

Overview

As part of the process of collecting stakeholder input on priorities for the 2017 federal budget, Pathways to Education is pleased to offer the following comments and recommendations to the Finance Committee.

The partnership between Pathways and the Government of Canada is built on aligned objectives, including working to reduce poverty in Canada, supporting youth from diverse backgrounds transition to post-secondary education and employment, and providing tailored programs and support for Indigenous youth.

We encourage the Government to continue to ensure that at-risk youth receive the supports and services necessary to graduate high school and succeed in the work place. We believe that the implementation of comprehensive and equitable programs can lead to higher graduation rates for low-income youth and a better, more equal Canada.

About Pathways

Pathways to Education is a national charitable organization that seeks to provide all youth – regardless of socio-economic background- with the support needed to complete school, break the cycle of poverty, and contribute back to their communities. More specifically, Pathways provides the leadership, expertise and resources needed to run effective, evidence based community programs that help youth from low-income communities graduate from high school and make the often difficult transition into post-secondary education or meaningful employment. Founded in 2001 in Toronto’s Regent Park, Pathways to Education programs now operate in 17 communities in Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and British Columbia.

Our unique program of comprehensive wrap-around supports for high school students has an established track record of reducing high school drop-out rates and increasing post-secondary enrolment of students from low-income, vulnerable neighbourhoods. This community-based volunteer-supported program provides tutoring, mentoring, counselling and financial support to disadvantaged youth and their families. The results of this program have been ground-breaking. Graduation rates in Pathways communities have increased by an average of 75% and of those graduates, 73% have gone on to post-secondary education or training.

With the support of the Government of Canada, Pathways has been contributing to the achievement of the Government’s commitment to ensuring access to education for all Canada’s youth. Pathways is grateful for the ongoing support of the government of Canada which has

provided key funding for the program since 2010. This partnership between Pathways to Education and the Government of Canada has strengthened Canada's leadership in understanding the challenges of high drop-out rates in low-income communities, as well as in working to address and reverse the problem in 5 provinces.

Achieving Success Together

The partnership between Pathways to Education and the Government of Canada is based on a strong alignment between the mission of Pathways and the strategic objectives of the Federal Government. Pathways to Education's work in Canada closely aligns with many of the government's policy objectives outlined in the 2015 ministerial mandate letters and the 2016 Federal Budget.

The 2016 budget outlined a number of key programs that will help youth succeed in school and transition into post-secondary life. We hope that the Federal government will continue to build on these policies in Budget 2017.

Making Post-Secondary Education More Accessible

Pathways to Education welcomes the Government's commitment to increase the Canada Student Grant by 50 per cent, which is projected to help 247,000 low income students better afford post-secondary education in 2016-17. In concert with the government, Pathways works towards making post-secondary education more affordable by providing financial support to students in the Pathways program. These financial supports can be as large as scholarships to help pay for tuition and as small as free transit tickets to get to school. In our experience, financial barriers are among the strongest deterrents for students considering going on to post-secondary education. It is our recommendation that the government of Canada continue to fund the Canada Student Grant at a 50 per cent to make sure students are able to access post-secondary opportunities regardless of their family's income.

Furthermore, part of our commitment to make post-secondary education more accessible for all is working with parents and students to make sure that they are aware of all post-secondary funding programs that are made available to them by provincial and federal governments. In our experience high school students and their parents have limited knowledge of the various financial aid programs available to them and the actual cost of post-secondary education,

making awareness a crucial part of the solution. In addition to the expanded Student Grant Program, Pathways recommends a major effort to improve awareness regarding the cost of post-secondary education and the programs in place to help finance it.

Supporting Indigenous Education

Pathways to Education welcomes the government's commitment to support Indigenous Education by investing 2.6 billion over 5 years to transform the current on reserve school system, and better support Indigenous primary and secondary education through consultation and partnership.

This renewed investment in Indigenous education reflects the complex and difficult barriers facing Indigenous youth across Canada and the work that needs to be done to overcome them. At Pathways to Education Canada we see support like this as a crucial step towards closing the achievement gap that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians and are working continually and reflectively to ensure our program better meets the needs of different youth in risk situations.

Pathways to Education Canada is working in partnership with Indigenous communities to explore how we can help address the education and employment gap that affects Indigenous youth. Drawing from the insights gained from our partners, we hope to continue to tailor the Pathways to Education experience in order to better address the achievement gap faced by these groups in risk situations. Our program sites in Mashteuiatsh, QC and Winnipeg, MB are two examples of what a Pathways site can look like when partnering with a First Nation, Indigenous organization or community group that supports Indigenous students.

Although the funding announced in the 2016 budget to address primary and secondary education is a crucial step forward, in our experience supporting students through their post-secondary transition is just as important. To this end, Pathways to Education recommends that the government fulfill its commitment to increase its annual support for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program by \$50 million, as outlined in the mandate letter of the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour. The Post-Secondary Student Support Program provides First nation and Inuit students with the support needed to access education and skills development opportunities at the post-secondary level.

Supporting Youth Transitions into the Workforce

Pathways to Education welcomes the investment of an additional \$165.4 million into the Youth Employment Strategy for 2016-17. Programs like *Skills Link* and *Career Focus* that are funded by the Youth Employment Strategy are crucial for in risk youth to overcome the barriers they face when entering the workforce.

At Pathways' we share the same goal of supporting youth employment by focusing on employability skills in high school to ensure success in the workforce. Our mentoring activities are available for all students with the goal of connecting Pathways' students with potential post-secondary opportunities. Preparing resumes and practicing interviewing skills, completing college and university applications, and visits to potential employers and post-secondary institutions are typical career mentoring activities. In the past we have partnered with organizations such as Mount Sinai Hospital and Heritage Toronto to provide internship opportunities for our Pathways' students and more recently, Barclays hosted Pathways' graduates for a resume workshop and mock interview. Career mentoring gives youth a chance to explore future education and employment options while sharpening the skills needed to land these opportunities.

Pathways to Education encourages the government of Canada to continue to strive towards achieving their election platform commitment of doubling the 11,000 Canadians who access *Skills Link* each year.

Youth Leadership & Civic Engagement

In our experience, leadership skills are an important part of the skill set students need to succeed in school, give back to their community, and successfully transition into post-secondary life.

Pathways supports the creation of the Prime Minister's Youth Advisory Council, consisting of young Canadians aged 16-24 from diverse communities and from all regions of Canada. The Youth Council is an exciting opportunity for underrepresented youth to have their voices heard and provide input on key policy issues from a youth perspective. Pathways to Education welcomes further initiatives from the Government of Canada that promote leadership and civic engagement among youth.

Recommendations

- Pathways to Education supports the Federal Government's commitment to invest \$ 2.6 billion over 5 years to better support indigenous education. This level of funding shows an understanding of the complex barriers facing Indigenous youth across Canada and is a crucial step towards closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. Pathways to Education Canada recommends continuing to work towards closing the achievement gap by fulfilling the Government's commitment to increase annual support to the Post-Secondary Student Support Program by \$50 million.
- Pathways to Education welcomes the investment of an additional \$165.4 million into the Youth Employment Strategy for 2016-17. Programs like *Skills Link* and *Career Focus* that are funded by the Youth Employment Strategy are crucial for low-income youth to overcome the barriers they face when entering the workforce. Pathways to Education encourages the Government of Canada to continue to strive towards achieving their election platform commitment of doubling the 11,000 Canadians who access *Skills Link* each year.
- Developing the employability skills of youth is only one part of the solution for tackling youth unemployment. In addition, employers need to be willing to hire young graduates and provide the on the job training that is so important when beginning a career. To this end Pathways to Education recommends that the Federal Government fulfill their platform promise to offer a 12-month break on employment insurance premiums to employers who give permanent jobs to people aged 18-24. By giving employers an incentive to hire young people, students will be given an opportunity to develop the skills employers value, as well as help encourage more youth friendly employment practices.
- Pathways supports the creation of the Prime Minister's Youth Advisory Council, consisting of young Canadians aged 16-24 from diverse communities and from all regions of Canada. The Youth Council is an exciting opportunity for underrepresented youth to have their voices heard and provide input on key policy issues from a youth perspective. Pathways to Education welcomes further initiatives from the Government of Canada that provide underrepresented youth an opportunity to have their voice heard.

Conclusion

Pathways to Education Canada welcomes the progress made by the Government of Canada in supporting youth and their transition into post-secondary life. We ask the government to continue to invest in the education of at-risk youth through the kind of targeted investments and programs outlined above. Investments in the Youth Employment Strategy and Indigenous on reserve education are crucial for ensuring success for youth across Canada, but more needs to be done. Barriers remain for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students hoping to make the transition to post-secondary education. Providing increased funding for programs like the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and the Canada Student Grant are crucial for ensuring equitable access to PSE and the benefits that it brings. Furthermore, making sure families are well-informed about the real cost of PSE and the financial programs in place to help fund students' education, is crucial in closing the achievement gap in Canada.

Thank you for your continued support in helping Pathways to Education make Canada a Graduation Nation. We look forward to a lasting partnership with the Government of Canada for many years to come.