

Partnering for Impact: Public College – Municipal Innovations

Remarks by Marketa Evans, Colleges Ontario

at the AMO Conference, Monday August 19th

Good afternoon! Thank you all for being here this afternoon and for the very warm welcome and kind introduction.

Thank you Brian and the team at AMO for the opportunity to share some thoughts and for your wonderful ongoing partnership with Colleges Ontario. We are truly delighted to be part of the program and to help you celebrate 125 years! Congratulations!

And a warm welcome to the new Minister of Colleges and Universities, Minister Nolan Quinn. We are delighted to be working with you.

It is terrific to be here today on behalf of the 24 public colleges in Ontario and to be joined by so many of our member colleges. I hope you will all have a chance to meet them and connect and learn.

How energizing is that video? I think it really captures the vibrancy of Ontario's public college sector – 24 public colleges that are innovative, affordable, trusted partners in your communities. And we are everywhere that Ontarians need us – over 200 locations for learning, education, training across all regions of the province. From Kenora to Cornwall, from Hawkesbury to Sarnia, from Windsor to Moosonee, public colleges are a strong

partner for all municipalities and communities on the issues that matter most to Ontarians – housing, healthcare, job creation. Practical and solutions focused.

Sixty years ago, colleges were just a glimmer in the eye of a young education minister named Bill Davis. And since your first public community college opened its doors in 1967, colleges have been an indispensable part of communities large and small.

My goal here today is to leave you inspired with some fresh ideas about how you can work with your public colleges to solve the most important challenges and seize the most exciting opportunities for your communities. Colleges are your partners in that work.

The first thing that comes to mind when most people think about colleges is the programs they offer and the stream of skilled job-ready graduates. College grads are the backbone of Ontario's economy. Simply put, without college grads, Ontario grinds to a halt.

But a job is so much more than just a paycheque. At your local college, we provide opportunity.

A fulfilling, attainable, rewarding career opens doors to so much more in life. I'm sure we can all relate to jobs we had that left us feeling unfulfilled or bored, just as we have all (hopefully!) had ones that have left us feeling incredibly gratified.

Whether in STEM, skilled trades, IT, health care, human services, tourism, business or the creative industries, Ontario's colleges -- your colleges -- offer affordable, job focused

training for people, young and not so young - giving people a path to a good job, a great career and a bigger paycheque.

But we know that the modern workforce is always changing, and so we change with it. Your colleges also offer short term training opportunities for those people already in the workforce - tailored to employers' specific needs. Right here in downtown Ottawa, Algonquin College has a corporate training centre that provides custom training and upskilling for municipal employees in the city of Ottawa and beyond. Helping Ontarians get more out of the careers they have now.

College grads are key to municipal workforce needs – and Colleges Ontario as the member association - has been an eager participant in AMO's Workforce Development Task Force.

For students, co-ops and work placements provide a way to see themselves in a workplace, understand the dignity of work, and most importantly, find a role that provides them with a fulfilling career. The Waterloo Regional Police Service for instance regularly takes on Conestoga College students from the School of Applied Computer Science and IT, showing them that the job market is not limited to Big Tech or big cities, and that organizations of all stripes can provide opportunity for them to apply their skills and spread their wings – right in their home community. This type of learning opens a whole new world for students, showing the practical “hands-on” value of college education, and allows them to explore careers in the municipal sector.

Coops and work placements are vital – but transportation challenges in smaller communities and rural areas in Ontario are a barrier. This is especially true for healthcare – students must have placements but without transportation, this often just isn't possible.

Take a look at this.

Loyalist College was eager to find a solution to get students into health care placements in Hastings Prince Edward County. Loyalist piloted a Health PULSE bus which takes students from the Loyalist College Belleville campus to placements all around the County. Interest in the Health PULSE shuttle continues to increase from both industry and community partners who are seeking talent. As a result, a new cohort of Loyalist College students will be boarding the Health PULSE shuttle in September 2024.

These are not just transportation solutions – they are also labour market and education and training solutions! Talk about win-win-win!

And here is an innovative partnership between Durham College and eight chambers and boards of trade in the Durham Region – representing many of the small and medium sized businesses, the job creators of Ontario. All first year Durham College students in business or IT programs get a free membership in each of the region's chambers during their studies and for one additional year after graduation.

Students build their networks, and jumpstart their careers. They get access to events on and off campus where they meet local professionals and potential future employers, and explore careers right in Durham region.

Small and medium sized businesses gain access to new talent – both permanent and through internships. Other colleges have been reaching out to Durham to learn more and are considering this kind of partnership to support their local business as well.

Let's switch gears to talk about another issue I know is top of mind for many of us – housing.

Ontario's ambitious goal of 1.5 million new homes by 2033 needs all hands-on deck. And we know that there are many things you are already doing to meet this goal.

We all read regularly about the need for more skilled labour to build these homes, as well as the vital accompanying infrastructure such as sewers and roads. Your colleges across the province produce graduates who fill a variety of critical roles in the home construction industry, including lesser known talent such as construction technicians, architectural technologists, construction project managers and civil engineering technologists. But critically – public colleges also offer skilled trades programs where graduates are job ready from day one. Thousands of job ready grads in skilled trades every year. A vital talent pipeline for home building.

The District of Muskoka aims to grow housing supply through its ambitious Big Move on Housing. Muskoka is looking to expand affordable and attainable housing. One critical piece of that is more talent in home construction.

To support this plan, Muskoka and Georgian College are now working together – Muskoka will invest \$850,000 over three years so that the college can increase its training capacity with a new skilled trades facility. The new space will provide room to accommodate larger projects, like scaffolding, hoisting and rigging, as well as building layout and fabrication. And, Georgian plans to create an interdisciplinary fabrication lab to bridge the gap between technology, skilled trades, manufacturing and engineering – to build more housing with a smaller environmental impact.

In addition to the critical role of producing skilled graduates, there are other ways colleges are contributing to solutions on housing. Most colleges are expanding housing on and off campus through a variety of innovative solutions.

As just one example, Canadore College in North Bay will have over 800 beds ready and available for students both on and off campus – an increase of 170 beds over the past 2 years. Canadore has renovated a former office building in North Bay and converted it into student housing. And many other colleges have similar projects underway.

Keeping community housing stock in good repair and bringing outdated units back into use remains a challenge, yet also critical. Mohawk College has partnered with City Housing Hamilton bringing students from the Construction Engineering Technician program to

renovate and update affordable housing units, increasing the available housing stock for families. The students took their school-based learning into the real world and Hamilton housing was expanded.

Communities across Ontario want to revitalize their downtown areas, and The City of London partnered with Fanshawe College to do just that.

The first project – a repurposed bank building – opened in 2014 and provides space for Fanshawe’s School of Media and Digital Arts.

Following that success, Fanshawe purchased the Kingsmills building, which had, for more than a century, been a family-run retail business – in order to create a new home for the School of Tourism, Hospitality and Culinary Arts.

This project – which you can see reflected in the before and after photos here – brings new life downtown, keeping notable historic legacies in place while building for the future.

Hundreds of students and staff now stream through the downtown campus daily, bringing buzz and economic activity into the city core. Colleges don’t just train students – they are engines for job growth and urban revitalization. Public colleges power economic growth in your communities.

We know that a strong talent pipeline is a key driver of business investment decisions.

Niagara College worked closely with the Niagara Region Economic Development team to help land a \$1.6 billion investment in Port Colborne as part of Ontario's ambition to become an electric vehicle global powerhouse. The investor, the Japanese-headquartered Asahi Kasei Corporation, could have chosen to go anywhere in the world.

But not only was it impressed with the province's commitment to building a battery ecosystem, but Niagara College presented a clear value add. With specialized training facilities and opportunities for internships and apprenticeships to support the company's needs in photonics and green automation, Asahi Kasei recognized the importance of high quality, local education to power their operations for the years ahead.

Niagara College was a partner in the exploration trips the company made to the region and toured corporate delegations through the college's labs and training facilities. Your public colleges are stepping up to the plate to help sell Ontario as an investment destination of choice.

And what about the businesses already in your communities? Colleges support business-led R&D and commercialization to help them thrive and grow and create jobs.

At Northern College in Timmins, the Innovation Hub drives prototyping to boost mining industry competitiveness and regional economic development – all while providing experiential learning and real-world industry experience for students.

At Seneca College, the Centre for Innovation in Life Sciences is serving a previously unmet need for small and medium enterprise in the life sciences field – an industry of increasing economic significance in Ontario.

At George Brown College, the Food Innovation and Research studio helps companies undertake market research and build new food products – that grow local businesses and create jobs and put new food products Made in Ontario right on the shelves of your supermarket.

At Fleming College, the Centre for Innovative Aquaculture Production is helping to shape and grow Ontario’s aquaculture industry – a very fast growing food production sector.

Another compelling challenge we share is ensuring Ontarians have access to the health care services and professionals they need where and when they need them.

Ontario’s public colleges are a key source of graduates in a range of health fields like nursing, paramedicine, and laboratory and imaging technicians. Did you know that colleges can now offer nursing degrees, as well as practical nursing diplomas – which means students can study close to home and stay close to home when they graduate. And ensures Ontarians across the province can get care close to home.

Public colleges and municipalities are strong partners in growing healthcare talent. Here are a few exciting examples in long term care

Many communities in Ontario are looking to expand long term care facilities and colleges are right there to help make that happen. Did you know that we are putting long term care facilities right on college campuses?

The Village at St. Clair College is a long-term care facility located right on the campus of Windsor's St. Clair College. The college has made land available for the facility and in turn has ready access for living classroom opportunities for students. Canadore College and Collège Boréal are both planning new construction of on-campus long-term care facilities, supported by North Bay and Sudbury. Students will be able to learn, practice and work after graduation - supporting seniors with a whole range of care needs – dental hygiene, healthy eating, social activities, physical therapy and so much more. Students get direct placements right in their communities and this means they put down roots, and stay in those communities after they graduate. Win, win, win.

I would be remiss, in talking about health care, to not acknowledge the leadership of municipalities in dealing with the impacts of mental health and addiction challenges across our communities.

Most recently, we've seen the call by Ontario's Big City Mayors to "Solve the Crisis", calling on governments to enact steps to address the homelessness and the mental health crisis.

Thank you for your leadership on these critical issues.

We know that this work too needs the dedicated graduates of college programs - social service workers, child and youth workers and mental health and addictions counsellors just to name a few. New continuing education offerings, such as the one at Centennial College’s microcredential in “Addictions Work: Professional Practice Skills” keep people working in those fields equipped with the latest professional knowledge.

Reconciliation with First Nations peoples is another area of critical shared interest.

Confederation College in Thunder Bay is proud to be a partner in supporting the engagement of First Nations communities in the construction of the Waasigan Transmission power line – a critical piece of infrastructure across northern Ontario that will both support mining in the region and bring clean reliable energy to First Nations communities.

A 100 per cent First Nations owned business has been engaged by the firm leading the project – Valard Construction LP – to ensure that Anishniaabe traditional ways of life are acknowledged and respected throughout the project, and to provide training and employment opportunities to the eight participating First Nations Communities. Seven Generations Education Institute – a first nations institution - brings its unique strengths to the table, while Confederation College offers specialized vocational skills training for all the Indigenous communities participating.

In conclusion, your public colleges and municipalities are trusted and long standing partners on the issues Ontarians care most about. Housing, Healthcare, Jobs. And together, we have a proven track record of finding solutions.

Ontarians need strong and sustainable municipalities. Ontarians also need and deserve a strong public college sector to provide the talent for home construction, childcare, healthcare, economic growth and job creation. In every region of the province. We at Colleges Ontario are increasingly concerned about the strength of the sector and its ability to continue to deliver for you.

For 125 years AMO has been supporting strong municipal government throughout Ontario. For nearly 60 years, public colleges have been delivering the workforce Ontario needs. Together we can continue to build a shared future vision - a more prosperous Ontario!

Thank you very much.