



Report on Education

from the Deputy Minister of Education

June 23, 2006

Industry Training is a Winning Formula

We know that there is, and will continue to be, a shortage of skilled trades people in BC. That is why the Ministry is partnering with the Industry Training Authority to develop and promote industry training programs for secondary students. And that is why we have a goal of increasing the proportion of students in Grades 11 and 12 who participate in an industry training program to 10% by 2010.

For the past 30 years our secondary schools have been largely focused on preparing students to attend university. During the Graduation Program consultations several years ago the Ministry heard the message that many secondary schools were too focused on university-bound students. Many voices said that there were not enough programs aimed at students going into occupation-specific programs at colleges and institutes or aimed at students going directly into the workplace after graduation.

Prior to school year 2004/05, the great majority of students taking technology education courses in Grades 11 and 12 were not working towards a trades credential. For instance, in school year 2003/04, more than 2200 students completed one or more Ministry courses in Automotive Technology, yet only 62 of these students were participating in an automotive or mechanics program that was part of industry certification. These 62 students were from districts that had Career Technical Centre (CTC) programs where students took trades training at a local college. Now there are 351 students participating in automotive repair or heavy duty equipment repair programs that lead to industry certification.

Several weeks ago I wrote about the Graduation Portfolio. Another program was introduced along with the new Graduation Program: the Accelerated Credit Enrolment in Industry Training program (ACE IT). ACE IT provides trades training for secondary students. It provides the technical training part of

an apprenticeship. It is also a dual credit program that enables these technical training courses to count towards both Grade 12 graduation and the first level of a trades' certification credential. Depending on the delivery model, some students may also gain credit towards a post-secondary institution credential. Most ACE IT programs also include a work experience component where prospective employers can assess students' on-the-job skills before hiring them. The ACE IT technical training complements the existing Secondary School Apprenticeship program where students work under direction of a journeyperson to hone their on-the-job skills in a workplace setting.

Students participating in ACE IT programs are using the same curriculum and are learning the same skills that an adult apprentice does during their technical training. The ACE IT program was developed as a partnership between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Advanced Education, and the Industry Training Authority. The ACE IT model encourages school districts to develop local partnerships with post-secondary training providers and local industry groups. Post secondary partners play one of three roles: either providing seats for secondary students in their existing trades training programs, or providing an instructor for a program offered at a school, or providing advice and expertise to school districts wishing to deliver technical training with their own qualified staff and facilities. Employers play an important role by providing students with on-the-job work experience opportunities to practice the technical skills gained in the school setting.

ACE IT has surpassed growth expectation starting with the first intake of students, in February 2005, when more than 800 students in 23 school districts began the program. An additional 1,000 students in 36 school districts began their training in September 2005. And another 956 students started training in February 2006. The tremendous growth in ACE IT enrolments demonstrates a commitment by districts to offer programs for hands-on learners who wish to pursue options other than university programs.

There are a growing number of school districts that have made industry training programs a key priority for their secondary students. In the Northeast corner of the province School Districts No. 59 (Peace River South), No. 60 (Peace River North), and No. 81 (Fort Nelson) work as part of a consortium that offers a wide variety of industry training programs in conjunction with Northern Lights College and BCIT. Their programs fit the needs of both their students and their regional economy with training in areas like welding, pipe fitter/steam fitter, heavy duty mechanic, and instrumentation. According to staff at North Peace Secondary School, industry training programs are not only providing students with good jobs, but they have also improved the overall academic culture in the school. Many students in these programs are now taking Applications of Math and Application of Physics so that they can be successful in their technical training courses.

School District 83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap) is currently working with three different colleges to deliver ACE IT programs. They have even partnered with a college outside of their geographical region (Selkirk College) so that they could offer students a Machinist/Millwright trades program this year using school district facilities. The district uses available qualified school staff and facilities as much as possible, but also enrolls students in regional colleges for programs that the district cannot offer. In addition to offering ACE IT technical training, the district has a large number of students participating in on-the-job training through Secondary School Apprenticeship.

School districts on southern Vancouver Island provide an interesting example of how the introduction of ACE IT has caused the school districts (SD No. 61 Victoria, SD No. 62 Sooke, SD No. 63 Saanich, SD No. 64 Gulf Islands) and Camosun College to innovate in order to provide industry training for secondary students. All of their ACE IT programs have steering committees which include subject teachers from secondary schools, instructors from the college, and representation from local industry. Some programs are taught at the college, other programs are taught

mostly in secondary schools, but include a special session at the college to cover additional or specialized aspects of the curriculum. The college has even agreed to align new programs with start dates that coincide with the K-12 semester system in order to meet the timetable requirements of secondary school students.

The Ministry anticipates that the number of secondary students participating in industry training will continue to grow based on demand from school districts and job opportunities for students.

We know that many students prefer to learn by doing, by working with their hands. In addition, it appears that the ACE IT program is also keeping some students from dropping out of school. In a recent evaluation of the ACE IT program by the Industry Training Authority, the executive summary notes: "An interesting unsolicited response from the students was that 11% said they would have dropped out of school if ACE IT had not been offered." In addition, the report says that parents interviewed saw ACE IT as an excellent opportunity for their sons or daughters to explore non-university options and obtain credit towards a trade certification.

Given the high average age of current skilled trades workers and the projected skills shortages in a number of trades, the provincial economy requires more youth apprentices sooner, rather than later. We hope that all school districts continue to develop training programs that meet the needs of their students and communities, as well as the labour market needs of the province.

The focus on skills training for many students is another way to provide success for all – but attitudes are still slow to change. While many students seek technical skill training, parents and the schools sometimes remain focused on academic learning as the favoured pathway. There is much work remaining to be done in re-orienting the widely held view about the value of technical vocations.

Bargaining update

I'll bet that if you asked teachers, principals, parents and students what question is most frequently on their minds, almost every one would answer: "Will there be an agreement with the BCTF by June 30?" The good news is that the parties, BCPSEA and the BCTF, are still talking, and mediator Irene Holden is working with them to seek areas of agreement. The bad news is that time is running out.

Government has negotiated 123 four-year agreements with 255,000 other public sector workers, including thousands of school support staff. Each and every one of those 255,000 employees received a bonus for signing their contracts early. And they are all eligible for up to another \$1,000-dividend for signing four-year agreements.

There remain 14 agreements, covering 45,064 employees, to be negotiated by June 30. The remaining negotiations comprise 40,332 K-12 teachers and 4,732 K-12 support staff. All agreements reached before June 30 will be eligible for the incentive payment.

A further 9,000 employees are under contracts that expire after that date.

Is there cause for optimism? Well, I guess the next week will answer this for us. Government has taken a very respectful approach to the labour movement throughout negotiations with the public sector unions. Public sector employees are valued for their work and their contributions. More than 80% of the public sector has new agreements. Now, government is seeking the same result with the BCTF.

Finance Minister Carole Taylor summarized the situation well in her statement on CBC radio on Tuesday. She stated, "If you look at our public sector workers, we tend to be about third in Canada. So Alberta and Ontario – with all of our workers – tend to be ahead of us. It is the same for teachers as well. What we have said to teachers is, we listened to you last fall when you said it's not just about wages; it's also about workplace. So we have been reaching out and trying to listen to teachers and respond. So when they said, you know, we're worried about class sizes, we brought in legislation. They said we're worried about class composition; so we brought in legislation. They said we're worried about our teachers-on-call not being paid enough; so we put extra millions there. They said that we really want compassionate leave for our teachers so we listened and responded to that. They've said that some of our teachers around the province are not being paid the same as others; we want it harmonized. We've responded, and put millions on the table for that. So from our point of view we really are respectful; we're trying to listen; we're certainly responding to all the issues the teachers have brought up."

In the meantime, keep your fingers crossed – and hopefully we will get to a place where we have a peaceful year and focus on student learning.

Updated bargaining information is available at www.negotiatingframework.com