



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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Cathy Abraham
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May 25, 2021

To: Amarjot Sandhu, Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Julia Douglas Clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

comm-financeaffairs@ola.org

Re: Bill 288, Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021

Dear MP Sandhu and Members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs:

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) appreciates the opportunity to provide our comments regarding Bill 288, Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021. We note that this legislation intends to establish a new entity, Skilled Trades Ontario, to replace the Ontario College of Trades and to make the "skilled trades and apprenticeship system more efficient, accessible and easier to navigate."

OPSBA has long advocated for a public education system that allows students to be provided with a range of program options that permit them to pursue a pathway that supports their interests, aspirations and strengths. This has always included our support for experiential learning opportunities found through programs such as the Ontario Youth Apprentice Program (OYAP), Cooperative Education, trades oriented programs, vocational programming, Special High School Major (SHSM), Dual Credit Programs, and others.

The debate on this issue had many comments from all parties in the House and there appeared to be agreement about there not being enough focus on the skilled trades in our schools at present, the need to start sharing information and opportunities about this pathway earlier, to support and grow existing programs, and an overall push to support the skilled trades as a viable, respected career option. Shaping attitudes for the skilled trades needs to begin in elementary school with students, parent/guardians and educators.

Last November, our Association provided [a brief letter](#) to support the provincial budget changes and recommended a continued focus on Ontario's Skilled Trades Strategy to promote and modernize Ontario's skilled trades and apprenticeship system. As well, in our [education funding submission](#) sent earlier this year, we included an entire advocacy section entitled "*Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship*."

In that letter we asked for, "*more focus at the provincial and local school board level to help students develop positive attitudes toward the trades and be provided with more 'hands on' and*

experiential learning opportunities. An apprenticeship focus can easily be expanded and integrated into existing vocational school programs and through secondary school experiential and cooperative education programs, as well as Specialist High Skills Majors. This will involve balancing and/or shifting funding levels for commencing an apprenticeship to secondary schools rather than only in post-secondary and employment settings.”

Our list of our recommendations included:

- Continued funding for the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program and the Specialist High Skills Major programs, but also request that the government expand relevant opportunities for students to begin to earn apprenticeship hours while in secondary school and address the issue of a lack of skilled trades' education and apprenticeship options for Indigenous students in Indigenous communities.
- Providing dedicated funding for renovations in secondary school facilities and new construction to provide shop programs to support careers in the trades (Grades 7 to 12).
- Support for amendments that will change the journey person-to-apprentice ratio for all trades to increase student access to these career opportunities.
- A targeted marketing and communications plan, specifically directed at parents, students, educators and employers, to further elevate skilled trades to an even more respected pathway.

Our members want to ensure that any future discussions include promoting the expansion of these offerings to all students, particularly to women, girls and marginalized youth. Another key point made was to help find ways to incentivize companies and industries to become more involved. Students are often interested in specific programs, but there is no industry partner available to provide the opportunity.

OPSBA will follow up with the Ministry of Education to suggest a working group, that includes school board representation, be established to develop a comprehensive and workable plan that see some real improvements and changes for our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

cc.

Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister

Jeff Brennan, Director of Stakeholder Relations

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