

paying for it. And we are certainly paying enough. This country spends 7.8 per cent of its GDP on education. The problem is not that we are not spending enough on education. The problem is that we are not getting value for it.

And that is the second message. Canadians are downright dissatisfied with the quality of education in this country. The discontent is general and well-informed. It comes from students, from parents, from business, from labour and from educators. It manifests itself in a growing uneasiness about high-school drop-out rates, low rates in functional literacy and numeracy, and a general lack of preparedness for the modern workplace.

Canadians don't want to see the federal government getting directly involved in education. They do believe that it is logical and desirable for the federal government to provide some leadership in this field. They see this to be critical to our competitiveness and our standard of living. The Government of Canada can make quality education and training what it needs to be: a Canada-wide cause.

The goal is clear enough. We want a quality, results-oriented system for education and training in this country.

The federal government can be a catalyst for collaboration in making this happen. It can and should bring together what we're calling these days "the stakeholders": students, parents, business, labour, and the provincial governments. I believe that the federal government, acting on behalf of all Canadians, has a responsibility to lead the way -- and a responsibility, too, to press the provinces to implement the changes that are required.

Another area in which federal leadership is needed is the development of national standards. And by that I don't mean federal ones. I mean standards for measuring quality and progress that would apply from coast to coast; leadership in developing a system that focuses on excellence and on results.

The place to start is with a decision about what we, as Canadians, want our education and training systems to achieve. Having made that decision, we must reorient the system to fit. Doing things in that order -- rather than the other way around -- will get us to a system focused on results.

During the Prosperity consultations, some hard and searching questions were raised about the system. They were common from one end of the country to the other. The most basic concern is the end product. Canadians are demanding action, and they are looking to both the federal and provincial governments for solutions. Canadians individually are not getting the quality of education and training they need to make it in the world of work.