

WEMBLEY'S REPAIRS; A Challenge to Community Stakeholders and the Construction Trades in working towards Goals of Educated Workforce and Safe and Healthy Schools

Submission to the Wembley Public School Accommodation Committee, dated May 6, 2008

From Margaret Sun, a member of community and parent of children in the Rainbow District School Board schools

I have always felt that a school is more than its bricks, mortar, and roof. For me, as a child who came to Canada at age 8 with 4 words of English, school was a caring and accepting community.

There were:

classmates who willingly came home with me after school to teach and drill me in my ABCs as there was no "English as a second language" program. They showed me that my inability to speak English did not exclude me from playing baseball and skipping rope;

a watchful principal and teachers who noticed that we were latch-key kids and recruited a couple of Grade 6 students to accompany my brother and me to and from school;

teachers and kids who did not mock at our noticeable failures on tests.

From reading the School Evaluation Framework document about the various programs (Roots of Empathy, basketball leagues, curling, volleyball, family skating night, music programs, ASD classes) offered at Wembley, and the Sudbury Star article "Wembley Students build a school; Fundraising drive helps Kenyan community", one gets a sense of the warmth and caring of the school community. It has a strong tradition of being a neighbourhood school with many students having parents and grandparents who had also attended Wembley. From the sidewalk, Wembley appears to be a grand school with tall ceilings and large classrooms in a beautiful setting with large trees.

Given all that, it would be a shame to let a substantial 5-year repair estimate decide the fate of Wembley.

Looking over Diane Cayen-Arnold's 5 year cumulative Capital Projects 2011-12 cost projections, it may be possible to pare down the \$4.21 million repair estimate. I am making assumptions, that land and enviro costs (totalling \$684,160) may not be urgent. With renovation costs, a large portion of the costs can be apportioned to labour.

If we want to cut down labour costs, there may be several approaches:

1. Use the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) in decreasing the labour costs. OYAP is a pre-apprentice program. Currently, Rainbow District high schools are placing high school kids with employers in learning a trade. Some of these students are working in the summer time. Looking over the repairs needed, we are looking for bricklayers/ masons, roofers, painters, carpenters, floorcovering installers, electricians, plumbers, steamfitters/pipefitters, glaziers, tilers, concrete finishers. Rainbow District School Board has experience with OYAP placements in a number of these trades.

An apprenticeship program is a contract between an apprentice and an employer in which the apprentice exchanges labour for practical training in a workplace environment. The official duration varies by program, but is generally three to four years.

Naysayers to this approach may believe

A. that the unions would have a problem with using unpaid helpers,

There is recognition among unions and businesses that construction trades are facing shortages of workers and that more students need to be persuaded that working in the trades can be fulfilling and vitally important to the Canadian economy. There is union support for OYAP.

Canadian Federation of Independent Business, through its November 2006 members' survey, asked what one worker their business is in greatest need of. 28% of responses indicated shortage of construction trade workers.

According to Statistics Canada 2001 figures (released 2003), several of the skilled trades in the construction sector have a relatively large share of older workers, which may lead to shortages in the coming years. The average age, at about 43, is relatively high among contractors and supervisors in the construction sector. Within this group, 18% of pipefitters and 16% of carpenters were aged 55 and over. In 2001 there were only just over 1 worker aged 20 to 34 for every one aged 55 and over in these occupations. In comparison, the ratio of younger to older workers in the overall labour force was 2.7. Bricklayers were among the oldest construction workers, with 17.5% aged 55 or more, followed by 14.3% for plumbers. At the same time, the number of young workers in these occupations decreased. In 1991, there were 2.7 bricklayers aged 20 to 34 for every one aged 55 and over. By 2001, that ratio had dropped to 1.5. Similarly, the ratio of younger to older plumbers fell from 3.9 to 2.3 over the decade.

To be an apprentice, one need not be in a union.

B. that it may be difficult to find employers willing to use the OYAP,

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum - Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage (CAF-FCA) undertook research into the return of apprenticeship training investment for employers and initial findings indicated that for every dollar employers invest in an apprentice, they accrue \$1.38 or a net return of \$0.38 over the life of an apprenticeship.

Employers are willing. But more publicity on the employment of OYAP students may be needed. Currently, OYAP operates with the student finding an employer (at times a family friend or relative) or with OYAP finding a suitable employer.

According to a study by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum - Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage in 2003, there are some generic barriers that seem to exist or are perceived to exist for employers, such as: lack of information about apprenticeship training, economic factors which impact an employer's ability to provide apprenticeship training, a lack of human and financial resources to train apprentices, concerns about the ability and lack of work experience of apprentices; and issues around the regulations that govern apprenticeship training which may not align with specific business.

Contracts for tender by the Rainbow District School Board can be written to specify that OYAP and/or apprentices must be used on the work.

C. who is paying the WSIB for the students ?

Ministry of Education covers the students under WSIB during work placement. If the student is paid, the employer provides the WSIB protection.

2. The Rainbow District School Board has a large number of older buildings and could justify having the repairs carried out by its own people with a combination of OYAP placements of its students and also with apprenticeship programs through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

One problem to employers taking on apprentices is the journeyman/ratio in Ontario. It currently takes 5 bricklayers/masons to train one apprentice, four carpenters to train one apprentice. Ontario has higher ratios than other provinces. In most other provinces it takes one journeyman to train one apprentice. A lot of businesses do not have enough journeymen to take on an apprentice. There is currently debate in the Ontario Legislature about changing that ratio –see **Ontario Hansard Session: 39:1 Date: 20080501** comments by **Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde**.

- Ontario government committed to increasing the number of new apprenticeship registration from 21,500 in 2006 to 26,000 in 2007-2008
- Ontario introduced Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit (ATTC) in 2004, a refundable tax credit for

corporations and unincorporated businesses employing apprentices in certain skilled trades.

- ATTC reimburses up to 30 % of small employers' eligible expenses, to a maximum credit of \$5,000 per year per apprentice during the first 36 months of an apprenticeship program
- Dual Credit Programs allow students to earn a number of credits by participating in apprenticeship training and postsecondary courses. Courses count towards both high school diploma and postsecondary diploma, degree, or apprenticeship certification. (Apprenticeship Plus is available through Rainbow District School Board and Cambrian College)
- Federally funding exist, one example is the Apprenticeship Incentive Grant (AIG), cash grant of offers \$1000 per first two years of apprenticeship in 49 trades.

3. For certain repairs (eg. painting, landscaping) volunteers recruited from construction trades and school community can be used. A model to follow could be "Habitat for Humanity" which uses volunteers to build social housing for people.

Although Wembley is facing bleak prospects, I believe that this may be a time to examine how educators and the school community can rise to the challenge of determining solutions which may benefit all the stakeholders in our educational system.