

Education as a Catalyst in Modern Mining:

How Tutoring is Opening Career Pathways for Students

By Joanne Sallay, President & CEO, Teachers on Call Tutoring



The selected participants were immersed in modern mining, something few educators ever get to experience.

I'll be the first to admit I'm not your typical contributor to Canadian Mining Magazine. I'm not a geologist, engineer, or industry executive. I come from the world of education, as President & CEO of Teachers on Call, an in-home and online tutoring service since 1984, known for providing one-on-one curriculum-based support by provincially certified teachers for elementary and high school students from kindergarten to grade 12 across Canada.

But as fate would have it, I've been called something unexpected in recent months: an accidental advocate for educating students and teachers about the mining industry. In the article that follows, I'll explain how this unlikely intersection came to be and the implications for the future. In particular, I'll talk about how education can serve as a long-term solution to one of the greatest challenges facing the sector: a significant shortage of skilled trades and professionals. This includes the growing difficulty of attracting and retaining talent, especially as demand for critical minerals continues to rise.

MY JOURNEY TO BECOMING AN ACCIDENTAL MINING ADVOCATE

This journey started far from mine sites, in living rooms with laptops shortly after the pandemic in spring of 2022. Through the Ontario Learning Recovery Action Plan, launched in response to COVID-19

and funded by the Ministry of Education when the Honourable Stephen Lecce was Minister of Education (now Minister of Energy and Mines), my company partnered with five Ontario school boards to provide free tutoring to thousands of deserving students across the province who met specific criteria for participation. The program focused on priority learners from diverse backgrounds, including financially vulnerable students living in shelters and government housing in major urban centres.

While the academic needs among low-socioeconomic students in cities like Toronto didn't come as a surprise, what did shock me was the extent of the learning challenges in rural and remote communities.

THE DILEMMA AND THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

When that funding ended, I couldn't stop thinking about the students in these remote areas. How could we reach them again? Why were they just as behind, or even more behind, than the city kids from vulnerable neighbourhoods? I believe it all came down to one thing – access. Many of these students lacked basic access to educational supports like tutoring or nearby high schools – the kind of access many urban dwellers don't think twice about.

That's when a trusted mentor and friend, the Honourable Lisa Raitt (former Minister of Natural Resources), encouraged me to explore the mining industry as a potential partner in education. It was sound advice. She understood firsthand the industry's vested interest in seeing students in northern Ontario and Canada succeed in school and contribute back to their local communities when they reach adulthood.

SEEING MODERN MINING UP CLOSE: DOING MY OWN HOMEWORK

Like any good student, I did my homework. I began by attending the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada (PDAC) convention and joined the Toronto Chapter of Women in Mining, where I participated in lunch-and-learn sessions hosted by industry leaders like Mary McKenzie of Odgers.

Through PDAC and Women in Mining, I learned a great deal about the pressing challenges facing the industry – many of

which were new to me, but familiar to this magazine's readers. I quickly realized that some of the biggest issues in modern mining could benefit from cross-sector collaboration with industries like mine. Contrary to what many in the industry believe, I don't think teachers have a negative perception of mining, rather it's simply not on their radar.

That's when I began my journey to help "teach the teachers," working to bring more awareness and understanding of the industry to the education sector.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS AT PDAC

As part of that effort, I began inviting teachers and principals through my education network, in partnership with Mining Matters, to join me at PDAC so they could gain their own understanding of the sector and bring those insights back to their students and classrooms.

These educators represented a wide range of grade levels, subject areas, and school communities – from elementary educators to secondary teachers in science, business, and co-op education. Each one brought a unique lens to the experience, discovering new ways to connect modern mining to the curriculum and open the eyes of students (and their parents!) to career pathways they may have never considered.

EXPERIENCING LIFE ON A MINE SITE: JUST THE 20 OF US

My journey continued in August 2024 with the Mining & Mineral Resources Educator Tour in Gogama, Ontario, as part of the Ontario Mining Association's This is Mine Life campaign, coordinated in partnership with Mining Matters, the Canadian Ecology Centre, and hosted by IAMGOLD. We toured and lived at Côte Gold Mine, which is one of the newest and most technologically advanced mining operations in Canada. You can watch a YouTube video about this visit at www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLUGr5hBY3M.

The tour brought together educators from diverse backgrounds and geographies across Ontario. Just 20 of us were selected to participate, creating an immersive and focused learning experience that few educators ever get. It was a powerful opportunity to see how modern mining intersects with education, community,



In 2024, Joanne Sallay, along with 20 other educators from throughout Ontario, toured and lived at Côte Gold Mine. Photos courtesy of Joanne Sallay.

and future careers. For anyone interested in reading more about this field trip, I encourage you to search online for my personal accounts, which were shared in the Teachers on Call corporate blog (www.teachersoncall.ca/site/blog-toronto-gta-tutor – September 29, 2024) and this magazine's blog (www.canadianminingmagazine.com/blog – January 16, 2025). As well, additional resources are available for youth and for educators through This is Mine Life (www.talentegg.ca/employer/this-is-mine-life).

This visit was captured on video, and for anyone who views it, a pivotal moment for me was when former Côte Gold's VP & General Manager, Bryan Wilson, told me, "We hire every discipline out of college and university – tell your students to come work for us."

His message stuck with me. The opportunity is real, but it starts with education. Students need to graduate high school first, but they also need appropriate guidance and tools to succeed in prerequisite courses like math and English. I'm proud to share that this conversation helped inspire the pilot tutoring initiative Teachers on Call has launched together with IAMGOLD's Côte Gold Mine – one



The hope was that teachers like the 20 who participated would bring back the knowledge of what they learned, and the endless career opportunities available, to students, parents, and fellow educators.

of the most advanced mining operations in the world and now a trailblazer in partnering on this first-of-its-kind tutoring initiative.

AN INNOVATIVE TUTORING SOLUTION

This forward-thinking campaign is more than strong environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices; it's a targeted educational solution. Designed to support students in local and Indigenous communities near mine sites, the initiative provides tutoring to help youth stay in school, complete their credits, and build confidence for the future. These students are encouraged to succeed with the knowledge that there are ample opportunities to find meaningful employment where they are, without the need to leave their local communities. It also supports hardworking employees' families, enhancing recruitment, retention, and community ties.

This is education as a tool for workforce development, economic reconciliation, and community building. And it's just the beginning. Mining doesn't just need trucks and cutting-edge technology – it needs strong graduates. Through early investment in academic support, the sector can help build the pipeline of skilled, motivated talent it will rely on for decades to come.

LOOKING AHEAD: A CALL TO COLLABORATION

As someone who stumbled into this space through tutoring, I now believe deeply in the power of cross-sector collaboration. The future of mining involves more than sophisticated machinery; it requires the minds of students who are not only ready and able, but who are inspired to pursue careers in modern mining and apply their talents to help shape the industry's future.

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