

SUBJECT: Integrating Entrepreneurship into the Public School System

SUBMITTED BY: Youth, Education, and Training Committee

BACKGROUND

Saskatchewan is recognized as one of the most entrepreneurial provinces in Canada. Because entrepreneurial activity is a key source of job creation and economic growth in the province, it is imperative that the provincial government and business community continue to support an entrepreneurial culture. An area of support that is lacking is in the K-12 system. By promoting youth entrepreneurship programs and course integration in the K-12 curriculum, Saskatchewan is creating students that are better equipped and prepared to be meaningful contributors to the economy and to themselves.

ISSUE

The community at large needs to find ways to encourage entrepreneurial spirit, and the schools are a significant vehicle within which this can be done. Saskatchewan's schools are not fully engaging the entrepreneurial spirit of students and the system could be improved by making this mandatory. Students today lack a depth of understanding about the economy and are often less able to function within it.

As a province that ranks high amongst its peers for being an entrepreneurial environment, Saskatchewan is unfortunately also a place that is not providing its local talent with opportunities to explore an entrepreneurial career path. The youth of today and the future entrepreneurs of tomorrow are not adequately exposed to business education in the K-12 school curriculum.

While there has been the introduction of the Junior Achievement (JA) program that provides business education to elementary, middle, and high school students, it is not mandatory nor consistently taught and supported in all schools and regions throughout Saskatchewan.

In 2013, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) launched the Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program (AYEP). This program aimed to provide necessary training in order to prepare First Nation and Métis for business and entrepreneurship. Again however, the deployment of this program was only in select schools. Even though this was a move in the right direction, there were many schools that were simply identified and then placed on a waiting list.

Some of the reasons why these two programs (and others) are not universally available is the lack of financial support and lack of emphasis toward entrepreneurship by not making it a mandatory subject. The inconsistency in programming and availability leads

to lost opportunities, lost ideas, and in turn, a province that will lose its ranking as a top entrepreneurial jurisdiction, resulting in an eventual drop in economic growth.

In addition to the lack of funding, there is also a training element consider with regard to the introduction of new curricula. Is the school system providing teachers with the appropriate amount of training and resources needed to properly and effectively teach the subject of entrepreneurship?

Encouraging youth entrepreneurship is also an important step towards addressing the concerns about succession planning that many family-owned, small and medium sized businesses face. Without informing potential young entrepreneurs about the opportunities that can arise from buying an existing business, they will often choose other career paths, which results in existing business owners having no successors to continue their business once they retire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education ensure that entrepreneurial studies are included in at least one mandatory course and available to all elementary and middle school students, and that elective entrepreneurship programs are offered in all high schools.
- 2) That Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education ensure that the teachers responsible for the teaching of such courses are adequately trained and supported to present the course content.
- 3) That the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce continue to support entrepreneurial programs by encouraging the government, Chamber membership, and the broader business community to support these programs by being funding partners, mentors, and/or volunteers.

DATE OF POLICY RESOLUTION RATIFICATION

This policy resolution was ratified by the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors on September 14, 2017.