

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Parisa Mahboubi
To: Labour Force Watchers
Date: March 2, 2023
Re: **POSTPANDEMIC YOUTH JOB RECOVERY NEEDS HELP**

COVID-19 and its restrictions hit young Canadians hard because they were overrepresented in industries that suffered most. They were also the principal group affected by the education disruptions that can lead to lower incomes and higher unemployment.

Current record low unemployment rates mask the reality that lasting COVID-19 impacts and ongoing recovery are varied and that the country still has work to do.

First, the youth labour market recovery has been [uneven](#) and groups such as [some visible minorities](#) and [low-educated](#), non-student youth still face high unemployment rates despite the tight labour market across all sectors.

This suggests the need for targeted support and policy interventions. Subsidized employment and training would help. Targeted employment services (counselling and job search assistance) as well as high-quality work experience options such as co-op programs would also help, as [shown](#) in recent C.D. Howe Institute work. Co-op programs can lead to a more successful transition from school to employment and has measurably better labour-market outcomes after graduation, particularly among visible minorities and those in STEM fields.

Second, the pandemic's education disruptions worsened prospects for young Canadians. Closures to in-person learning and inconsistent learning settings resulted in low attendance and classroom engagement. The lack of preparedness to roll out remote learning, along with inequitable access to technology and resources also contributed.

Meanwhile, there is little recent Canadian education data on COVID-19's effects, in part because student assessments were largely suspended for two years. But historical research on the effects of education disruptions and the use of online instruction along with early [evidence](#) from other countries, point to potential learning losses. The consensus is that the amount and quality of learning has been substandard. Although students were able to switch to remote learning, one World Bank [study](#) suggested that emergency remote digital learning only helped mitigate between 15 percent and 60 percent of learning losses from the move away from in-person instruction.

The 2022 results from the first post-pandemic Education Quality and Accountability Office assessment in Ontario support these findings, showing a decline in overall student performance. The Grade 9 [math results](#) were particularly shocking: Only 53 percent of students met the standard, down from 75 percent in 2019.

Learning losses are expected to be particularly significant for low-income and disadvantaged students and those students who experienced more frequent and more prolonged school closures. If they are not addressed, learning losses can lead to future poor educational outcomes – education scarring – and have life-long effects on employment, productivity and incomes.

Offsetting the negative educational effects of the pandemic on youth prospects, preparing them for future of work and equipping them with in-demand skills will require a [holistic approach](#), including:

- Increasing support and funding to expand summer school and private tutoring during and after school for K-12 students;
- Modernizing curricula and providing resources and teachers' training options to ensure strong numeracy and essential digital skills, and raise student performance in STEM subjects;
- Encouraging participation in and support for opportunities in education, learning and training, and addressing [barriers to participation](#) for non-student youth.

The federal government has introduced a recovery [plan](#) to support the creation of new work-integrated training opportunities and short-term, subsidized, high-quality youth jobs. It also announced its [2022 plan](#) to modernize the labour-market agreements with provinces to support workers' retraining and to support an employment strategy for persons with disabilities to increase participation and employment. The most recent [initiative](#) includes supports to address some barriers to kick-start a career among youth in trucking and logistics.

Moreover, provincial governments have [introduced](#) recovery plans to address students' needs. These include online tutoring support. However, it is doubtful they will be as effective as in-person tutoring, and resources and investments are not well-targeted to address gaps and inequalities. Ontario recently offered parents with school-aged children, \$200 or \$250 per child, depending on their child's special education needs, to help students catch up in school by offsetting the cost of tutoring.

These measures will help, but the likelihood of long-lasting negative impacts on youth suggests more vigorous measures are appropriate. Provinces should increase support and funding to expand summer school and offer [high-dosage](#) in-person tutoring during and after school for K-12 students. These students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and the communities most affected, should also receive these supports and catch up on learning.

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