

From School to Success: Clearing the Path

REPORT OF THE TRANSITION TASK FORCE



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Letter to Ministers

To: Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Karen Casey
Labour and Advanced Education Minister Kelly Regan

We are pleased to submit to you our report, *From School to Success: Clearing the Path*. This report contains 15 detailed recommendations that we believe will have the most significant impact on helping young Nova Scotians move more successfully from school to post-secondary education, training, and the workforce.

By creating this task force, you created a unique forum, where everyone had an equal voice: students and youth, a teacher and principal, university presidents, community college senior staff, senior school board staff and elected representatives, an apprenticeship board member, African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw representatives, and business and industry leaders.

Each of us brought individual perspectives to the table. Those different perspectives led to, at times, heated and, always, frank and honest discussions.

We also came to the table united in our passion for this province, and our commitment to young Nova Scotians. The future of our province depends on a strong economy—led by business and industry, fueled by the talent and energy of our youth, educated and trained in the best schools, colleges, universities, and workplaces in the country.

The work does not end today. We have recommended a new direction, but some of the details of how to get there require more effort.

If young people are to transition successfully from and among schools, colleges, universities, and workplaces, we must continue to work together. We will always have our individual priorities and mandates, but our work to date reinforced our interdependence on each other.

As the work continues among all the partners we represent at the table, our hope is that it is guided by a common purpose—building a strong economy, with a well-trained and educated workforce, in a great province where more young Nova Scotians can live and work at home.

Sincerely,

Members of the Transition Task Force



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Executive Summary

In fall 2015, Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Karen Casey and Labour and Advanced Education Minister Kelly Regan appointed a task force to recommend ways to more effectively support all students as they transition from public school into college, university, apprenticeship, and the work force.

The Transition Task Force, with representation from youth and students, teachers and principals, school boards, the community college, apprenticeship, universities, business and industry, and diverse communities, was asked to examine five themes:

- **career decision-making information**
- **meaningful hands-on experience**
- **transitions for youth with low marks or no high school diploma**
- **post-secondary retention and completion rates**
- **how education, training, and apprenticeship programs match labour market needs**

Career decision making

Youth are generally not aware of the range of careers that exist, and what courses and skills they need to enter them.

Careers Nova Scotia is the government-funded agency that is mandated to help Nova Scotians connect with good jobs. However, 90 per cent of job seekers surveyed in 2015 were not aware of Careers Nova Scotia.

Task Force members also raised concerns about the need for the agency to: have more comprehensive, coordinated labour market information; build strong relationships with employers, schools, colleges, universities, and apprenticeship; and develop and implement a marketing strategy that reaches all youth (including youth no longer in school and youth with disabilities) in a variety of ways. These

➤ factors were all recommended as part of **a complete overhaul of the mandate and services delivered through Careers Nova Scotia.**

Students begin forming opinions about their future careers as early as grade 4, and they must have the information and advice to guide them, beginning early and continuing in college, university, and apprenticeship. The task force recognized: the value of inquiry-based learning that allows students to identify and solve problems; contributions that employers can make if welcomed into schools; the need for information and career exploration opportunities at all grades in school and throughout post-secondary; and the need to embed entrepreneurial and career education and foundational skills across

➤ curriculums. They felt this could best be achieved by **creating an entrepreneurial culture within schools, colleges, and universities.**



Meaningful hands-on experience

Employers consider hands-on experience as one of the most effective ways for youth to prepare for the workplace. A wide range of programs exist. However, the task force raised concerns about whether programs are meeting intended outcomes and aligned with student needs.

- This led to a recommendation to **review co-op education and community-based learning programs, and to make changes and expand programs achieving the greatest results**. The review should consider factors including: eligibility requirements; preferred community college admission; roles and responsibilities of partners; success features of youth apprenticeship programs; alignment with today's labour market needs; and diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Mentors can also play a valuable role in guiding youth. The task force recommends **expanding the mentorship network**, first identifying existing groups and agencies to identify gaps or duplication, then identifying if a new mentorship body is needed or if better coordination of existing organizations would avoid duplication. The task force also recognizes the value of broader promotion of mentorship, training for mentors, and the need to connect mentors and youth in a variety of ways, depending on individual needs and availability.

- Youth employment programs encourage employers to hire post-secondary students, giving them valuable work experience. The task force recommends **reviewing provincial youth employment programs in consultation with stakeholders to make them easier for employers and employees to access**.

Transitions for youth with low marks or no high school diploma

Most stable good-paying jobs require a diploma, degree, or certification. Yet marks for more than one in four high school graduates are between 50 and 69 per cent, too low to get them into many post-secondary programs.

If youth leave high school without the education and skills to continue training and learning, or get a job, it is important to understand what youth do or where they go next. This led to a recommendation

- **to use a unique identifier to track youth into and through public schools, and into and out of apprenticeship, colleges, and universities**. This data could then be used to inform program decision making.

Programming currently exists to help youth with low marks or no diploma upgrade or complete their high school education, some at a cost, and some for free. Programs also have different eligibility or entry requirements; for example, age and completion of high school. The task force recommends

- **reviewing existing upgrading programs wherever they are and developing a cohesive, accessible system for Nova Scotians**. The review should consider: mandatory graduation requirements; the cost and benefits of making all high school upgrading free; other potential barriers; readiness and need in entry requirements; and program outcomes.

The task force also discussed gap years, and ways to make any time out of school more meaningful.

- This led to a recommendation to **develop programming options that help youth gain skills, education, and experiences to support a successful transition into college, university, apprenticeship, or work.** This could include a gap-year program that enables youth to gain skills and experiences in communities; a transition year program with transferable credits; a post-secondary preparatory program (e.g., general arts and sciences); and a specialized apprenticeship transition program.

Features of the Achieve program should also be considered. Achieve provides young adults with disabilities an ability to develop skills and confidence to transition from high school to work, further education, and life in their community.

Post-secondary retention and completion rates

Seventeen per cent of Maritime university students leave in their first year. As well, just 39 per cent complete their degree in four years. After five years, 58 per cent have graduated.

- This led to a recommendation to **collaborate on plans to increase retention and completion rates.** The plan should be built on retention data from all universities and the community college; consider orientation programs and how to identify and help struggling students early; provide a range of support for students (including mental health); and enhance training for faculty.

The task force discussed the stark differences between a young person's experience in high school,

- compared to education, training, apprenticeship, or work. The task force recommended **examining partnerships and common practices (such as stronger curriculum links and more consistent approaches to deadlines and attendance) that would support a smoother transition.**

Continuing one's education remains the clearest path to a good paying job. For example, a university graduate could earn about \$25,000 more annually than a high-school graduate.

Yet, the cost of education is also a concern for some students.

- Part of the response involves **reaching parents and students with financial planning information earlier.**
- The task force also calls for a **review of current sources of financial assistance to students** (from governments, universities, colleges, families, and students themselves) and an assessment of what changes could be made to close the gap between costs and available resources.



How education, training, and apprenticeship programs match labour market needs

Employers and industry want a greater voice in advising on how programs can match labour market needs. Some forums already exist to allow for this to happen—trade advisory committees for apprenticeship as one example. Improvements are needed, however, using more current information and giving employers more influence.

The task force recommends enhancing forums, such as program advisory committees and other post-secondary committees, to **ensure business, industry, and other employers have an effective voice in developing programs linked to workforce needs.**

The task force also discussed the need to enable youth to explore their aptitude for a certain career path before they invest in further education and training. The task force recommends that **the Nova Scotia Community College enhance its admissions processes and experiences** to ensure that applicants make informed choices based upon aptitude, readiness, and labour market information.

Accountability for action

The recommendations in this report set a new direction, but more work on the detail, and continuing partnerships, is ahead. While some changes will take time, progress must be reviewed and evaluated.

➤ To this end, the task force recommends **developing an evaluation framework**, including indicators to mark progress (youth hopefulness, transition rates, etc.), for all recommended actions accepted by government. The task force members also want to reconvene in fall 2017 to review and share their comments on progress.

Introduction

A global issue

The McKinsey Center for Government released an international report, Education to Employment (mckinsey.com). The report talks about two related global crises: high levels of youth unemployment and a shortage of people with critical job skills.

If there are unfilled jobs, and we have young people looking for jobs, how do we close the gap?

The Canadian and Nova Scotian perspective

Nationally, the Council of Ministers of Education Canada have identified student transitions as a priority, and is forming a national working group to shape actions across the country.

The challenge has been identified and explored in Nova Scotia too. Meeting this challenge is an essential piece in building a strong economy and better future for our province.

In May 2014, the ONE Nova Scotia Coalition came together to develop a plan in response to the Ivany Report on Building Our New Economy. Their recommendations focus on new approaches to education, beginning in the early years and continuing through to post-secondary education and training.

“We want to ensure that our young people have the best possible chance to maximize their future potential right here, at home, in Nova Scotia.”

—A Playbook for Nova Scotians, ONE Nova Scotia Coalition

In January 2015, the provincial government released the Education Action Plan (ednet.ns.ca) to transform Nova Scotia’s public education system. The action plan recognizes the need for the public school system to better prepare young people to continue their education and training, and become career ready. The action plan included a commitment to create the Transition Task Force to recommend how this goal could best be achieved.

Working together for better results

This is consistent with a major theme in the ONE Nova Scotia Coalition Playbook (wechoosenow.ca). In order to realize different results, government cannot be expected to act alone. Nova Scotians must work together.

This also responds to a key finding from the McKinsey report: “employers, education providers and youth live in parallel universes” with fundamentally different understandings of the same situation because they are not engaged with each other.



Employers, Education Providers, Youth Not Engaged

- *One in five employers surveyed say they do not communicate with education providers.*
- *Only about 38 per cent of youth surveyed say when they chose what to study, they had a good understanding of what disciplines led to professions with job openings and good wages (McKinsey Education to Employment Survey 2013).*

Transition Task Force

The Transition Task Force brings together youth and students, teachers and principals, school boards, the community college, apprenticeship, universities, business and industry, and diverse communities.

Task force recommendations were driven by data and research, the experience and knowledge each member brought to the table, and presentations from other partners.

Youth Demographics: A Snapshot

- *115,000 youth (aged 15 to 24) in Nova Scotia represent 12 per cent of the population*
- *70 per cent live in urban areas (Halifax, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Kentville, Truro, New Glasgow regions as identified by Statistics Canada)*
- *8 per cent are visible minorities, and 5 per cent are of Aboriginal identity*
- *6 per cent of youth have a disability*

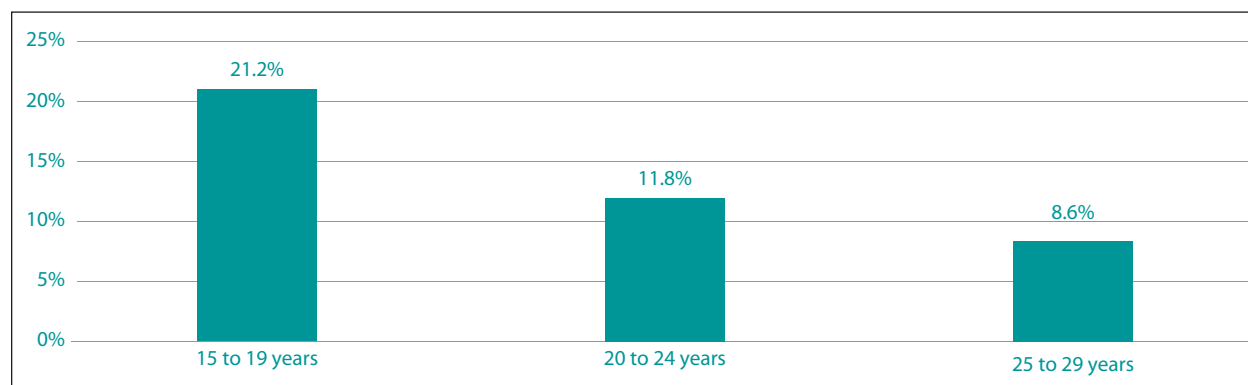
While the needs of all youth were discussed, the task force paid particular attention to those facing the greatest challenges. This includes youth who are under-represented in university, college, apprenticeship, and the workforce, and youth with disabilities.

Within the public school system, the task force agreed that students must receive better age-appropriate career information, and begin building foundational skills in the early grades. High school students with marks between 50 and 70 per cent were also a focus.

Another focus is youth who are not in school, college, or university, or are unemployed or under-employed. This includes students who do not graduate or high school graduates who need upgrading to begin college, university, apprenticeship, or work.

In 2015, the overall youth unemployment rate was 15.3 per cent in Nova Scotia (13.2 per cent in Canada).

Figure 1: Youth Unemployment by Age Group, Nova Scotia, 2015 (Statistics Canada)



For those youth who enter college, university, or apprenticeship, first-year students are important to reach to support them in completing their journey. This includes students who may be the first generation in their family to pursue post-secondary education and training.

Youth who leave the province are also a priority. Even when considering the number of youth who come here from other provinces, Nova Scotia experiences, on average, a net loss of 1,000 youth each year.

Task force members were asked to examine five themes:

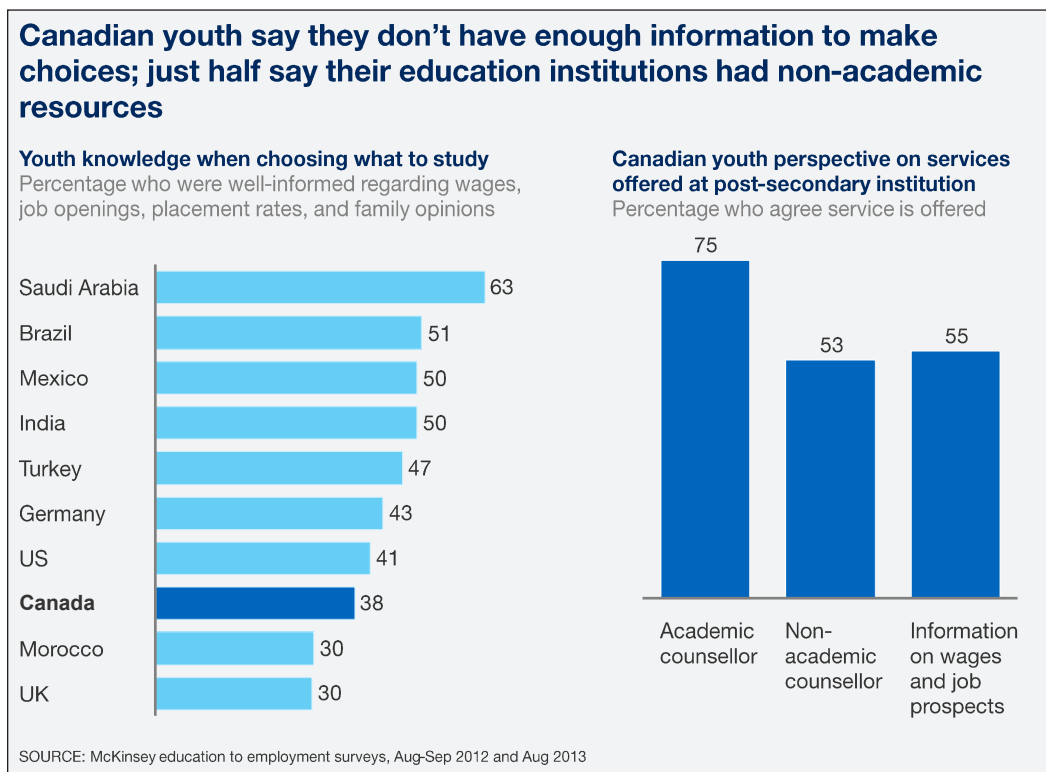
- 1. career decision-making information**—youth are generally not aware of the range of career opportunities, and what courses and skills they need to prepare for them
- 2. meaningful hands-on experience**—employers consider hands-on experience as one of the most effective ways for youth to prepare for the workplace; however, this is not available for all students at all levels of education and training
- 3. transitions for youth with low marks or no high school diploma**—marks for more than one in four high school graduates are between 50 and 69 per cent, too low to get them into many post-secondary programs
- 4. post-secondary retention and completion rates**—17 per cent of Maritime university students leave in their first year, and just 39 per cent complete their degree in four years; 19 per cent take five years to graduate
- 5. how education, training, and apprenticeship programs match labour market needs**—employers want a greater voice

While the paths will be as individual as each young person who takes them, the task force recommendations under each theme are aimed at clearing the path from school to success for more young Nova Scotians.

Improving Access to and Quality of Career Decision-Making Information

Youth need better access to career decision-making information in forms that are meaningful and relevant to them.

Figure 2: Are Youth Well-Informed?



In the absence of meaningful information, youth have limited awareness of

- the range of career opportunities that exist
- which sectors have the greatest labour market needs
- what education (particularly math), skills, and financial resources they need for further education, training, or work

Many partners already have access to labour market information (e.g., current and projected labour market needs, including retirements). In some cases, however, the information is not timely, or available on a regional level. In other cases, people don't know where to find the information, or it is not in a form that they can easily use.



In a 2015 survey, 90 per cent of job seekers were not aware of Careers Nova Scotia, the government-funded agency that is mandated to help Nova Scotians connect with good jobs.

Careers Nova Scotia is in the midst of substantially changing how it operates. This presents an opportunity for Careers Nova Scotia to create a coordinated system where all partners can both contribute and access information to help youth with career planning, and connect the people looking for jobs with the employers who need them.

Create a reliable, coordinated, accessible labour market information system

Recommendation 1

Continue to overhaul the mandate and services delivered through Careers Nova Scotia. Within its new mandate, Careers Nova Scotia should

- create and maintain a coordinated labour market information system contributed to by, and shared among, all partners
- hire business development staff to work with employers, industry, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, and other partners
- build a relationship with, and provide professional development to, teachers, guidance counsellors, and career counsellors in schools, colleges, and universities
- reach youth (including youth no longer in school and youth with disabilities) and families directly with labour market information, and required education and skill sets (and how to access them) for different jobs or fields
- develop a strategic communications and marketing strategy targeting audiences in a variety of ways, such as industry-led career events (e.g., Big Data conference); presentations at schools, colleges, and universities; parenting programs; and social media channels

“We need to be creative if we are going to effectively engage youth and families—for example, hosting a virtual Game of Life, where families have fun while learning valuable real-life lessons about the relationship among education, training, employment, and earnings.”

—Transition Task Force Member

Reach youth in schools, colleges, apprenticeship, and universities

A recent survey of grades 4 to 6 students shows students start forming opinions about their future careers early.

Just 13 per cent of Nova Scotia students say they'd like to start their own company.
(Equals6, 2014 Student Recruitment Survey)

Career education and exploration opportunities must begin in elementary, and continue, with age-appropriate information, throughout school, college, and university. Young people should also have access to entrepreneurial and general skill development that will prepare them for success in whatever their career choice or choices.

Business and industry can play an important role. Local businesses and industry have real-time information on jobs needed now and here at home.

“Having youth hear about jobs directly from employers can give them a sense of hope and motivation that counters what can be a self-fulfilling prophesy—that you need to move away to get jobs.”

—Transition Task Force Member

Employers say they want to come into schools but are frustrated that the rules for doing so vary from region to region, or even school to school. At the same time, some schools find it hard to get employers involved. Developing criteria and guidelines that open school doors for employers would support an entrepreneurial culture within our schools.

Recommendation 2

Create an entrepreneurial culture within our schools, colleges, and universities, based on advice from the Business Education Council. The culture should grow from a foundation that includes

- supporting inquiry-based teaching and learning whereby students identify problems and find solutions; the students become initiators, directors, and managers in order to create a product, service, or event that meets a school or community need, discovering entrepreneurial qualities and skills essential to their life-career development
- developing a career education framework, beginning in the early grades
- embedding entrepreneurial and career education and exploration, including awareness of youth apprenticeship, within the public school curriculum, beginning in elementary
- embedding foundational skills (responsibility, work ethic, respect, etiquette, basic customer service, communications, resume and interview preparation, etc.) within public school programs, including Individual Program Plans, beginning in elementary
- embedding entrepreneurship within degree, diploma, and certificate programs, and encouraging faculty to connect what they teach in the classroom to career options and the labour market
- strengthening relationships between schools, colleges, and universities with community groups, local employers, charities, and others
- sharing more career information and exploration opportunities with post-secondary students, beginning in the first year



Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial spirit are about more than starting a business. Employers value entrepreneurial skills and attitude in their employees. Youth are also showing an increased interest in social enterprise, where business and entrepreneurial strategies can be used to improve society rather than generate profit.

Nurturing Entrepreneurial Culture in Schools

Entrepreneurial culture, including social enterprise, is nurtured in New Brunswick's Francophone school boards. Students in one school noticed a lot of their classmates didn't have hats or mitts. They started knitting and selling them, and donating the profits to charity.

Brilliant Labs, a not-for-profit organization, and its partners help teachers incorporate technology, creativity, and entrepreneurship into the classroom. Students get hands-on opportunities to explore science, technology, engineering-entrepreneurship, arts, and math-related fields. A Brilliant Lab is now in every Nova Scotia school board, with portable mini-labs (Brilliant Carts) available in more schools.

Providing Meaningful Hands-On Experience

Give youth more work experience in schools

A range of programs exists to help youth explore careers and link learning to the world of work. These programs are not just hands-on, they are also heads-in, and benefit students who have a wide range of interests and abilities.

Discovering Opportunities, offered to grade 9 students, familiarizes students with careers and education programs linked to trades, technology, and apprenticeship.

Co-operative Education courses help students plan their education and careers, explore their interests and develop skills, and relate what they learn in the classroom to real life and the world of work. Determining interests and aptitude early, before investing in education or training, can save everyone time and money.

The number of high school students enrolled in co-op education is growing, up by about 27 per cent since 2013. However, co-op education can look very different in different schools. As well, opportunities are more plentiful in some schools than others.

Skilled Trades courses let high school students explore trades as a career option, spending about 80 per cent of their time doing trades tasks. As an added benefit, their time supervised by a certified journeyman teacher qualifies as apprenticeship hours.

Options and Opportunities (O₂) takes a flexible, team-centred approach to learning, and provides students with work experience in their communities. O₂, which was introduced into schools in 2006, is organized around career academies: arts, culture, and recreation; business education; health and human services; hospitality and tourism information technology; and trades and technologies. Ten years later, are they all still relevant? Should there be more?

Students can also gain valuable experience, and test their interests through volunteering. Volunteerism will be a part of the new **Citizenship** course, now under development for grade 10 students.

The link between public school programs and community college training was also discussed. In particular, the community college currently gives admission preference to O₂ students but does not give preference to Skilled Trades students. As public school programs increase career exploration opportunities, the community college may need to evolve its admissions processes.



Build on what works

The task force heard a presentation on Building Futures for Youth, one of a number of youth apprenticeship programs.

Building Futures for Youth is a successful partnership among the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, the provincial government, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, the Nova Scotia Community College, and local school boards. Its purpose is to increase the number of youth who explore careers in the trades.

Features of the program that contribute to its success include

- intensive screening
- rigorous, real-world standards (e.g., deadlines, being on time)
- employer engagement with students
- wages to reinforce the value of the work
- assignment of a workplace mentor
- co-op credit and apprenticeship hours
- partnerships
- evaluation

Since the program started, more than 500 students have been connected with jobs, and more than 180 employers have hired students.

Recommendation 3

Review co-operative education and community-based learning programs (Discovering Opportunities, Skilled Trades, O₂, Youth Apprenticeship) to ensure they are meeting their intended outcomes and are aligned with students' individual career plans. Make necessary changes and expand courses achieving the greatest results. The review should focus on how the programs support a successful transition, including

- eligibility requirements and core competencies
- preferred community college admission for some but not all programs
- how the programs prepare graduates for post-secondary education, training, and apprenticeship
- foundational, math, and literacy skill development
- aptitude testing
- alignment with today's labour market needs

- roles and responsibilities of employers, teachers, and the education system
- how to incorporate success features of youth apprenticeship programs
- how to move youth apprenticeship into more sectors and workplaces where labour market needs are growing (e.g., ICT, Digital Nova Scotia)
- program branding and promotion
- diversity, inclusion, and equitable access

Expand mentoring opportunities for youth

The Halifax Connector Program and Mentra in New Brunswick, organizations that promote the value of mentorship and networking, presented to the task force. The following issues were raised:

- Mentors have limited time to offer, and there are limited numbers of mentors, particularly in rural communities.
- Young people have limited time. Connecting with mentors has to be relatively easy and the experience must be meaningful and valuable.
- Technology can be an enabler when used appropriately—to allow people who can't physically get together (due to geography, time, etc.) to have meaningful conversations.
- Opportunities for face-to-face mentoring and connections are also important—to learn how to shake hands, to learn business/industry expectations, etiquette, and language.
- People who have retired have the experience and may have more time to give, as a target for mentor recruitment.

Catapult, a non-profit leadership camp, also presented to the task force. Catapult provides a fun, high-energy learning experience focused on enhancing leadership skills just prior to starting grade 10 for students who face at least one barrier. Teachers nominate the students, who have strong potential yet are often overlooked or miss out on experiences that develop personal growth and confidence.

“Catapult believes that no matter who their parents are, where they live, or what kinds of connections and opportunities life may have offered them, every student has the potential to make their dreams come true.”

—Jane Roy, Founder and Chair, Catapult

While the task force agrees that mentorship should expand, members raised concern that anything new should not duplicate what exists, or further drain the limited pool of mentors. Beyond the Halifax Connector Program, Mentra, and Catapult, mentor and leadership associations already exist through university and college alumni offices.



Cape Breton Partnership also has a Connector Program. The Business Education Council will be asked to create a database of local entrepreneurs to serve as mentors for students. Junior Achievement programs are available in a growing number of schools. As well, Parents as Careers Coaches is offered to parents of junior and senior high school students to help them support their children in making informed and successful education and career choices.

Recommendation 4

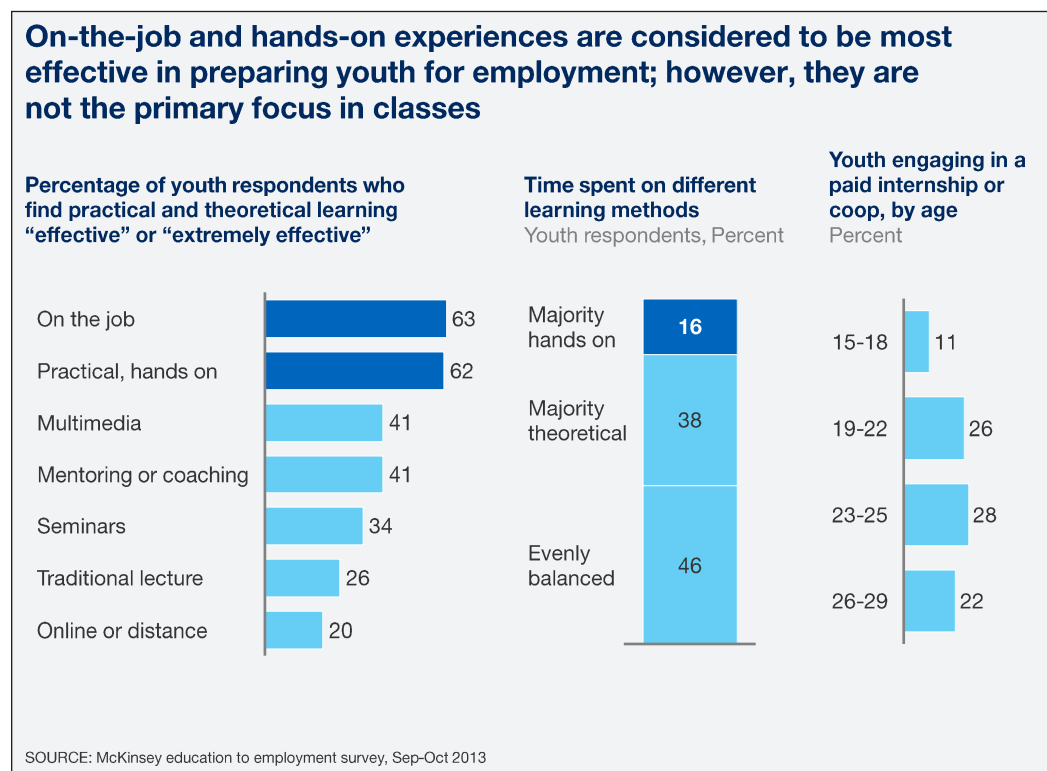
Expand the mentorship network in Nova Scotia. This could include

- identifying existing groups and agencies offering mentorship opportunities, as well as any gaps and duplication
- promoting the established networks in a central location, accessible to youth
- determining if a new mentorship body is needed, or if existing bodies can fill existing gaps
- creating incentives to assist very small businesses (e.g., 10 or less employees) in providing paid mentorships or internships
- focusing on inclusive approaches that respect diverse culture, race, and abilities
- providing training to people who want to mentor
- involving post-secondary students, or recent graduates, as mentors (as well as increasing their access to mentors)

Remove barriers for employers

Hands-on, practical experience is the best training for a job. It is also the best way for students to explore their interest and aptitude for a career.

Figure 3: On-the-Job and Hands-on Experience Valued



A 2014 Statistics Canada study also revealed benefits of participating in co-op in post-secondary:

- A slightly higher percentage of college and university co-op graduates were employed full-time. (Three years after graduation, 90 per cent of co-op bachelor graduates were employed full time compared to 83 per cent of non-co-op bachelor graduates.)
- Co-op graduates were more likely to report that their job was related to their education. (Three years after graduation, 87 per cent of co-op bachelor graduates compared to 80 per cent non-co-op bachelor graduates reported their job was related to their education.)
- Bachelor co-op graduates had higher earnings. (Three years after graduation, co-op graduates in the top 25 per cent of earners, earned \$3,200 more per year than non-co-op graduates.)

While current post-secondary youth employment programs encourage employers to provide co-op and work-related experience, the application and approval process discourages some from participating.

Recommendation 5

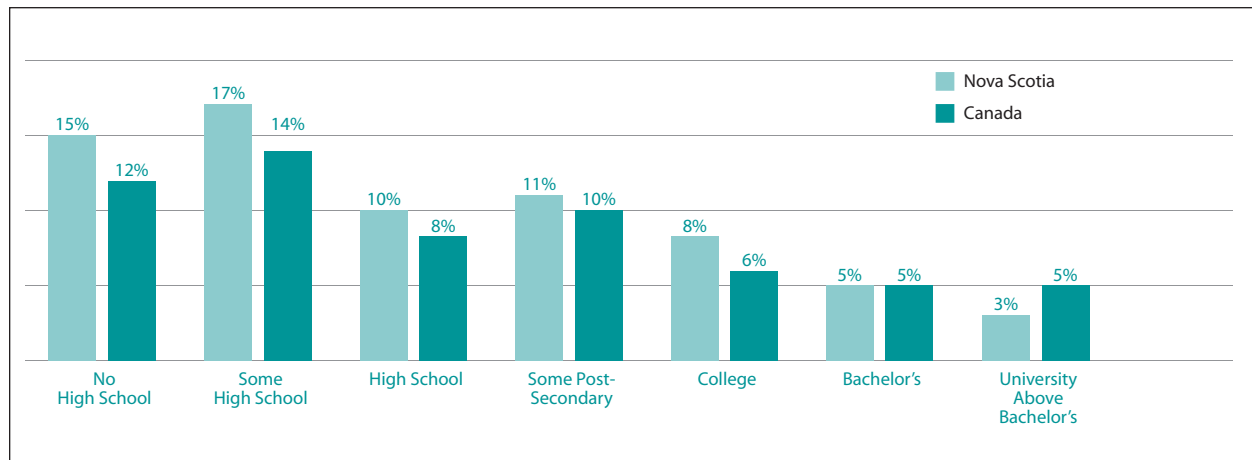
Review provincial youth employment programs in consultation with stakeholders (including students) to make them easier for employers and youth to access. This could include

- reviewing the application and approval processes
- reviewing the response time to applications
- helping employers create work experiences that advance learning outcomes for all youth
- strengthening the links between high school programs and the university and college sector

Supporting Transitions for Youth with Low Marks or No High School Diploma

Most stable, good-paying jobs require a diploma, degree, or certification.

Figure 4: Unemployment Rates by Education Attainment, 2015 (Statistics Canada)



Yet, too many young people do not complete their diploma, degree, or certification.

- About 5 per cent of students (400 to 600) leave high school in grade 11.
- Thirty-two per cent of NSCC students (in diploma programs or programs longer than one year) did not return after the first year.
- As shown in Figure 5 (see page 21), 17 per cent of Maritime students were no longer enrolled in a Maritime university after their first year. That number grows to 31 per cent after 5 years.

Marks for some of those who do graduate are also a concern.

Marks for more than one in four (26.5 per cent) high school graduates are too low (between 50 and 69 per cent) to get them directly into many post-secondary programs.



As well, the 2012 Program for International Assessment of 15-year-olds indicates Nova Scotia youth rank below the Canadian average in math, reading, and science.

Further, an intentions survey of Nova Scotia students in 2014 showed that almost 30 per cent of high school graduates do not intend to enter post-secondary education or training.

While a gap year or break from school can make sense, or may be a necessity for some graduates, youth are at risk of getting “lost” between high school and post-secondary, trapped in a low-paying job or unsure about what they need to do to continue their education or training, or find a job.

It is important to understand the reasons why youth are not continuing or completing their education, training, or apprenticeship.

Understand what paths youth are taking

The Education Action Plan commits to registering all children in an electronic school file at birth. Parents will use this file to keep track of their child’s growth and development. While taking steps to protect privacy, the education system can use the file to help plan services like pre-school services and transition plans for starting school.

The task force believes this electronic file should be expanded beyond the public school system.

Recommendation 6

Use a unique identifier to track youth from birth, into and through public schools, and into and out of apprenticeship, colleges, and universities. Explore the unique identifier system from Ontario, or other jurisdictions that allow tracking to follow youth into, around, and out of the workforce. Establish indicators, such as transition rates, to evaluate progress. Use the data to inform program decision making.

Help youth find the right path back

Programming currently exists to help these youth get or upgrade their high school education, some at a cost, and some for free—and with various age or eligibility restrictions.

Some, but not all, high schools allow graduates with low marks to come back to upgrade their marks. For those who do allow them to come back, some school boards charge, and some do not. As well, some graduates feel coming back to school carries a stigma of failure.

About 5,400 people are enrolled in upgrading programming, including (a) the free Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning, open to people 19 and over who have not completed high school, and (b) the Nova Scotia Community College Academic Career Connections program (costing \$1,290 plus books and fees), open to high school graduates who require additional courses or higher marks.

The Nova Scotia Community College has just tested the virtual delivery of the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning’s Adult Learning Program—again, free to learners. Counselling and faculty support, as well as group chats, are available, but the learner fits it into their own schedule. The program’s first graduate balanced the program with two jobs and a child.

Universities also offer some upgrading at a cost.

Task force members made a number of observations to support their recommendations:

- Access to upgrading and transition programs must increase, for example, by removing barriers (such as cost and arbitrary entrance criteria) and taking advantage of technology (such as the Nova Scotia Virtual School).
- People need to be able to complete their training as quickly as their schedules and readiness allows. This points to the value of more dual credits that can be earned within high school or post-secondary, and can be used to meet the requirements of more than one program or credential.

Remove barriers to completing or upgrading high school

Recommendation 7

Review existing high school and upgrading programs wherever they are offered (e.g., an extra high school year to improve marks, Nova Scotia Virtual School, Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning, adult high school, the community college, or university) and develop a cohesive, accessible system for Nova Scotians to complete or upgrade their high school education and gain the skills and education they need to progress to the next step on their career path. The review should

- assess the mandatory high school graduation requirements
- explore the cost and benefits of making all high school upgrading courses and programs free
- identify other potential barriers (child care, transportation, etc.) and ways to overcome them
- focus on entry requirements (e.g., age, years out of school, non-graduates, graduates, and graduates with an Individual Program Plan) to ensure entry is based on readiness and needs
- examine outcomes, including success in transition

Programs for all learners, including African Nova Scotian, Mi’kmaw, youth with disabilities, and other under-represented communities, must be part of a cohesive, accessible system.



Programs to Consider, Build On

The Distance Learning for African Nova Scotian Rural Learners (led by the Black Educators Association) draws on different existing programs and services to successfully transition African Canadian adult high school graduates to the Nova Scotia Community College, other institutions of higher learning, or the workforce. This is a collaborative effort that recognizes the multiple barriers faced by African Canadian adults.

As another example, Works for You is a government-funded program intended to support projects across the province that increase the job readiness of people who are not eligible for Employment Insurance. The goal of the projects is to integrate or reintegrate people into sustainable, insurable employment.

Help youth move successfully from school to post-secondary or work

The task team discussed what happens after young people leave high school.

Some students take a year off—a gap year—after they graduate. This can be valuable for many young people, giving them more time to mature, decide what they really want to do, or gain new skills and experience.

For others, the gap year goes well beyond 12 months, delaying further education and training, or sometimes turning into a low-paying job with few prospects.

“It’s okay to wander around, it’s not okay to get lost.”

—Transition Task Force Member

Most people want to complete their training and get into a paying job as quickly as possible. This builds resistance around adding another year as a transition program. However, data shows that just 39 per cent complete their degree in four years. Each additional year costs thousands of dollars annually.

“Would a stronger foundation, through transitional or gap-year programming, lead to greater success and save time overall?”

—Transition Task Force Member

Recommendation 8

Develop programming options that help youth gain skills, education, and experiences to support a successful transition into college, university, apprenticeship, or work. Any programming options must be designed considering eligibility requirements for student assistance, including bursaries. Four options are recommended for analysis:

- a gap-year program that offers young people a chance to gain skills and experiences across the province that will help them succeed in university, college, and work
- a transition year program that could include credits transferable to post-secondary; experiential learning to help youth explore skills and aptitudes; and readiness skills to help students succeed as they transition from a small class and teacher-based learning experience, to larger classes and lecture-based learning
- an accessible preparatory program (e.g., general arts and sciences) offered at multiple sites across the province
- a specialized transition program in which apprentices enter directly into a skilled trade after high school, in partnership with industry and the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency

Features of the Achieve program (a partnership between the Nova Scotia Community College and school boards) could also be considered. Achieve provides young adults with disabilities an opportunity to develop skills and confidence to transition from high school to work, further education, and life in their community.

Katimavik could be explored as a model for the gap-year program, given how its programs contribute to personal and professional development. CEGEP, a preuniversity college in Quebec, could be explored as a model for an accessible preparatory program.

An example of a specialized transition program in apprenticeship exists at O'Regan's. While the company employs automotive service technician graduates from the Nova Scotia Community College, O'Regan's was unable to meet its recruiting needs.

As a result, O'Regan's developed a 12-week program that combines academics with hands-on training. Participants are paid while training and receive \$3000 worth of equipment to keep if they commit to staying with the company for two years. The training counts as apprenticeship hours, and the goal is to get Red Seal certification through the apprenticeship program.

The analysis of all options should involve all partners: the public school system (including the Nova Scotia Virtual School), the Nova Scotia Community College, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, universities, and employers/industry.



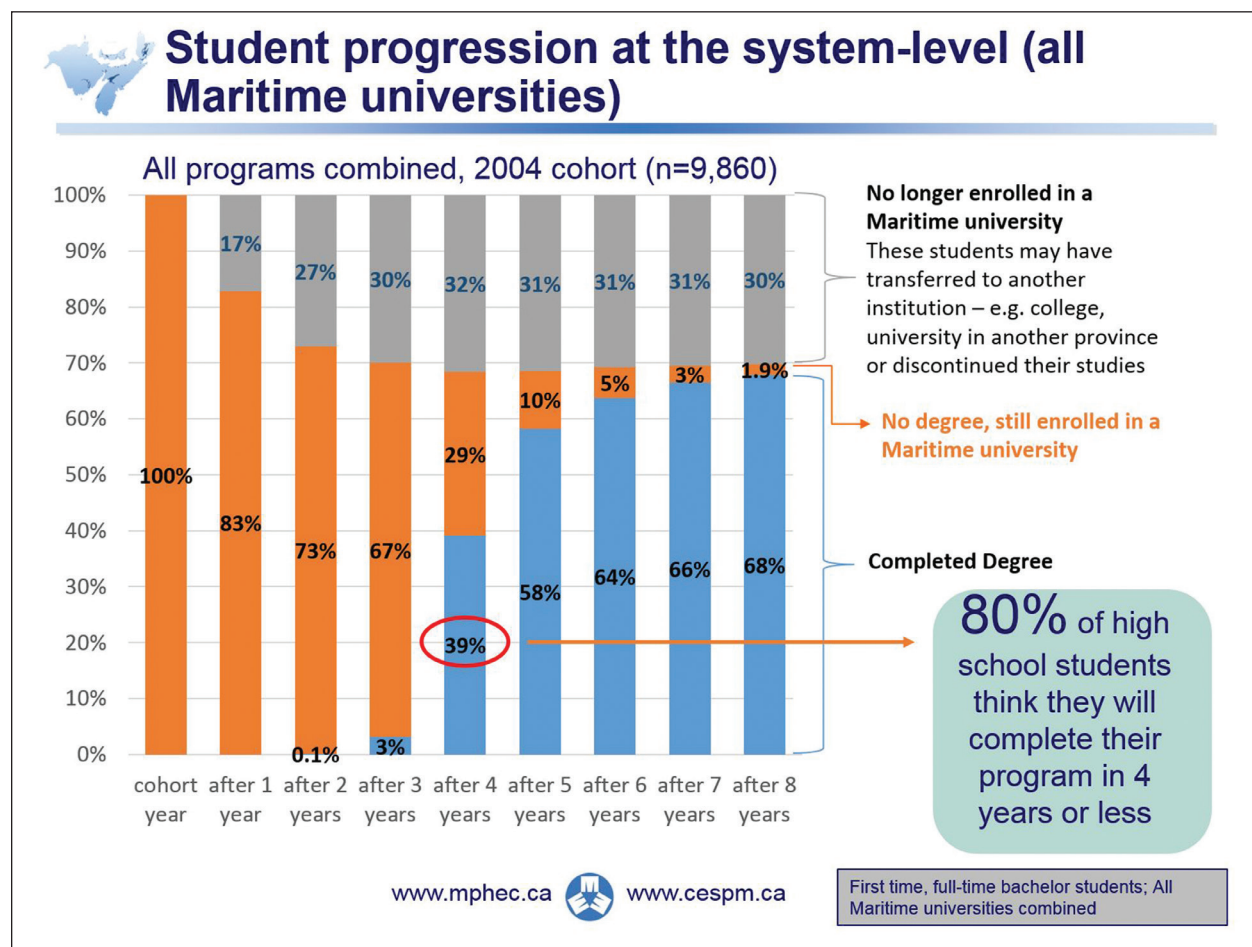
Increasing Post-Secondary Student Retention and Completion Rates

Dawn Gordon, Director, Research and Data Analysis, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, shared statistics (Figure 5) showing that

- of all students who entered their first year of a Maritime university (one student cohort), 32 per cent were no longer enrolled in any Maritime university after four years (These students may have transferred to another college or university in another province or discontinued their studies.)
- just 39 per cent of that same group or cohort had completed their degree in four years (After five years, 58 per cent have graduated.)

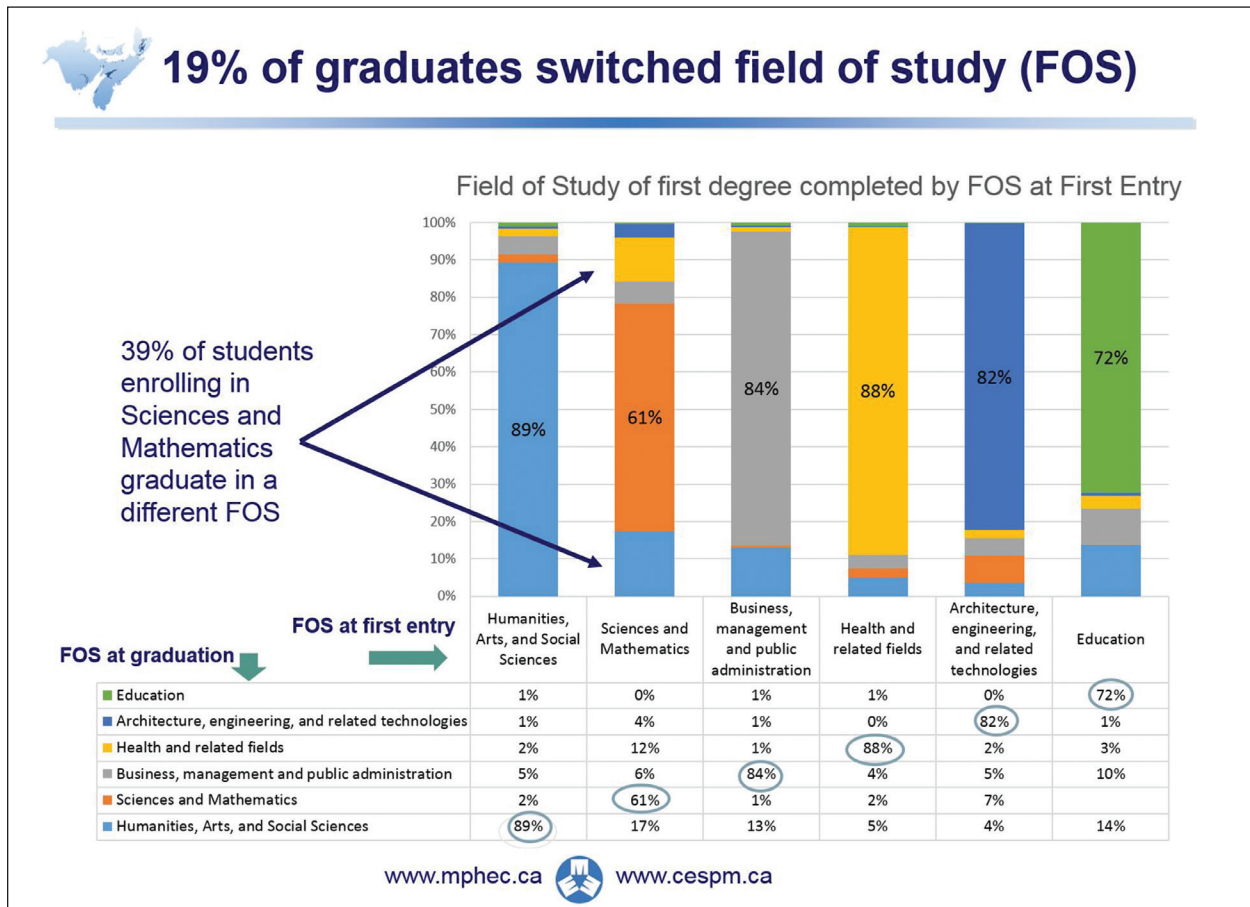
This is in stark contrast to what grade 12 students think. A 2014 survey revealed that 80 per cent of university-bound students believed they would graduate within four years.

Figure 5: Student Progression within Maritime Universities



The fact that 19 per cent of graduates switched their field of study contributes to how long it takes to complete a degree. That number jumps significantly for students in sciences and math, with 39 per cent graduating in a different field of study than where they started (Figure 6). This reinforces the need for stronger articulation agreements to help students complete their programs at an institution that best suits their needs, without repeating courses.

Figure 6: Graduates Switching Field of Study



Dr. Carolyn Watters, Dalhousie’s Provost and VP Academic, presented the results of a recent trend analysis of Dalhousie student data. This analysis identified various factors that are correlated to higher rates of student attrition after first year, including lower entering average, dropping to part time after first semester, coming from a rural area, and having government student loans.

Conversely, other factors were identified as strong predictors of academic success and retention, including: students who complete Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate credits in high school and students who live in residence. A student’s first-term average is highly correlated with student success.

Evidence-based best practices indicate that identifying struggling students early in the first term and providing intentional support and advising are paramount to maximizing student success.

Dr. Stan Kutcher, advisor to the Transition Task Force, presented on youth mental health issues. He said that three out of four Canadians, aged 12 to 19, rate their mental health as very good or excellent.

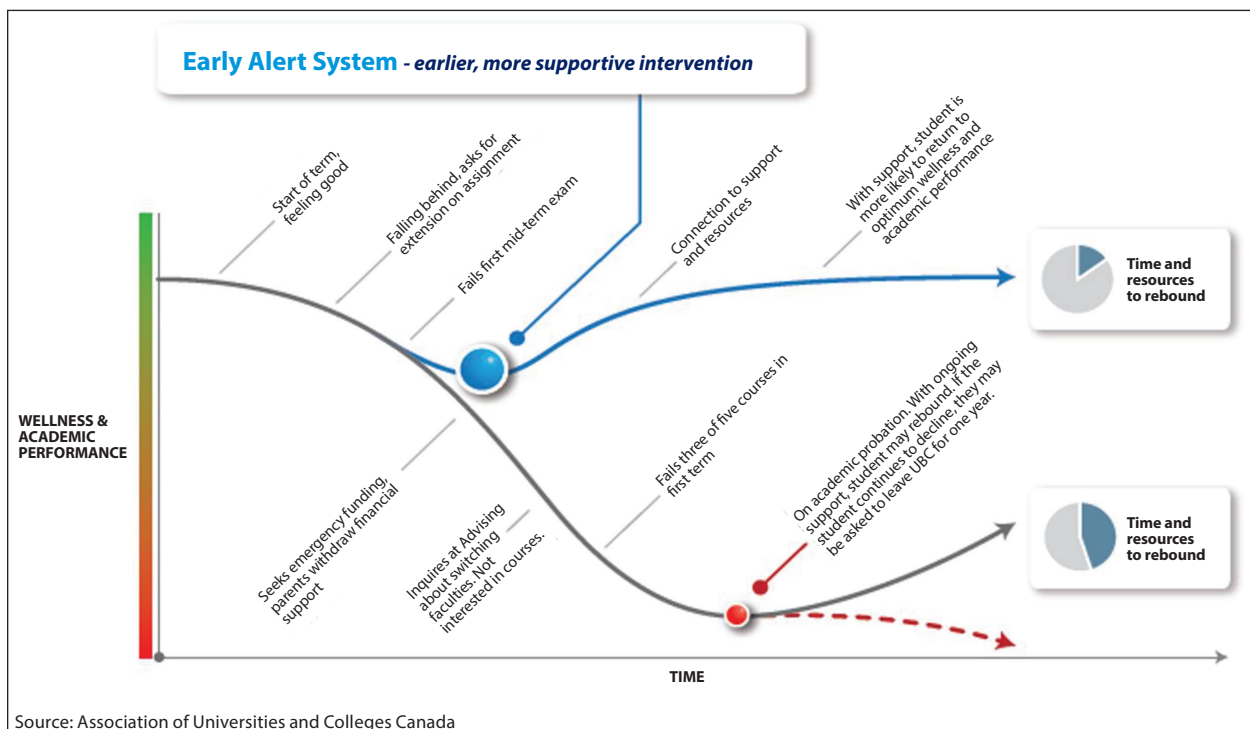
About 8 per cent of youth, aged 15 to 24, described their mental health as poor. Dr. Kutcher shared key components of any school or campus response to students' mental health needs. He said these components have been developed in Nova Scotia and are available for schools and campuses to use.

A comprehensive approach should include all components:

- mental health awareness and literacy for students, teachers, and faculty
- early identification of mental disorders capacity on campus (see Figure 7)
- access to mental health care for students requiring it

Dr. Kutcher also pointed to evidence that teens and youth learn better if that learning starts later in the day.

Figure 7: Early Alert System



Dr. Kutcher also shared information on Transitions, the first evidence-based resource of its kind in Canada. The resource provides first-year students with information on topics including time management, relationships, sexual activity, mental illness, suicide, and addictions. It also includes information on mental health self-help and where students can go to get help on their campus.

His presentation reinforced the need to use best evidence to choose interventions that are effective, safe, and cost-effective.

Develop a plan to help more students succeed, stay

Recommendation 9

Collaborate on plans to increase retention and completion rates for students in university, college, and apprenticeship. Plans should include clear outcome measures and could be based on

- retention data for all universities and colleges, collected within government, or through another central infrastructure
- a structured orientation program that can assess prior learning and individual student needs
- a range of support (e.g., tutoring, mental health services, students helping students, reach out to off-campus students) based on the identified, individual needs
- identification of struggling students and apprentices early, and appropriate supports based on data and advice from specialists working in mental health and with people with disabilities
- training (including culturally-responsive teaching) for faculty to identify and help students at risk
- programs and policies that give students a second chance to get on track

Improve course and credit connections between schools and post-secondary

Data also points to the need for better preparation and advice for students before they leave high school. Building on recommendations 1 through 4, stronger partnerships among high schools, colleges, and universities would support a smoother transition.

Recommendation 10

Form a working group (involving groups represented at the task force table) to examine partnerships and common practices to support a smoother transition and help students graduate more quickly. This could include

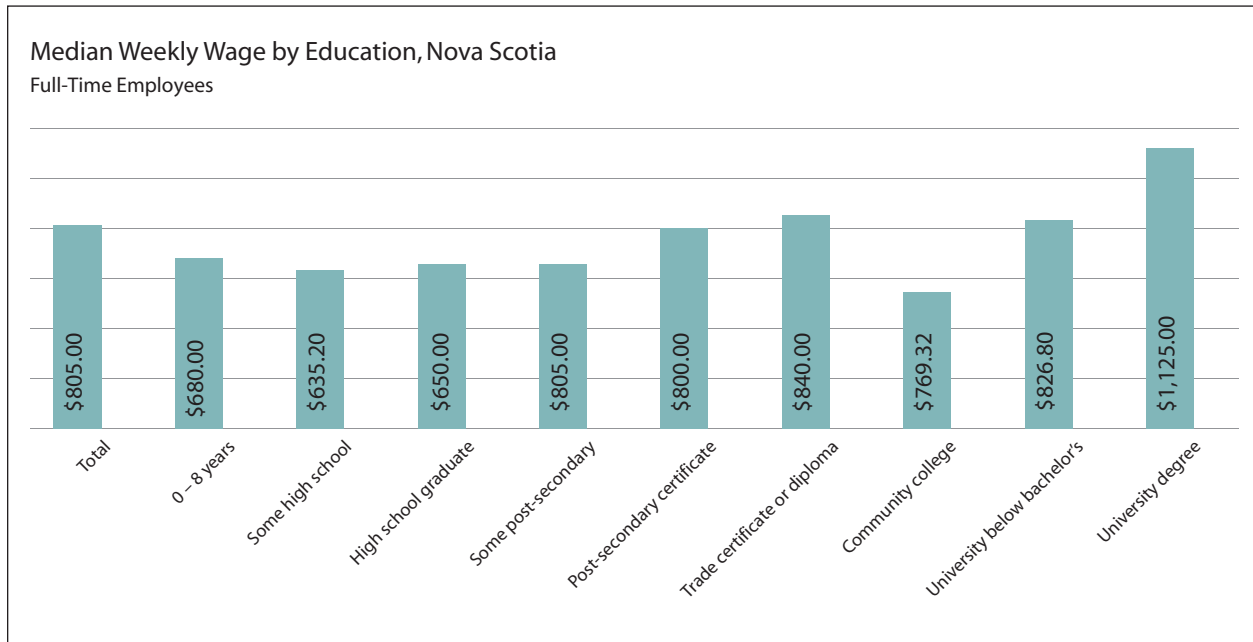
- better links between high school and post-secondary curriculums (e.g., high school curriculum content, opportunities for dual crediting and articulation agreements, prior learning assessment)
- bringing public school policies and expectations more in line with those in post-secondary in areas such as evaluation, deadlines, and attendance
- reviewing high school, college, and university daily start times
- reviewing mental health supports and strengthening connections and information sharing as students transition from high school to post-secondary education and training

Understand and plan for the return on a student's investment

Continuing one's education remains the clearest path to a good paying job. As seen in Figure 8, the median weekly wage for a university graduate employed full time was \$1,125, compared to \$650 for a high school graduate, a gap of \$475 a week.

A university graduate could earn about \$25,000 more annually than a high school graduate.

Figure 8: Nova Scotia Labour Force Survey, 2015



Young people need to understand the direct benefits to them in continuing their education, training, and apprenticeship. They and their parents need more information earlier so they can take advantage of programs, beginning with registered education savings plans, and develop a financial plan to contribute to their education.

Government also has a role to play.

About 17,000 students receive \$194 million a year in loans and grants.

Despite this sizable investment, some students still struggle to pay for their education. Student assistance is calculated based on the difference between what parents (of dependent students) and students themselves can contribute (through work or scholarships), and the cost of their education (tuition, books, supplies, living costs, etc.).

However, federal and provincial assistance is capped. For students with limited resources and high costs, the costs can significantly exceed the amount available in assistance (described as “unmet need”).

Identify and lower financial barriers

Recommendation 11

Reach parents and students with financial planning information earlier—beginning with information parents receive when their child is born, in early years programs, and continuing in school.

Recommendation 12

Review current sources of financial assistance to students (from governments, universities, colleges, families, and students themselves) and assess what changes could be made to close the gap between costs and available resources. The review should consider

- total available assistance and when it is made available (e.g., before, during, or after study)
- eligibility criteria
- student and parent contributions
- incentives to complete more quickly
- student assistance in other provinces and changes to the federal program (for example, Ontario has announced plans to offer more up-front grants for students in need, paid for in part by eliminating a 30 per cent tuition break that was available to all Ontario students)
- youth employment and earnings
- fiscal realities in Nova Scotia

While the review is ongoing, governments and universities and colleges must continue to invest in ways that help the most vulnerable students cover the cost of education and training.

Matching Programs to Labour Market Needs

The Nova Scotia Community College was created to help the province meet its labour market needs. The college ties programs and enrolment to labour market needs based on information from industry, program advisory committees, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency's trade advisory committees, as well as labour market information. The college also provides customized training tailored to the needs of an individual business or employer group.

Universities also offer career-oriented programs, and they work with employers on adapting programs to labour market needs. Universities delivering Bachelor of Education programs are just one example.

As well, creating an entrepreneurial culture within the Nova Scotia Community College and universities (see Recommendation 2, page 8) will give students in all courses an opportunity to develop skills helpful in the workplace. Co-op can be just as meaningful for a philosophy student as a commerce student.

Give employers, industry a greater voice in advising on programs

Some program advisory committees are working well. However, task force members say some are not working effectively. They say meetings should happen more frequently, information should be more current, and employers should have more influence. Trade advisory committees were raised as a model to explore.

Trade advisory committees are established by the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency Board. When the Nova Scotia Community College has a trade-related program, a trade advisory committee serves as the program advisory committee for that program. This involves a close working relationship between the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency Board and the Nova Scotia Community College.

Recommendation 13

Enhance forums, such as program advisory committees and other post-secondary committees to ensure business, industry, and other employers have an effective voice in developing programs linked to workforce needs.



Give students the best opportunity to assess aptitude, interest, and readiness

The Nova Scotia Community College is an access college, and admits students who apply and meet the program admission requirements on a first-come, first-serve basis. Applicants have the opportunity to explore aptitude, interest, and readiness through a range of services and supports such as Open House, Career in Gear, Test Drive, Get Started, Techsploration, campus visits, and applicant and student advising.

Transition task force members believe it is important for youth to be able to explore their aptitude for a certain career path. Determining aptitude early, before investing in post-secondary education or training, can save everyone time and money. Do they have the knowledge and skills they need? Do they have the interest, or in some cases, fortitude for certain work and work environments?

*There is little point in training to be a power line technician
if a fear of heights keeps you from climbing a ladder.*

—Transition Task Force Member

Recommendation 14

Enhance Nova Scotia Community College admissions processes and experiences to ensure that applicants make informed choices based upon aptitude, readiness, and labour market information to complement ongoing work with the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency.

Accountability for Action

If young people are to transition successfully from school to, and among, college, apprenticeship, university, and the workplace, partners must work together as a system, not in silos.

Bringing the partners together at one table—students and youth, representatives from diverse communities, community college staff, university presidents, apprenticeship, school board superintendents and elected representatives, school staff, business, and industry—is an important step in that direction.

The conversations were respectful but challenging. The need for significant change on significant issues is clear.

The recommendations in this report set a new direction. But more work on the detail, and continuing partnerships, is ahead.

Some recommendations call for further analysis. Task force members, or the groups they represent, will continue their involvement by participating on the working groups.

The task force wants to ensure that an evaluation framework be put in place for all actions accepted by the Ministers. While some changes will take time, progress must be reviewed.

Recommendation 15

Develop an evaluation framework, including indicators to mark progress (e.g., youth hopefulness, transition rates), for all recommended actions accepted by the Ministers. Reconvene task force members in fall 2017 for a round table to review and share their comments with the Ministers on progress.



Appendix A:

Recommendations Summary

1. Continue to overhaul the mandate and services delivered through Careers Nova Scotia.
2. Create an entrepreneurial culture within our schools, colleges, and universities, based on advice from the Business Education Council.
3. Review co-op education and community-based learning programs (i.e., Discovering Opportunities, Skilled Trades, O₂, Youth Apprenticeship) to ensure they are meeting their intended outcomes and are aligned with students' individual career plans. Make necessary changes and expand courses achieving the greatest results.
4. Expand the mentorship network in Nova Scotia.
5. Review provincial youth employment programs in consultation with stakeholders (including students) to make them easier for employers and employees to access.
6. Use a unique identifier to track youth from birth, into and through public schools, and into and out of apprenticeship, colleges, and universities. Building on the Education Action Plan commitment, explore the unique identifier system from Ontario or other jurisdictions that allow tracking to follow youth into, around, and out of the workforce. Establish indicators to evaluate progress. Use the data to inform program decision making.
7. Review existing high school and upgrading programs wherever they are offered (e.g., an extra high school year to improve marks, Nova School Virtual School, Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning, adult high school, the community college, or university) and develop a cohesive, accessible system for Nova Scotians to complete or upgrade their high school education and gain the skills and education they need to progress to the next step on their career path.
8. Develop programming options that help youth gain skills, education, and experiences to support a successful transition into college, university, apprenticeship, or work. Any programming options must be designed considering eligibility requirements for student assistance, including bursaries.
9. Collaborate on plans to increase retention and completion rates for students in university, college, and apprenticeship.
10. Form a working group (involving groups represented at the task force table) to examine partnerships and common practices to support a smoother transition and help students graduate more quickly.
11. Reach parents and students with financial planning information earlier—beginning with information parents receive when their child is born, in early years programs, and continuing in school.
12. Review current sources of financial assistance to students (from governments, universities, colleges, families, and students themselves) and assess what changes could be made to close the gap between costs and available resources.



13. Enhance forums, such as program advisory committees and other post-secondary committees, to ensure business, industry, and other employers have an effective voice in developing programs linked to workforce needs.
14. Enhance NSCC admissions processes and experiences to ensure that applicants make informed choices based upon aptitude, readiness, and labour market information to complement ongoing work with the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency.
15. Develop an evaluation framework, including indicators to mark progress (youth hopefulness, transition rates, etc.), for all recommended actions accepted by the Ministers. Reconvene the task force members in fall 2017 for a round table to review and share their comments with the Ministers on progress.

Appendix B: Presenters to the Transition Task Force

November 4, 2015

Career Decision-Making information and Opportunities for Grades Primary to 12
Don Glover, Director, Student Services, Education and Early Childhood Development

Careers Nova Scotia
Rick Alexander, Director, Labour and Advanced Education

November 18, 2015

Profile of Youth in Nova Scotia
Kirsten Robertson, Economist, Labour and Advanced Education
Dmitry Lysenko, Economist, Education and Early Childhood Development

“We Choose Now”: One Nova Scotia Coalition Collaborative Action Plan
Danny Graham, QC, Lawyer and Chief Engagement Officer with Engage Nova Scotia

December 2, 2015

Community-Based Learning Programs in the P–12 Public Education System
John Cochrane, Community-Based Learning Coordinator, Education and Early Childhood Development
Kilah Hayden, Technology Education Services, Education and Early Childhood Development

Mentra: Collaborative Mentorship Model
Janna Hare, Executive Director for Mentra

Post-Secondary Education: Experiential Learning Opportunities
Marjorie Davison, CEO, Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency
Ava Czapalay, Senior Executive Director, Higher Education, Labour and Advanced Education

January 6, 2016

The Connector Program
Denise DeLong, Project Manager for the Connector Program, Greater Halifax Partnership

Building Futures for Youth
Alain Lefebvre, Coordinator, Building Futures, Construction Association of Nova Scotia



January 20, 2016

School of Access and Flexible Learning

Taralee Hammond, Dean, School of Access and Flexible Learning, Nova Scotia Community College

Issues and Opportunities for Helping Youth

Ann Power, Executive Director, Student Equity and Support Services, Education and Early Childhood Development

February 3, 2016

University Retention and Graduation Highlights

Dawn Gordon, Director, Research and Data Analysis, Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission

Trend Analysis of Dalhousie Student Data

Dr. Carolyn Watters, Provost and Vice-President, Academic, Dalhousie University

February 17, 2016

Direct-Entry Apprenticeship Program

Tim Manuel, O'Regan's

Youth Mental Health Issues

Dr. Stan Kutcher, Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health, and Director World Health Organization Collaborating Care in Mental Health Policy and Training, Dalhousie University and IWK

March 2, 2016

Preliminary Results from a Career Intentions and Perceptions Survey for Nova Scotia Students

Dr. Sheryl Scully, Director, Learning and Organizational Development, Institute for Ocean Research Enterprise, Marine People Partnership

March 9, 2016

Catapult: Launching Tomorrow's Leaders

Jane Roy, FCA, Founder and Chair, Catapult
Lori Barker, Executive Director, Catapult

Overview of Student Assistance Program in Nova Scotia

Carol Lowthers, Executive Director, Student Assistance, Labour and Advanced Education

Appendix C: Transition Task Force Mandate, Terms of Reference

Mandate

The Transition Task Force will identify existing gaps in helping youth access and succeed in post-secondary education and work. It will develop recommendations to align resources and efforts to assist students in identifying their career goals and creating and/or improving academic pathways to assist them in achieving those goals.

The Task Force will prepare a report that analyzes current issues, proposes solutions to address those issues, and suggests ways to measure and track outcomes. The recommendations should align with the goals of the OneNS Commission Report. The Task Force will prioritize recommendations for Ministerial consideration based on greatest need and the fiscal realities of the province.

Terms of Reference

The Transition Task force will

- be facilitated by the Deputy Ministers of Education and Early Childhood Development and Labour and Advanced Education
- be guided by the direction and priorities outlined in *The 3 R's, Renew, Refocus, Rebuild—Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Education*, and the anticipated report regarding youth from OneNS to determine key elements for consideration
- be provided with background information that outlines some of the current issues facing young Nova Scotians as they move between the P-12 and the post-secondary sectors

The Transition Task Force will consider the following questions:

- How can we provide relevant and timely career decision-making information and opportunities for students, parents, and teachers? (Careers Nova Scotia, school guidance counsellors, etc.)
- How can we give students opportunities to gain meaningful work experience to inform and enhance career and education decision making and success?
- How can we help students who leave the public school system without the necessary requirements for successful entry into post-secondary education or the workplace? These include students who did not graduate and graduates with marks in the 50–70 per cent range.
- How can we increase post-secondary retention and completion rates and help more Nova Scotian students attain their educational goals? (What are the root causes and possible solutions to address why Nova Scotia university students withdraw from university in their first or second year?)
- How can we ensure students have access to post-secondary programs that match labour market opportunities and lead to jobs?



Members

The Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Deputy Minister of Labour and Advanced Education shall facilitate the Transition Task Force. Members are appointed by Ministers.

The Education and Early Childhood Development Minister will appoint members from the following sectors:

- one or two members in administration or executive level positions representing the province's 8 school boards
- one or two educators currently teaching in the province's public education system
- one member from the Nova Scotia School Boards Association
- one member from the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey School Board

The Labour and Advanced Education Minister will appoint members from the following sectors:

- one or two members from the Nova Scotia Community College
- one or two members representing the province's universities
- one member representing from the Board of the Apprenticeship Agency
- two members from the business community
- youth representation

Subject to the approval of the Ministers, the Transition Task Force may also engage with external experts to provide expertise and advice on areas considered by the Task Force.

Roles and Responsibilities

The frequency and dates will be determined in consultation with Transition Task Force members.

At a minimum, meetings will be convened monthly starting in October 2015 and ending in March 2016 when the Ministers of Labour and Advanced Education and Education and Early Childhood Development shall receive the recommendations report.

Staff assigned from government to the Transition Task Force will be working in between meetings to provide the Transition Task Force updates and information as requested.

Meetings will be a combination of face-to-face and conference calls depending on length of meetings and other factors like weather.

Remuneration

There will be no remuneration for members of this Task Force. Reasonable travel expenses per Public Service Commission Guidelines will be reimbursed.

Accountability

The Transition Task Force will table a final report that outlines recommendations for implementing and evaluating successful transitions to post-secondary education that include academic and social readiness and career choices and pathways.

The Transition Task Force may also be asked to advise the Province of Nova Scotia on implementation or future initiatives related to post-secondary transitions and career readiness.

