

**CESBA meeting with Sue Herbert  
Deputy Minister of Education  
Friday April 5, 2002.**

**NOTE:**

The following document was used as the basis for discussion at the April 5<sup>th</sup> meeting that CESBA had with the Ministry of Education. Deputy Minister Sue Herbert was unable to attend. Assistant Deputy Minister Judith Wright and Grant Clarke, Director of the Secondary School Project, represented EDU in the discussions. Representing CESBA were President Diane Cowden, Past President Tony da Silva, Treasurer Ward Levine, Executive Officer Anna Bowles, Board Member Geraldine Waud and Executive Director Dave Neumann.

**Summary**

Ontario school boards are involved in the delivery of adult & continuing education programs that help build the skills of the workforce, meet the challenge of the growing skills shortage, foster a culture of life long learning, and enhance the international competitiveness of the Ontario economy. Adults involved in formal learning are supported in achieving their career goals. As parents, they become important learning role models for their children. Many, through academic upgrading and skills development enhance their opportunities and their chances of becoming more financially self-sufficient. The adult population served through education and training opportunities, and through continuing education programs, becomes an important source of recruits for meeting the growing skills shortage in our economy. Furthermore, these programs delivered by school boards, are accessible in communities both large and small, right across Ontario.

Unfortunately, a number of factors are placing this important service at risk of being severely diminished or lost altogether. We understand that the Ministry of Education must view elementary and secondary education of school aged children as its most important core role. However programs serving adults are very important, not only for those adults served, but also for their children in the school system and for the economy as a whole. Adult education programs are severely under funded, so much so that boards are being forced to re-consider their involvement in this area. The impression being left is that adult & continuing education is not an important priority for the government.

Given the importance of these programs for adult learners, their families and the economy as a whole, we believe that this impression must be corrected. We offer our positive support to work collaboratively with the ministry to ensure that this important resource is preserved and strengthened, so that we can continue to support the achievement of important goals for Ontario.

**CESBA**

The Ontario Association of Adult & Continuing Education School Board Administrators is an Ontario incorporated non-profit corporation whose object is "... to promote and advance the cause of adult and continuing education." Our members reflect the wide diversity of adult & continuing education programs delivered by Catholic, Francophone and Public district school boards across Ontario. At the community level, school boards coordinate a range of programs funded by a variety of federal departments and provincial ministries.

## **Current challenges**

### The challenges and potential for adult learners

The growing skills shortage restricts the growth of the economy and affects the international competitiveness of the Ontario economy. Adults who are under-skilled, many who did not complete a high school diploma, are an important source for adding to the skilled workforce. School board adult and continuing education programs provide a cost effective and accessible alternative that would be hard to replace.

### Funding challenges facing programs

Funding for adult programs is inadequate to cover real costs. Yet as costs have risen, many programs have not had adjustments in years. The method for calculating eligible funding is problematic, in some cases making it hard to determine whether the program even has sufficient funds to see it through to completion. There is a real risk that programs important to the Ontario economy may be lost if more school boards feel compelled to discontinue offering these programs. Should this happen, finding a replacement could prove to be more costly than providing sufficient funds to ensure their survival. The most pressing funding areas that need to be addressed are -

- Continuing education credit registers (day school, night school & summer school)
- Accommodation issues related to a number of programs
- International Languages (non credit) has not seen an increase in many years
- ESL (non credit) – accommodation & other issues
- Foundation grants for day school adult credit programs
- Programs trying desperately to cope without any recognition for the real costs of essential components such as text books, support personnel, computers, resources, etc.

### Recognizing prior learning

It is important that the informal learning of adults be recognized in a way that invites adults to embark on formal learning programs. We are working positively with the Ministry led Committee on PLAR to assist in determining the best way to implement PLAR for adults within the policy direction already established. At the same time, we feel compelled to point out the real risks that may be associated with that policy direction. Adults acquire a tremendous amount of knowledge and skills through the informal process of learning associated with life experience. It is in everyone's interest for prior learning of all kinds to be recognized and celebrated. It is in no one's interest to ask adults to spend their time and our money to re-learn skills and knowledge they have already mastered. If the process is too cumbersome, and the approach discouraging, adults may avoid embarking on the many challenges of the formal learning process. We, as a society, will miss benefitting from the potential represented by their past experience and inherent abilities.

We support the goal of higher standards represented by program reform, but are concerned that an approach that does not properly recognize the uniqueness of the needs of adults returning to formal learning may result in the needless erection of barriers that would discourage adult learners. These learners include adults seeking to complete their high school diploma and newcomers to Canada seeking to have their qualifications recognized. A restrictive approach may negatively affect broader policy goals related to a skilled workforce and a competitive economy. Whatever approach is taken sufficient staff time and resources must be made available for effective implementation.

### Summer School

CESBA is addressing emerging issues related to the growth in demand for summer school programs (e.g. transfer courses, literacy) designed to meet the needs of school aged students meeting the challenges of the new curriculum. In some cases funding may not be sufficient to accommodate special needs children. Even though these programs are for school aged students, it is often the Adult and Continuing Education department that is given the challenge to make it all work. This emerging area needs to be carefully tracked to ensure that resources are sufficient to ensure that objectives of the new curriculum are met.

### **The Road Ahead: Seeking collaborative solutions**

CESBA represents a rich resource of experience from right across Ontario. Our members deal with the issues facing adult learners on a daily basis, right at the community level. They assist adults seeking to improve their skills, work with those adjusting to job dislocation and guide newcomers to Canada and Ontario in finding the best way to apply their many skills and qualifications. They are in the business of helping people make the right choices for themselves. They help people find their way through the maze of federally and provincially funded options.

Representing CESBA we offer to work collaboratively with the government of Ontario to find the right direction and the most effective policy alternatives and funding models. Choices that will open doors, not close them; directions that will provide positive benefits for adult learners, their families, employers and the economy as a whole.

All we ask in return is that adult and continuing education delivered by school boards be recognized as an important priority. If that is done, and the goodwill and knowledge of professionals is respected, positive outcomes will emerge for all concerned.