly within the “dual system”, which combines practical, on-the-job training with theoretical instruction at a part-time vocational school. In the dual system, vocational schools complement the training received in a company. Trainees attend a part-time vocational school one or two days a week for three years. The schools teach general subjects and theories which are easier understood in the classroom than at work. Usually about 40% of the schoolwork is in basic academic subjects such as language, mathematics and sciences and about 60% in subjects directly related to the chosen profession.<sup>19</sup>

Also, the secondary school system in Germany, as well as the Netherlands, is highly standardized “in terms of their curricula, funding, teacher training/certification, and national certification systems. Both countries have highly differentiated school systems with different curricula/examinations, and selection procedures occurring at relatively young ages.”<sup>20</sup>

At the polar extreme to the standardized dual systems in Germany and the Netherlands is the American high school system.<sup>21</sup> In this system, students complete a comprehensive, general education up to the age of 18, with “wide regional and local variation in the curriculum, teacher qualification and instruction effectiveness, and school resources. The system is unstandardized not only in terms of the curriculum and pedagogy adopted, but also in the examination/certification system used. As a result of this lack of reliability and generalizability of the examination results from high schools, employment decisions are not, indeed, cannot be based on performance/achievement levels in high schools, other than completion/non-completion of the high school diploma.”<sup>22</sup>

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### School to Work Transitions in Canada – Vocational Education

Education in Canada most closely resembles that of the United States in that it is termed “general.”<sup>23</sup> This simply means that the philosophy behind education in Canada has traditionally stressed the need for cognitive learning over specific skill acquisition and has resisted stratification, at the secondary level, into differentiated pathways that lead to specific vocations. That being said, it is the case that secondary school in Canada does “attempt to accommodate individual differences in ability and interest by streaming students into either academic or vocational pathways. Ostensibly, formal curricular programs prepare students for either university or some form of vocational training, usually in the colleges but also through a system of apprenticeship.”<sup>24</sup> In principle, there is equal opportunity for all students to progress to post-secondary education or vocational training.

### Polarization and the Forgotten Half

Schuetze points out, however, in his *Integrating School and Workplace Learning in Canada*, that the reality of Canadian secondary education is much different from this principle of equal opportunity upon which it is based:

While there is a clearly defined and demarcated path to university and academic programs in colleges for students who are academically gifted and inclined, there is no equivalent pathway in Canada for those who are not interested in continuing formal academic education after compulsory schooling. This group is arguably, like that in the United States...“the forgotten half”, since almost half the youth cohort, who are either not college-bound or leave college without any formal qualification, are suffering from a lack of clear sign-posts and opportunities for a solid preparation for employment and working life. Thus educational attainment in Canada is highly polarized.<sup>25</sup>

The polarization of educational attainment is, in part, a consequence of the emphasis placed on going to college or university. Because all secondary students are encouraged to strive for higher academic post-secondary education, to the neglect of other post-secondary options, what ends up occurring is a significant number of secondary students *do* go on to achieve college or university credentials, however a significant number of students become frustrated with this far-reaching goal, or

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

enroll in inappropriate high school courses, and wind up losing credits and dropping out in frustration.

In fact, in Canada, “a very high proportion of age cohorts graduate from university – 38% (just under the United States’ 39%), compared with 29% in the UK and 15% in Sweden. On the other hand, Canada stands third lowest among 19 OECD countries in secondary school completion – 68% of the age cohort, as against 76% in the US, 80% in the UK, and 82% in Sweden (OCED 1996B: 66, 65).”<sup>26</sup>

### Stigma Against Non-academic Education & “Re-culturing” of Schools

Related to the lack of non-academic pathways in Canada’s education systems is the stigma associated with not going on to university or college after secondary school. A document produced by “The Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group” in 2003 titled *Building Pathways to Success* stresses the need for a “re-culturing” of Ontario schools.

Certain long-held assumptions – that going to university or college is the pathway of preference, and that the best measure of a successful school is the percentage of students taking academic or university/college preparation courses – need to be set aside so that the culture of our schools better reflects the values and aspirations of the entire student population. The emphasis must be on what each student is capable of doing well...We may think of this change in outlook as a “re-culturing” of our schools.<sup>27</sup>

### Alternation Models in Canada

There have been many initiatives taken across the country to support students in their transitions from school to work. These initiatives exist in both educational and training institutions and in the labour market. Schuetze (2003) provides a concise overview of models of alternation training in Canada:

<i>Category</i>	<i>Types of Programs</i>
Secondary education models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• cooperative education and workplace experience</li><li>• secondary school apprenticeships</li></ul>

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• programs for “at-risk” youth</li></ul>
Post-secondary education models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• cooperative education</li><li>• internships</li><li>• experiential technical/vocational programs</li></ul>
Workplace models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• youth and adult apprenticeships</li><li>• other workplace training (including professional continuing education)</li><li>• programs for unemployed youth and adults<sup>28</sup></li></ul>

The chart above does not mention community-based models, another type of school to work transitions model. These are programs delivered by community-based agencies, including youth employment centres. Community-based models offer the advantage of a “third-party perspective” whereby they are positioned in between education and the workplace and can act as ‘brokers’ for youth seeking employment as well as employers seeking employees.

### New Brunswick

We focus briefly on New Brunswick because it is the only province to have raised the legal school-leaving age to 18. All other provinces, including Ontario presently, slate it at 16. Legislated in 1999, the driving force behind raising the school-leaving age was to increase the number of New Brunswick youth who complete high school. Similarly, the rationale behind increasing the number of youth with a high school diploma was a recognition of the importance of high level skills in the new economy, and the crucial role that a high school diploma plays in successful entry into the work force or post-secondary education.

It is noted in a report by the New Brunswick School Leaving Age Task Force titled *High School Graduation: The New School Leaving Age* that some members of the task force “...opposed the change in the school leaving age, citing two key reasons. Those who oppose the legislation fear that keeping students in school who want to withdraw before they graduate will create more discipline problems in schools, and that the legislation will be difficult to enforce. They argued that if a 16-17 year-old decides to quit school, the education system does not have effective ways of keeping such youth in school.”<sup>29</sup> However, the task force goes on to say

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

that the very point of it's work is to "devise and implement strategies to ensure that those who now choose to leave school prematurely will choose to stay in school and graduate"<sup>30</sup>

Strategies to this effect which are recommended by the Task Force include, but are not limited to, incorporation of vocational options into the delivery of education. Referring to a previous document created by the New Brunswick Department of Education titled *Vocational Education in the Graduation Years: A Time of Transition*, the Task Force "asserts that vocational options, because of their relevancy and experiential, hands-on approach, help keep potential drop-outs in school."<sup>31</sup> Specifically, the recommendations related to vocational options are as follows:

- Credit-based experiential work opportunities (i.e., co-operative education, work experience)
- Vocational options
- Youth Apprenticeship Program
- Career guidance
- Employability skill development

### Ontario

The Ontario education system has been undergoing changes since 1999 when grade 13, or OAC (Ontario Academic Credit), was eliminated from the curriculum, reducing the number of years Ontario students spend in secondary school from five to four. Since that time, numerous studies have kept track of the impact these changes have had on Ontario students. Dr. Alan King's government-commissioned "Double Cohort" study is probably the largest of these studies.

Findings from Dr. King's study suggest that Ontario students are struggling in the new curriculum, particularly students in applied courses. It was estimated that as many as 30% of students who began high school in 1999 were at risk of not graduating, and the main reason for this was high failure rates in some grade 9 and 10 applied level courses.<sup>32</sup>

To improve the chances for struggling students to successfully complete high school, the current Ontario Government conceived and implemented a "Student Success" program, which addresses both the lack of non-academic pathways in Ontario's high schools, and the stigma associated with not attending college or university, by re-defining student success so that it encompasses ALL post-secondary destinations.

"Success for students will move beyond college and university to include

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

apprenticeships and skilled job placements.”<sup>33</sup> Under this model of success, a student who obtains a secondary school diploma and enters the workforce is equally successful as a student who continues with post-secondary education at a college or university. Success becomes solely a function of a student’s performance within a pathway (as opposed to a function of which pathway a student is on) and as long as a student is committed to and meeting the requirements of a program pathway, regardless of the post-secondary destination, the student is considered to be on the road to success.

The program will be phased in over three instalments. Under the first instalment, “curriculum issues will be fixed, technical education programs will be improved and additional alternatives will be provided for struggling students...Future steps include raising the school leaving age to 18 and creating an alternative diploma combining work experience and academic accomplishment.”<sup>34</sup> The program incorporates a large vision and its announcement is essentially “a first step in creating a new role for public high schools.”<sup>35</sup>

In conjunction with the “Student Success” program, the Ontario government has a campaign in place to reach out to employers and involve them more concretely in students’ transitions from school to work. This campaign is called “Passport to Prosperity” and aims to “get more employers involved in providing a range of school-work experiences for high school students, such as cooperative education, the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), school-work transitions, and job-shadowing.”<sup>36</sup>

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### School to Work Transitions in Canada - The Labour Market

#### Overview of Youth in the Canadian Labour Market

Youth participation in the Canadian labour market has been marked by changes over the past two decades. In the late 1980's, participation stood at about 70%, and then dropped to less than 60% by 1998.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, youth unemployment rates consistently hover at nearly double that of their adult counterparts. According to Statistics Canada's December 2004 Labour Force Survey, the overall unemployment rate was just 7.0% while the youth unemployment rate was nearly 13%.<sup>38</sup>

Youth access to the labour market is hampered by a vicious cycle of 'no experience, no work – no work, no experience'. Furthermore, recent studies show that through the 1990's youth were getting more education and much less work experience – the percentage of 17-19 year olds who had never worked for pay increased from 9.2% in 1989 to 26.3% in 1998.<sup>39</sup> There is also an even greater barrier that precludes even this cycle. Youth are already greatly disadvantaged in the labour market through a lack of work experience – this situation is further threatened with the absence of, at least, secondary school completion.

Borrowing data from the National Youth in Transitions Survey 2003, HRSDC's Learning Policy Directorate states that the national employment rate for youth aged 15-24 years, who have completed *some high school* is 41%, while the employment rate for youth 15-24 years, who have *completed high school* is 69%. This is a difference of nearly 30% in the employment participation rate. Even post-secondary completion only rates a couple of points higher than high school completion in labour force participation, highlighting the fact that school to work transitions (directly from secondary school) are as important as post-secondary destinations in the current labour market.

As in some other industrialized nations, especially the United States, the amount of time youth spend between leaving high school and finding stable employment has increased. This is only partially explained by high enrollment rates in post-secondary education. Often, youth find themselves in what has been referred to by youth labour market researchers as a "floundering period" – which is an extended time spent in temporary and marginal work, interspersed with spells of unemployment and participation in remedial, stop-gap labour-market/job

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

creation programs.<sup>40</sup> This ‘floundering period’ is further exacerbated by non-completion of high-school, and various other behaviors or barriers that put a youth at-risk of being unable to gain employment successfully.

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### Ontario's Job Connect Program

#### Overview

Ontario's Job Connect program is a comprehensive employment and training service. The program's main services are for youth between the ages of 16 and 24 – as well as some adults – and are delivered through community-based employment agencies and community colleges in over 80 communities throughout the province.

The program seeks to effectively target their services to specialized groups of those with very high needs, to those with very low needs – attempting the maximum amount of labour market and training participation possible. As such, it offers three categories of service:

- The **Information Resource Service** provides information on careers and occupations, the local labour market, training opportunities and job search strategies. It is a self-directed service available to any person who walks into a centre seeking information.
- The **Employment Planning and Preparation** service is a one-on-one employment counselling service that helps people clarify their career needs, establish short and long-term goals, develop an action plan and search for a job.
- The **Job Development Placement Supports** is a service aimed at actually placing people in positions through partnerships between Job Connect deliverers and employers. Placement in a job helps clients develop their skills and gain experience through supports such as job trials, volunteer placements, job shadows, subsidized on-the-job training opportunities or direct employment placements. The eligibility requirements for the Job Development component of the program are very flexible to ensure that clients with multiple barriers are served best through this aspect of the program.<sup>41</sup>

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### Job Connect and School to Work Transitions

Job Connect has been a very successful program since its inception in 1998 and has had a strong hand in creating a world-class youth employment and training service delivery network in Ontario. The continuous improvement model upon which Job Connect operates gives it the flexibility required to change in order to best serve an increasingly diverse client population. Its tracking and evaluation system also gives the program developers the opportunity to base their decision making on a consistent source of reliable data.

Further to this, Job Connect also commissions projects that will develop the Job Connect network as a whole. This background paper and the upcoming retreat are projects to this effect. Below, are the compiled results of preliminary consultations with Job Connect deliverers. These deliverers were asked to comment on the strengths, gaps and possible enhancements within Job Connect in relation to supporting 16-18 year old youth the complete high school. Let it be noted again that the points made below are not to be understood as polished answers to these questions, but rather open-ended suggestions meant to stimulate critical analysis at the retreat. The goals of the retreat are to build on these suggestions, clarify the best school to work transition practices within the Job Connect network currently, and explore opportunities for policy recommendations for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

### Strengths of Job Connect to support School to Work Transitions for youth 16 – 18

#### *Community embeddedness*

Job Connect deliverers and youth employment service providers in general, have histories of strong community embeddedness in all regions of the province. This community embeddedness is displayed by the fact that, over time, their services have become recognized within the community both by residents and by natural and professional community institutions. In addition to these groups, the number of referrals for service provide evidence of the degree to which youth employment services are recognized as not only being "in the community," but "of and for the community". To be as effective as they are, youth employment service agencies must have deep roots in their locale – not

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

only with youth and other residents, but also with business groups, employers, local government, schools and other public services. The youth employment centre (and youth service professional), as a deeply linked high profile hub, holds great strength and possibility for excellent school-to-work transition programming.

### *Information and training supports*

Job Connect works as an information and training resource for local schools. A blend of workshops and services are offered to local high school students through Job Connect. Some of these workshops include the following:

- Career exploration
- Job preparation
- Job search
- Introduction to apprenticeship
- Introduction to volunteering
- Service excellence
- ‘Smart Serve’
- Food safety
- Job maintenance
- Resume and cover letter
- Interviews
- Employment standards
- Workplace safety
- Self-marketing
- Tapping into the hidden job market
- Employability and job skills
- Life skills
- True Colours

Job Connect deliverers also offer a range of services to local high school students that provide targeted outreach to prospective clients and practical solutions for clients with immediate needs. Some examples of these services include:

- Part time job postings
- Agency tours
- Career fairs
- Information sessions on Job Connect services

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

- Info sessions for graduating classes on school to work transitions
- Summer job placements
- Apprenticeship job placements
- Graduate job placements
- Targeted information sessions to Grade 10 classes on apprenticeship and Job Connect
- Placements for OYAP students
- Extended hours for resource centres
- In-school resource centres
- In-school employment counselors
- Volunteer placements
- Free access to office equipment: phones, fax machines, photocopiers, etc.
- Information on community resources

These services support 16-18 year old youth to make successful school to work transitions by informing them about career choices, helping identify skills and interests, strengthening skills related to employability, facilitating entry into the workforce through direct job placement, and motivating youth to return to school by helping them identify their career goals.

### *Relationship with educational institutions*

Job Connect deliverers across the province have forged strong partnerships and positive working relationships with local schools. Some Job Connect centres have actually decentralized their offices in order to provide career resource centres onsite within the schools. These centres have also stationed their employment counselors full-time within the school resource centre to provide constant access for some of the most at-risk youth clients who are in danger of leaving school early, or have already dropped out of secondary education.

Other examples of positive relationships forged between Job Connect deliverers and school teachers, guidance counselors and other educators have been highlighted in examples of partnerships created for career

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

awareness campaigns, job and volunteer placements of all kinds, as well as joint participation in community decision making bodies representing the voices of youth.

### *Relationship with employers*

One of Job Connect's greatest strengths is how it enables youth employment centres to build strong and lasting relationships with local employers. Internal expertise and intimate knowledge of the positive (or negative) attributes of local employers is built through the job development work that is constantly pursued within each centre. This important information is utilized in steering youth in the right direction. In this role, as a conduit to positive employers and worthwhile work experiences, Job Connect delivery agencies act as a broker for a vulnerable youth population, recognizing that first jobs have a significant impact on future career success. On the employer side, Job Connect acts as an excellent service provider, working with employers to enable better hiring practices, recruitment solutions, as well as job maintenance assistance.

### *Youth counselling expertise*

Job Connect's internal referral system works positively in helping clients with the highest needs find the counselling they require to make sound and actionable career decisions. In relation to school to work transitions this type of employment counselling, grounded in real-world experience, is perhaps Job Connect's greatest strength in demonstrating to at-risk students both the benefits of completing 'at least' a high school education, as well as the negative impact dropping out of secondary school can have on future career possibilities.

### *Evaluation system measures 'return to education' as a positive outcome*

The Job Connect evaluation system is one of the most rigorous and uniform systems of its kind. It effectively quantifies results that enable agencies to assess and improve their performance on an ongoing basis while maintaining a core flexibility that enables the delivery of personalized service. The evaluation framework is built upon the "employment outcomes system" whereby it "bridges the gap between individuals seeking employment and employers seeking human resources to meet their business needs".<sup>42</sup> However, despite the overarching

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

employment outcomes focus, the Job Connect evaluation system (JCS) also recognizes that in order to provide a market-driven employment service, individuals must meet a standard level of education and/or training in order to be employable. As such, JCS evaluates a “return to education or training” as a positive outcome within this framework.

### **Gaps in Job Connect to support School to Work Transitions for youth 16 – 18**

During OAYEC’s preliminary consultations, Job Connect deliverers were also asked about areas where they see gaps in Job Connect’s ability to serve youth aged 16 –18 in helping them towards successful school to work transitions and/or returning to school. Although there were few specific examples, some of the general responses follow below.

#### *Lack of clearly defined roles for stakeholders in school to work transition partnerships*

Stakeholders in school to work transitions include (but are not limited to) educators, youth employment service providers and the Ministries of Education, and Training, Colleges and Universities. Preliminary consultations uncovered that some Job Connect deliverers perceive the primary obstacle to delivering school-to-work transition programs within youth employment centres as the struggle to forge clearly articulated relationships with schools. At present, partnerships between Job Connect agencies and schools are usually a result of outreach and marketing efforts on behalf of Job Connect staff. No community, school or teacher is the same; however, and therefore various stakeholders in education have different reactions to forming relationships with youth employment centres.

In illustration of this point, a 2002 OAYEC survey conducted by Barbara Barrow highlighted the fact that many Job Connect deliverers reported they had developed working relationships with their local schools and school boards, but others struggled to gain access to students and raise awareness amongst educators about youth employment centre services. This struggle could be the consequence of a lack of clarity surrounding the roles each stakeholder would play in the partnered delivery of school to work transitions programs and services.

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

Clearly defining these roles would have the desirable effect of alleviating hindrances to forging these partnerships between school to work transitions stakeholders.

### *Eligibility requirements for Job Connect service target clients “not in school”*

Job Connect deliverers reported that eligibility requirements for youth to be referred into service are specifically focused on those who are “not in school”. As such, the 16-18 year old youth who are seeking service through Job Connect have, in most cases, already dropped out of school. Most Job Connect deliverers reported that it is much more difficult to get a youth to return to secondary school once they have left the system, than it is to prevent them from dropping out.

### **Alternatives and Enhancements within Job Connect to support School to Work Transitions for youth 16 – 18**

As previously discussed, a high school diploma is increasingly considered to be the minimum requirement for work in the new economy as well as entry into post-secondary education and training. Moreover, the fact that, within Ontario, many students are currently at risk of not graduating highlights the importance of efforts to enhance school to work transitions. It is with these realities in mind that Job Connect deliverers offered their input on alternatives or enhancements that can be made to the Job Connect program to support school to work transitions for youth 16-18.

### *Clearly articulate roles for education and youth employment service providers in the partnered delivery of school to work transition programs and services*

This enhancement was the primary result of all of the preliminary consultations with Job Connect deliverers and education experts. There is a real perceived need for stronger and more solidly entrenched partnerships between educators and employment service providers, particularly in serving youth of this age group. To achieve these partnerships, the functions and responsibilities that each sector would bring to the partnership must be clearly articulated.

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### *Increased marketing for Job Connect*

Some Job Connect deliverers see many opportunities to market the Job Connect program within the community and particularly, within local schools. Increased outreach to schools, provided by the Job Connect program, would serve to raise the profile of the youth employment centre in the community. As well, this raised profile could increase access for younger youth in danger of dropping out and looking for additional counselling and/or information about their alternatives.

### *Leverage existing strengths of Job Connect*

When Job Connect deliverers considered school to work transitions and the changing nature of education, they reported that the youth employment services sector is working very effectively in this area at present. As such, service deliverers encouraged the Job Connect program to leverage its current strengths in school to work transitions programming without adding to the Job Connect spectrum of existing services.

Overall, the Job Connect deliverers and education experts consulted reported that the Job Connect network is in an optimal position to provide a strong link between the world of school and the world of work for youth aged 16 to 18.

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### Conclusion

In a changing economy, school to work transitions remains at the forefront of Canadian concern. Youth participation in the labour market has been dropping steadily for a decade. This is only partially explained by the higher numbers of youth attending university in Canada, and thus delaying their entry into the labour market. It is also partly explained by the increasing polarization of educational attainment of Canadian youth. Those who do not graduate high school, or graduate but do not go on to attend academic post-secondary education, are having a difficult time making the transition into working life.

This is the case for a number of reasons. Namely, activities related to work are progressively more sophisticated and require grounding in formal training, thus making it extremely difficult for a person with no credentials to get a job. As well, Canada's education systems lack clearly demarcated pathways to any post-secondary destination other than university or college, thus leaving those who are not university- or college-bound floundering on their own.

Canadian policy makers recognize this aspect of Canadian culture, and are focusing attention on bettering the prospects of all Canadian youth to achieve the careers and quality of life they desire. Policy surrounding education and youth employment programs needs to encourage and articulate terms for partnerships and collaboration between the two in order to further strengthen their links and create more clear, concrete pathways that will lead youth successfully through their transitions from school to work.

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Betcherman, Kathryn McMullen & Katie Davidman, *Training for the New Economy: A Synthesis Report* (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 1998), p. 83

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Human Resources Development Canada, *Knowledge Matters; Skills and Learning for Canadians* (Ottawa: HRDC, 2002), 2

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Victor Thiessen, *Policy Research Issues for Youth: School-Work Transitions* (Ottawa: HRDC), 10

<sup>6</sup> This information was taken from the government website:  
[www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/hrp/essential\\_skills/essential\\_skills\\_index.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/hrp/essential_skills/essential_skills_index.shtml)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Hans G. Schuetze, "Alternation Education and Training in Canada" in *Integrating School and Workplace Learning in Canada* (Editors: Hans G. Schuetze & Robert Sweet) (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 68

<sup>9</sup> Lynn Olson, *The School to Work Revolution* (Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1997), 4

<sup>10</sup> Olson, *The School to Work Revolution*, 10

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Bowlby & Kathryn McMullen, *At A Crossroads: First Results for the 18-20 year-old Cohort of the Youth in Transition Survey* (Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada & Statistics Canada, 2002), 1

<sup>12</sup> Schuetze, "Alternation Education and Training in Canada" in *Integrating School and Workplace Learning in Canada*, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Schuetze & Sweet, "Integrating School and Workplace Learning in Canada: An Introduction to Alternation Education Concepts and Issues" in *Integrating School and Workplace Learning in Canada*, 5

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>16</sup> Patricia Duttweiler, *Effective Strategies for Educating Students in At-Risk Situations* (South Carolina: National Dropout Prevention Centre, 1995), 7-8

<sup>17</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *From Initial Education to Working Life; Making Transitions Work* (Paris: OECD, 2000)

<sup>18</sup> Damian Hannan, David Raffe & Emer Smyth, *Cross-National Research on School to Work Transitions: An Analytical Framework* (Paris: OECD, 1996)

<sup>19</sup> This information was taken from the German Embassy in Ottawa's website: <http://www.ottawa.diplo.de/en/Startseite.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Hannan, Raffe & Smyth, *Cross-National Research on School to Work Transitions*, 13

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 14

<sup>23</sup> OECD, *From Initial Education to Working Life*, 32

<sup>24</sup> Schuetze, "Alternation Education and Training in Canada" in *Integrating*

## School to Work Transitions for Youth to 18 Background Paper

- School and Workplace Learning in Canada*, 68.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid
- <sup>26</sup> Stewart Crysdale, Alan King & Nancy Mandell, *On Their Own? Making the Transition from School to Work in the Information Age*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 11
- <sup>27</sup> Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group, *Building Pathways to Success*, 2003, 10
- <sup>28</sup> Schuetze, "Alternation Education and Training in Canada", 73
- <sup>29</sup> The School Leaving Age Task Force, *High School Graduation: The New School Leaving Age*, (New Brunswick: Department of Education, 1998), 1
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, 2
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, 13
- <sup>32</sup> Alan King, *Double Cohort Study; Phase 3 Report for the Ontario Ministry of Education*, 2004, i.
- <sup>33</sup> Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) press release, June 8, 2004
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid
- <sup>36</sup> Information on "Passport to Prosperity" can be found on the Ministry of Education/MTCU website: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>
- <sup>37</sup> Schuetze, "Alternation Education and Training in Canada", 67
- <sup>38</sup> Statistics Canada, *Latest Release from the Labour Force Survey, 2004* <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Subjects/Labour/LFS/lfs-en.htm>
- <sup>39</sup> Graham S. Lowe, *Will Today's Youth Find Quality Work?* Presentation at School-Work Transitions 2000' International Conference, May 1, 2000, Toronto.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid
- <sup>41</sup> The above information was obtained from MTCU's website: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>
- <sup>42</sup> Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, *Job Connect/Summer Jobs Service Guidelines*, (Toronto:MTCU, 2001), 6

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