

Schools front and centre in throne speech

Drive Clean, health care, child care also addressed in provincial address

BY CAROLINE GRECH
Staff Writer

Ontario students will get to choose what kind of high school diploma they want.

Providing an alternative high school diploma focusing on developing skills and trades was one of the key promises in the McGuinty government's throne speech yesterday.

"This diploma will set a different

standard — not a lower one," Lt. Gov. James K. Bartleman said.

Coupled with the alternative diploma, legislation will be introduced making schooling mandatory until the age of 18.

While Bill Crothers, chairperson of the York Region District School Board, applauded the move, he said the throne speech contained no surprises.

"I can't think of anything the government is doing that we haven't started already," Mr. Crothers said, explaining the board has already initiated partnerships with businesses in the community to introduce students to trade professions.

"The legislation will mean nothing

really, but if you combine it with school boards putting alternative programs in place, that will have an impact on students," Mr. Crothers said.

"We're very pleased with what the government is doing. We're happy with additional money being funnelled in and we're in much better shape than we were last year," Mr. Crothers said.

York Catholic District School Board chairperson Elizabeth Crowe also applauded the introduction of an alternative diploma, despite reasonably low dropout rates in the Catholic board.

"Even one child not graduating from high school is a failure on our part," Ms Crowe said.

"You can't even become an appren-

tice in a trade without a high school diploma," Ms Crowe explained.

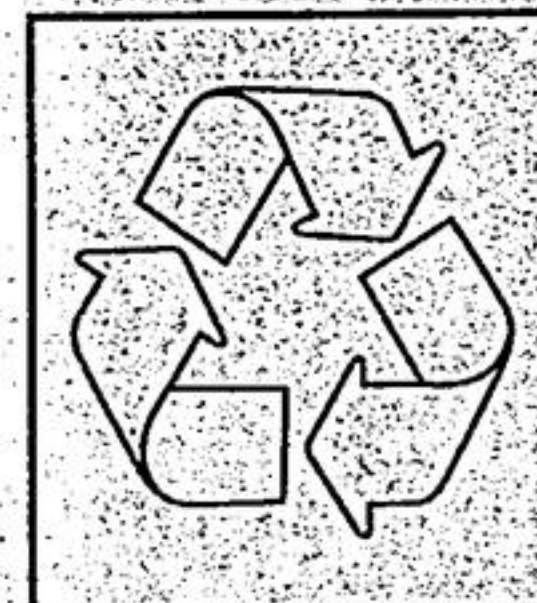
Stressing the lack of options for students today without a high school diploma, Ms Crowe echoed Mr. Crothers' sentiments that in York Region, through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, students have been given the option of a trade career for years.

"It's really building on something that is already out there," Ms Crowe said.

The establishment of a Greater Toronto Transportation Authority was also key among the announcements affecting York Region.

Other highlights of the speech include:

- funding for 25,000 new child care spaces;
- a reduction in wait times for key health procedures and more CT and MRI scans, cataract surgeries, cardiac procedures and hip and knee replacements;
- an overhaul of the Drive Clean emissions testing program.




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