

# Catholic school board to create Construction Academy



DAVE WADDELL, WINDSOR STAR

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St. Joseph's students Thomas Kennedy, left, Josh Gaudreau and Jacob Gagnier receive instruction from teacher Cory McAiney on April 19, 2017, during the announcement of Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board's Construction Academy. **DAN JANISSE / WINDSOR STAR**

Local construction officials welcomed Wednesday's announcement that the Catholic school board will open a Construction Academy this fall as a critical step to addressing the skilled labour shortage in the industry.

The academy, which will operate out of St. Joseph's and Brennan high schools, will be part of the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program.

Programming involves co-op education, paid summer placements and dual credit education with St. Clair College, which is designed to reduce the length of most apprenticeships to four years from five.

There will also be an online component to the program.

"Speaking personally as a contractor, right now it's difficult to get quotes (for labour) prices because there's so much work and not enough tradesmen," said Davide Petretta, president of the Windsor Construction Association.

"The Construction Association has an obligation to our members to support this," he added. "This will help fill the void in the qualified skilled labour force."

Canada Masonry Centre executive director John Blair, whose organization helped set up Brennan's masonry program in 2015, said the Construction Academy is visionary.

"There's nothing like what's going on here in any other place in Canada," Blair said. "We think this bodes well for all of us in the construction industry."

The open-boundary program will be open to every Grade 11 and 12 student in the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board.

The two-year program will allow a student to graduate with a certified high skills major seal on their diploma and up to 1,000 hours towards an apprenticeship.



Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board announced an open boundary Construction Academy at St. Joseph's Catholic High School in Windsor on April 19, 2017. The program will give students the skills needed to work in various trade industries. Director of education Paul Picard addresses attendees at the event. *DAN JANISSE / WINDSOR STAR*

Students also don't have to move from their current home schools to participate in the program.

"Initially, we'd be happy with 20 students, but we're going to have to rethink this," said Dan Fister, the board's executive superintendent of innovation and experiential learning.

"It looks like we're going to have to double the cohort up to 40," he added.

Students have to apply to get in and there will be interviews beginning in mid-May. Information on the academy was distributed to schools last week.

A Construction Academy open house for students and parents will be held beginning at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at St. Joseph's.

The practical, hands-on training — addressing specific needs in the modern economy — fits nicely with the provincial government's vision for education.

The Liberal government also announced Wednesday the creation of 40,000 new work-related learning opportunities.

It includes expanding the Specialist High Skills Major Program by 17,000 spaces and will involve partnering with universities, colleges and private industry.

"I've wanted us to move in this direction for some time," said Cory McAiney, SHSM lead teacher at St. Joseph's. "This will open students' eyes to real possibilities.

"They'll be working with licensed people," he added. "When they walk out of here, they'll be ready for the workforce."

McAiney said local construction and industry officials have been incredibly supportive of the concept.

"I ask organizations and businesses if we can get the contractors' price for something and they just give us the materials for free," McAiney said.

"People are giving us thousands of dollars of materials in some cases," he said.

One of the local organizations the academy will expand their partnership with is Habitat for Humanity.

The St. Joseph's woodworking program has been involved in Habitat's last six house builds locally with a seventh project to start in May.

The plan is for academy students to build entire modules at St. Joseph's that can be shipped to the work site and joined together to create a new home.

"This academy idea is really exciting," said Devin Forget, a Grade 12 student at St. Joseph's. "Students will get to try everything.

"I wish I wasn't graduating," he added. "I would have loved to be part of it."

Paul Picard, director of education, hinted the academy is just the first step in a much grander plan.



"We're just starting," said Picard, acknowledging the attendance of Tecumseh Mayor Gary McNamara and town CAO Tony Haddad.

"The announcements coming in the next few months, we believe, are going to be game-changers as far as construction in this area," Picard said.

"(Tecumseh has) committed to moving forward with us and helping us with some of the future endeavours we plan to get into. This is a wonderful start, but we intend to do much more."

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St. Joe's students Jacob Gagnier, left, Josh Gaudreau and Devin Forget work on framing techniques at the school.

*DAN JANISSE / WINDSOR STAR*



Student Thomas Kennedy, 16, sorts plumbing piping. *DAN JANISSE / WINDSOR STAR*



Students Josh Gaudreau, left, Jacob Gagnier and Devin Forget raise a wall into position. *DAN JANISSE / WINDSOR STAR*

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**Mark Buis**

Wow what took so long? We had a FULL technical wing in Highschool 70-90s . All major trades classes. Both school boards dropped this very important ball that was supplying informed students into the trades. Too little too late. But better than nothing.

Like · Reply · 3 · 9 hrs · Edited

**Bruce Desjardins** · McMaster University

Sports academies leave kids still dreaming at the end of High School. This idea will actually provide a great job for life. It's about time.

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**Katherine Mulder**

do they have a school already for the classes ?? Maybe Harrow High School would be a good building for the classes !! Maybe there could be other trades use the school also !!

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**Jayne Talbot** · Windsor, Ontario

We need opportunity schools for kids today. Like King George, William Hands and Alicia Mason. So many kids are just being pushed through the system.....no skills.....oh but wait.....the fricken welfare system will send them a check once a month so the kids think they don't need school at all and drop out! Give them hands on training like Western does still. Give these kids a chance to really learn.....a lot of us were not scholastic, couldn't write a lot on paper but could learn trades very easily. Wake up separate and public school boards. 🖋️📅📖📎

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**Vicky Bechard** · General Amherst High School

It's about time to go back to teaching trades . Now maybe kids will be interested in attending classes

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