

ARE CANADIAN STUDENTS GETTING THE CAREER HELP THEY NEED?

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The report [*Pan-Canadian Study of Career Development Practices in K-12 Public Schools*](#), commissioned by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, has been released and it offers some important insights to inform our answer to this question.

There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the importance of quality career development services, not only to individuals but more broadly to building economic prosperity.

- The lack of career development services is a key barrier to pursuit and persistence in PSE (*The Price of Knowledge*, 2004);
- A lack of program fit is the major reason for youth not completing PSE (*Who Pursues Postsecondary Education, Who Leaves and Why: Results from the Youth in Transition Survey*, 2004);
- Forty-four percent of high school graduates surveyed who did not pursue PSE cited barriers related to a lack of career information and/or support and a full 70% of students who discontinued PSE studies cited a lack of career direction (*Class of 2003: High School Follow up Report*, 2007);
- The need for more career development services was a main conclusion of *An Examination of Barriers to Pursuing PSE and Potential Solutions* (2008);
- Interim results of an ongoing 6-year study show that career development interventions delivered via after-school workshops to secondary students (Future to Discover) affect aspirations for post-secondary education (Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2009)
- The OECD has concluded that effective career information and guidance systems are a key to making lifelong learning a reality for all (http://www.oecd.org/document/20/0,3343,en_2649_39263294_32474452_1_1_1_1,00.html);
- EU countries, recognizing the link between career development and lifelong learning, have banded together to approve a resolution on lifelong access to quality career services for all citizens.

What is the state of career services offered to students in Canada?

Most parents assume that school-based guidance counsellors support youth with career planning, helping them to explore work and PSE options that would best fit their interests, skills and values as an integral part of their guidance responsibility (*The Role of Guidance in Post-Secondary Planning*, 2003).

[*Pan-Canadian Study of Career Development Practices in K-12 Public Schools*](#) reports the results of a 2009 national survey of almost 500 school guidance counsellors in K-12 public schools, pointing to some key strengths but also to a disturbing lack of consistency with respect to student access to career development services, outreach to parents, the use of creative service delivery models and the professional preparation of guidance counsellors.

Respondents completed a self administered online survey coupled with an online log tracking their time allocation over three consecutive days. The results at a national level show:

- 34% of respondents indicated that there are no mandatory career education courses offered in their schools, suggesting that career education is simply not accessible in all provinces. Where mandatory courses do exist, they are largely at the secondary level despite evidence suggesting the need for early intervention;

- Only 17% of schools nationally reported having staff specifically designated as career counsellors. This figure varied significantly province to province with New Brunswick and Ontario at the low end (5% and 7 % respectively) and Saskatchewan (44%) and British Columbia (42%) at the high end;
- Itinerant counsellors represent a very small minority (7%), yet they report spending 80-100% of their time on guidance and counselling while, overall, counsellors spend only 23% of their time on individual career planning, 10% on career education in the classroom and 25% on administrative and non-guidance responsibilities;
- Creative approaches to service delivery – such as group interventions, outreach to parents, workshop approaches and cooperative education – are not widely used. Only 3% of respondents indicated that 40% or more of their students were enrolled in cooperative education. Only 33% of respondents indicated that their school offered even one career education workshop annually for parents or guardians; and
- Guidance counsellors are a highly-educated population, but not necessarily specialized in the field of career development. Nationally, 41% of respondents cited a Bachelor of Education as their highest degree attained (with this percentage increasing to 72% in Saskatchewan and 79% in Ontario).

There is a great deal of inconsistency both nationally and within individual provinces regarding career development. Given the dramatic changes and new demands of the workplace, widespread attention has to be focused on the need for high quality career development programs for youth. If K-12 systems are not offering career education courses that closely link career pathways with post-secondary education, then it begs the question as to where the K-12 students will access this information in a meaningful way.

Future Considerations...

1. How can we ensure that *all* students access a minimum level and standard with respect to service delivery? Despite provincial jurisdiction, can we agree on a coherent framework for career development programming across the K-12 system nationally? Where is career development on the agenda of the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC)? Do they have a role in working with provinces toward a pan-Canadian strategy?
2. With the current ratios of students to guidance counsellors, it is obvious that guidance counsellors cannot reach all students through traditional one-to-one counselling. What creative service delivery models might be explored? Can successful models, such as Future to Discover and cooperative education approaches be more widely promoted? How can pockets of excellence be multiplied? How could K-12 educators, parents/guardians, employers and other community stakeholders become engaged as career allies?
3. How can provinces/districts/boards ensure that all counsellors in their respective jurisdictions have adequate professional training for their mandated roles and responsibilities?
4. A substantial portion of guidance counsellors' working day is devoted to non-guidance tasks. How might school board/district and school policies and procedures reduce the expectations on guidance counsellors with respect to time spent on non-guidance activities?
5. We know there are pockets of excellence but, for the most part, there is very little tracking of outcomes to ensure accountability from our career services. How can this be changed?

Leadership is needed at the school/board level, but also broader provincial and pan-Canadian leadership is required. If education systems support lifelong learning and equal opportunities for all children and believe that all children could benefit from guidance and career education from within the K-12 school system, then it is hoped that this report will support serious reflection, analysis and action.