

How can parents and teachers help K-12 students enter careers in the skilled trades?

Canada has been experiencing a shortage in skilled trades workers for several decades – from jobs like plumbers, auto mechanics, and construction workers, to hairstylists, estheticians, bakers, and many more. Historically, schools have favoured academic courses (i.e. learning concepts from textbooks) over vocational courses (i.e. hands-on training for specific jobs). For example, in the late 1800s in Ontario, working-class boys had to learn the rules of the factory and, by the late 1960s, vocational programs had gained a reputation as a dumping ground for low-achieving students. While high schools today are providing more opportunities for students to explore different career options, both schools and Canadian society still have a long way to go in moving away from seeing the skilled trades as “low status” jobs.

There are two main challenges with high school apprenticeship programs:

1. Schools are often hesitant to tell employers how to train students, which can lead to varying quality of learning experiences. Some employers have been known to exploit students.
2. On-the-job training isn’t usually well integrated with school curriculum, which can lead to perceptions that it’s less important and that vocational courses don’t belong in schools.

HERE ARE KEY TIPS TO PROMOTE THE SKILLED TRADES AMONG YOUTH:

<p>Tips for teachers and schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for students in different grades to explore a variety of education and work options. • Implement employment equity principles (e.g. respect for diversity and inclusion) in vocational programs to ensure all youth are encouraged to explore the skilled trades. • Ensure your students know their rights at work (e.g. workplace hazards, health and safety, fair treatment). • Build partnerships that are beneficial for both schools and employers to ensure high quality placements (e.g. employers lead classroom lessons alongside teachers; teachers go into worksites to see how curriculum is applied on the job).
<p>Tips for parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on whether you hold any stereotypes about what you consider “high status” and “low status” jobs, and what are “gender appropriate” jobs. Remember that a “good job” is one where your child feels valued and challenged. • Be an advocate for your child – there is often less support in schools for pursuing careers in the skilled trades versus going to university. • Learn more about what’s required to enter different skilled trades and the diversity of careers that are available.

A rich and meaningful vocational education requires parents and teachers to help students see how school and work are complementary, and that “good jobs” take a variety of forms. One way of closing the gap between academic courses and vocational courses is by having all students participate in hands-on learning opportunities, including community service projects that can have real impact. **Teachers, school administrators, employers, and community organizations all have important roles to play in encouraging students to learn “about” and “through” work, rather than simply “for” work.**

For online resources and references please visit:
www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education

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The Facts on Education Series is produced with a generous sponsorship from the Canadian School Boards Association and the Desjardins Foundation.

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