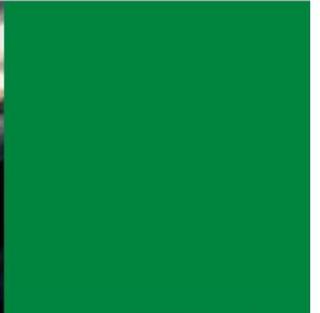
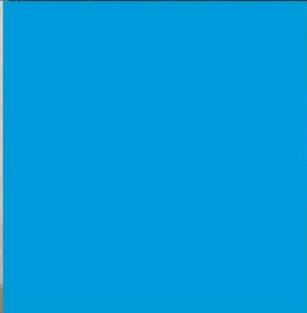
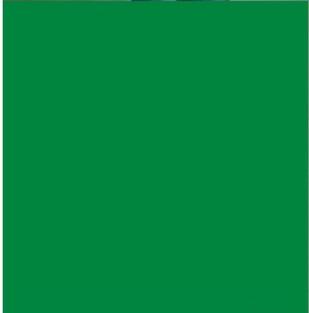
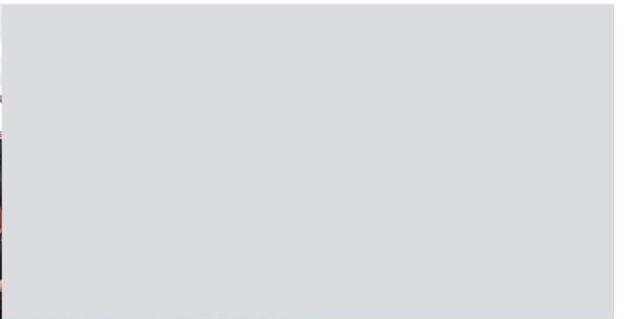


Pathways
to Education

BUILDING A **GRADUATION NATION**



Overview

As part of the process of collecting stakeholder input on the government's budget priorities, Pathways to Education is pleased to offer the following comments and recommendations.

The partnership between Pathways and the Government of Ontario is built on aligned objectives including: making post-secondary education more accessible and supporting youth in their transition to both post-secondary education and the workplace. Continued support of these objectives is crucial towards building a highly competitive and highly-skilled workforce, as well as making education accessible to all.

We encourage the Government of Ontario to continue to ensure that youth from low-income communities receive the supports and services necessary to graduate from high school and succeed in the workplace. We believe that the implementation of comprehensive and equitable programs can lead to higher graduation rates for our youth and a better Ontario.

About Pathways

Pathways to Education is a national charitable organization that seeks to provide all youth – regardless of socio-economic background – with the support needed to graduate from high school, break the cycle of poverty, and contribute back to their communities. More specifically, Pathways provides the leadership, expertise, and resources needed to run effective, evidence based community programs that help youth from low-income communities to graduate from high school and make the often difficult transition into post-secondary education or meaningful employment. Founded in 2001, in Regent Park, Toronto, the Pathways to Education Program is delivered in 18 communities across Canada.

Our unique Program of comprehensive wrap-around supports for high school students has an established track record of reducing high school dropout rates and increasing post-secondary enrollment of students from low-income, vulnerable neighbourhoods. This community-based, volunteer-supported program provides academic, social, financial, and one-on-one supports to disadvantaged youth and their families. The results of this Program have been groundbreaking. For the students in the eight Ontario

Pathways Program locations, there has been a 54 per cent increase in high school graduation rates while 70 per cent of students have transitioned to post-secondary education or training.

With the support of the Government of Ontario, Pathways has been contributing to the achievement of the government's commitments to reducing poverty and ensuring access to high school graduation for all Ontario youth. The partnership between Pathways to Education and the province of Ontario has strengthened Ontario's leadership in understanding the challenges related to the high dropout rates in low-income communities and how Pathways has been able to successfully address this issue.

Achieving Common Priorities

The partnership between Pathways to Education and the Government of Ontario is based on a strong alignment between the mission of Pathways and the strategic objectives of the government. Pathways' work is closely aligned with many of the government's objectives and initiatives including: making post-secondary education more accessible to all youth and providing them with the supports they need to make a successful transition to life after high school.

Making Post-Secondary Education More Accessible

Pathways to Education applauds the government's introduction of the Ontario Student Grant (OSG) which ensures that average tuition will be free for Ontario students with family incomes below \$50,000. At Pathways to Education, we know that a limited understanding of the net cost of post-secondary education (PSE) can discourage students who would qualify for financial support from otherwise applying. The new Ontario Student Grant will work towards removing the barriers associated with the cost of PSE and raise awareness about the financial supports available to youth.

The OSG is a groundbreaking step towards making post-secondary education accessible to all, but barriers for low-income families still remain. Pathways to Education has found that up-front application fees are a barrier to post-secondary education for youth from low-income families. In addition to the lack of financial resources, many Pathways families do not have a credit card, or access to online banking – which makes it difficult to pay the fees online. Providing discounts or eliminating application fees –

similar to the reimbursement Ontario Crown Wards receive – will build on the success of the OSG by further removing barriers to PSE for students from low-income families.

Supporting Post-Secondary Transitions

Pathways to Education welcomes the work carried out by the Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel and the recommendations made in their panel report *Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility*. In particular, Pathways welcomes the Expert Panel’s recommendation to provide more access to labour market information by working with the federal government to develop a nation-wide information system. At Pathways to Education, we know that youth often have a more limited understanding of the labour market, which impacts their ability to make effective and realistic decisions regarding post-secondary education, training, and employment. A national system that gives employers and job-seekers improved access to in demand jobs and skills would provide significant benefits to the youth in our Program.

Recommendations

- Pathways to Education shares in the Expert Panel’s recommendations to increase access to job market information, expand opportunities for experiential learning, and close skill and competency gaps that exist for job seekers. We urge the government to make implementing the Expert Panel’s recommendations a priority for Ontario Budget 2017.
- Pathways to Education has found that up-front application fees are a barrier to post-secondary education for youth from low-income families. In addition to the lack of financial resources, many Pathways families do not have a credit card or access to online banking – which makes it difficult to pay the fees online. We know there is already good work underway on this issue at the ministry and urge the government to continue to make it a priority. Providing discounts or eliminating application fees – similar to the reimbursement Ontario Crown Wards receive – will build on the success of the OSG by further removing barriers to PSE for students from low-income families.
- Pathways to Education understands that long-term mentoring relationships with adult role models are key to positive youth development and employability skills. That’s why a core feature of the Pathways Program is to partner each student with a Student Parent Support Worker (SPSW) who acts as their mentor, counsellor, confidant, and advocate. Research suggests that long-term

mentoring programs can be effective at addressing high-risk behaviour¹, increasing self-regulation skills², and contributing to positive youth development³. Pathways to Education recommends that the Government of Ontario continue to invest in long-term mentoring programs across Ontario and to continue to offer mentorship opportunities like those provided in the government's Youth Job Connection program.

Conclusion

Pathways to Education Canada welcomes the progress made by the Government of Ontario in making post-secondary education more accessible to youth from low-income families and supporting students' transition to post-secondary life. We ask that the government continue to invest in the well-being of youth through the kind of targeted investments and programs outlined above. Programs like *Experience Ontario, Learning for All* and the *Ontario Student Grant* are crucial for ensuring accessible education and post-secondary success, but more needs to be done. College and university application fees remain a barrier for youth enrollment, particularly those that come from a low-income background. Furthermore, making sure youth are well-informed about current labour market trends is a crucial step towards closing the skills gap in Canada.

Thank you for your continued support in helping Pathways to Education make Canada a Graduation Nation. We look forward to a lasting partnership with the Government of Ontario for many years to come.

¹ Smith, Newman-Thomas, & Stormont, 2015

² Morgan, Sibthorp, & Tsethlikai, 2016

³ Erde, Dubois, Larose, De wit, & Lipman, 2016

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