EFFECTING CHANGE THROUGH EDUCATION:

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN ONTARIO'S POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Effecting Change through Education:

Aboriginal Students in Ontario's Post-Secondary Education System

Issue Paper

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About Our Organization
The College Student Alliance (CSA) is a member-driven advocacy organization which has been proudly serves Ontario's college and college-university students since 1975. The CSA currently represents students from 16 colleges and 23 student associations with over 130,000 full-time student members throughout the province.

Cover art via Patrick Hunter, "Turtles," 11x14, acrylic on canvas, 2009. Used with permission.

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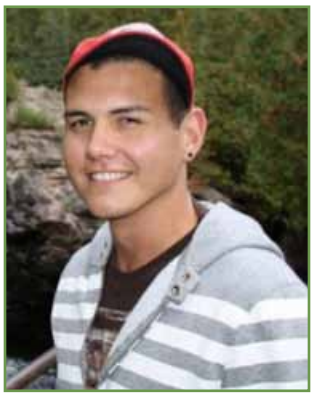


Dear Reader,

My name is Patrick Hunter, and I am a 23-year-old Ojibway from Red Lake, Ontario. I attended Sault College in Sault Ste. Marie, for three years in their graphic design program, which I successfully completed in May 2011. I am currently studying at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto working towards my B.A. in design. I was involved in student government as the Native Student Council President from 2009 to 2011 at Sault College. My council and I had the opportunity to engage the student body and promote cultural awareness through workshops, guest speakers, fashion shows, pow wows, and exhibitions.

I also worked with the College Student Alliance (CSA) and was instrumental in spear-heading their "Make Your Mark" project as a facilitator for sharing circles at both Sault College and Confederation College. I was shocked by the stories that were being shared by my people. Some students were very positive about their post-secondary educational experiences; some were annoyed with the hoops they had to jump through in order to walk through the classroom door. However, they were all hopeful for the future. They remained resilient in the face of tremendous hardships, from being single parents of multiple children, to struggling with a language barrier at a predominantly English-speaking school. They were confident that they would triumph over their current obstacles and remained hopeful that things would get better in the future. Things have to get better.

Action and policy implementation are required to ensure our nation's success. The decisions we need to make now will bring about a renaissance of Canadian life, one in which Aboriginal people are healthy and working to strengthen the economy and infrastructure of Ontario for this generation and those to come. If change is not made, we will stay in the current sub-standard mediocrity that simply does not work. Chi-meegwetch for those of you who read the CSA's stance and recommendations on effecting change through education as they are practical and sound. I hope you are left with a better understanding of Aboriginal peoples' struggles and I hope you realize that my people and I are ready and willing to make this nation better for you, for us, and for those to come.

Sincerely,

Patrick Hunter

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aboriginal populations in Canada are characterised by low socioeconomic and health standards and do not enjoy the same high standards of living as the general population. A post-secondary education (PSE) is the vehicle to help Aboriginal populations overcome these hardships. However, there are many issues that face Aboriginal students' access to PSE, including financial, historical, educational, personal, institutional, and geographical barriers.

Aboriginal students who want to access PSE are hampered by the low rates of success in elementary and secondary education. Smaller numbers of Aboriginal children graduate from high school than non-Aboriginal children. They are most likely to be the first in their families to pursue PSE and come from low-income families. Historically, the education policy that was adopted by past governments was that of assimilation: these policies have proven to be a failure and have marginalized Aboriginal communities, as is discussed below.

In Canada, the average performance of Aboriginal children is below that of non-Indigenous students. Those students who live on reserves are under the jurisdiction of the federal government and thus their school funding is provided by the federal government. These federally-funded schools lack the cohesive school system that we have in Ontario's public schools. This situational and unconsistent education system makes it difficult for individual schools to develop, plan, evaluate, and implement an education program that can meet the needs of First Nations communities on a greater level.

In secondary school, there are even more challenges for students to overcome. Aboriginal youth, like the youth across Canada, generally decide whether to attend post-secondary school before the age of 15, and sometimes as early as age 9.[1] This is why early outreach initiatives (EOIs) play such a vital role in increasing PSE participation rates. Data suggests that the drop-out rate for Aboriginals before completion of grade 9 is about 20% and 40% before completion of grade 12, compared to 3% and 16% respectively for the non-Aboriginal population.[2] Not only are Aboriginal students facing barriers due to low high school graduation rates, they are also less academically prepared for post-secondary education which then leads to higher dropout rates.

Rural, remote and reserve schools typically do not offer the academic preparation required for a successful transition to post-secondary education. Thus, transitioning programs are also essential in helping all Aboriginal students progress their education. These programs include, but are not limited to, bridging programs, literacy programs, adult basic education, Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) equivalency programs, and dual credit programs. Some Aboriginal communities simply do not have adequate secondary schools in their area and students have to leave their homes at a young age to attend high school in a more urbanized region. Accommodation facilities could be a way to address the complex issues that students face when they live in communities without secondary schools. These facilities would have to be designed, built, and overseen in cooperation with Aboriginal communities in order for them to succeed.

Once students attain a high school education, they face even more barriers to accessing a post-secondary education; one of the most daunting being a lack of funding. Outdated limits on government funding for Aboriginal PSE negatively impacts the abilities of eligible students to apply for necessary funding. Only those registered under the *Indian Act* can apply for the federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), a key funding programs that affords students the opportunity to attend PSE. This lack of funding is due to a 2% funding cap imposed on the PSSSP in the mid-1990s. Current funding from this program does not represent the true cost of education as the cost of tuition and living costs have increased at a rate higher than inflation. This cap is also problematic because there are more and more students graduating high school who are eligible to attend post-secondary

education: this is particularly concerning due to the fact that the Aboriginal population is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population and will be well-placed to access PSE in the future. Due to the legal complexities regarding the definitions of Métis and non-status Indians, they are not eligible to receive benefits and rights as people that have status are entitled to under the *Indian Act*. They do, however, share the same problems as First Nations and Inuit communities.

This lack of funding must be addressed as Aboriginal communities have had to ration PSSSP funds or prioritize students due to limited financial resources as more and more students try to attain a post-secondary education. The lack of data and policy guidance for bands coping with additional students and a funding shortfall is an issue that must be addressed. If the cap will not be lifted to better reflect the cost of post-secondary education, bands must be given guidance and support in addressing these issues. Currently, there is no national funding formula that guides First Nations' distribution of funds: there are only vague federal guidelines and region formulas that are varied. This has resulted in great concern and confusion about how funding should be distributed, as there have been issues with accountability, nepotism and fairness.

When considering that Aboriginal peoples have a risk of high school drop-out that is more than twice the national average, retention in PSE programs becomes that much more important. Students who beat the odds to attend a PSE institution have a gamut of other challenges that they face in order to complete their programs. Many Aboriginal students come from rural areas and have a higher chance of coming from low income families and it is a common experience for Aboriginal students to be the first in their families to pursue a PSE; they often lack mentorship to help them with the transition.[3] Many issues that Aboriginal learners encounter can be addressed with support services and retention practices.

Aboriginal students are most successful in college programs when there is strong community engagement and where Aboriginal leadership is supportive.[4] Aboriginal students have better retention and graduation rates in institutions that are able to provide strong support to Aboriginal students. One way in which this support can be created is through an Aboriginal space on campus. These spaces are successful because they can "offer emotional support, a sense of community, peer support, administrative assistance, and educational resources."[5] This can help address the alienation and loneliness that Aboriginal students feel when they start their studies as many Aboriginal students leave home in order to attend a post-secondary institution. As these spaces are open and inclusive, they can serve to educate the general non-Aboriginal student population about ways that are not familiar to them.

The common profile of students applying to the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation shows that they tend to be women, 27 years old, many of whom are single parents.[6] The lack of available and affordable childcare is an issue for many Aboriginal students: the burden of finding accessible and affordable childcare is one of the most frequently cited challenges. One of the other ways that Aboriginal students need to be supported in their efforts is by giving students grants to help with the actual move away from home, and the visits home for those that come from rural communities. Having these grants is likely to make post-secondary education more attractive to Aboriginal students, and make them see PSE as a viable option. This grant would go a long way to help those Aboriginal students who live away from home in their move to attend school and help them overcome various barriers, including financial, geographical and motivational barriers.

Canada's First Nations, having a relatively young population compared to the general Canadian population, represent a potential pool of skilled labour that could make valuable contributions in reducing Canada's expected labour shortages that is due to our aging population. In order to bring up the participation rates of Aboriginal students in the post-secondary realm, the different barriers to access must be addressed. These efforts cannot stand alone as a single individual, program, or initiative will solve all the problems encountered by Aboriginal learners. The substandard conditions that are faced by Aboriginal people in Canada can be improved by an educated populace, which is why the attainment of a post-secondary education for Aboriginal people must be made a priority. By working in cooperation, the different groups and levels of government can help build a more promising future for individual Aboriginals and their communities and to build a stronger Canadian economy and society.

BARRIERS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION CHART

Financial	Institutional	Historical	Geographical	Educational	Personal
2% cap on PSSP program	Lack of program coordination	Distrust of government	Relocation is difficult from rural communities	Difference between mainstream and Aboriginal thought	Lack of role models
Higher costs of education	Bias against Aboriginal culture	Lack of Aboriginal history in curriculum	High travel costs	Higher secondary school dropout rates	Lack of family and community support
Limited band funding: rationing and waitlists	Lack of Aboriginal groups involvement in policy and decision making	Jurisdictional voids due to Constitution and other legal texts	Culture shock when entering an urbanized area from a remote community		Family responsibilities: child or family care
Métis and non-status students cannot access funds	Inability to track students through educational systems	Outdated interpretations of status	Lack of secondary schools and colleges in community		High levels of worry and anxiety
Debt aversion					
Funding gap does not consider real costs of school					

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS CHART[A]

Financial	Institutional	Historical	Geographical	Educational	Personal
Remove the 2% funding cap on the PSSP program	Create a school system for K-12 for on-reserve students	Expand on Aboriginal issues in Ontario's teacher resource guide	Create facilities for students that attend high school outside their home communities	Include aboriginal ways of learning in mainstream education	Expand community early outreach initiatives
Develop a national funding distribution formula to prevent misspending	Create preparatory programs at institutions where they do not exist	Allow Métis and non-status students to access all Aboriginal programs	Create relocation grants for Aboriginal students	Expand the University and College Entrance Program to all Aboriginal students	Expand mentorship programs
Revise national guidelines to help account for additional students and funding shortfalls	Create orientation programs at PSE institutions to help students access services		Expand the Ontario Distance Grants so that they can be accessed without an OSAP application		Ensure child care facilities are available
	Encourage PSE institutions to welcome Elders and Aboriginal community members				
	Create an Aboriginal space on campuses for Aboriginal students to have a safe space				

[A] For a list of recommendations, see page 7

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: Expand Ontario's teacher resource guides to highlight past injustices and the impact they have on Aboriginal communities today (p.12).

RECOMMENDATION 2: Expand on outreach activities with community partners to improve outreach programs' effectiveness and efficiency (p.17).

RECOMMENDATION 3: Ensure that educators include Aboriginal ways of learning into the mainstream curriculum to help engage Aboriginal students and thus help them overcome feelings of alienation (p.18).

RECOMMENDATION 4: Develop an education system for on-reserve schools (that currently does not exist) for grades K-12, in cooperation with First Nations communities and the respective governments (p.18).

RECOMMENDATION 5: Expand support programs in high schools by expanding transitioning programs to all Aboriginals, not just those registered with the *Indian Act* (p.20).

RECOMMENDATION 6: Encourage PSE institutions to continue to offer and improve preparatory programs to ensure that Aboriginal students can access PSE and overcome barriers to education (p.21).

RECOMMENDATION 7: Expand on mentorship programs that help students to make informed post-secondary decisions prior to leaving high school, through advice from high school-aged or adult mentors (p.22).

RECOMMENDATION 8: Ensure guidance departments have adequate staff and resources to help students in their transition to life after high school, and incorporate more post-secondary education and financial aid information into the high school curriculum (p.22).

RECOMMENDATION 9: Urge the federal and provincial government to work with communities to create accommodation facilities for high school students that move away from their home to attend high school (p.23).

RECOMMENDATION 10: Develop a formal distribution formula by Aboriginal communities in collaboration with the federal government to allow for transparent and fair distribution and help reduce misspending of program funds (p.27).

RECOMMENDATION 11: Review and revise the National Program Guidelines for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP) Program to include options for bands coping with additional students and a funding shortfall (p.27).

RECOMMENDATION 12: Remove to the 2% funding cap on the federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) funding and readjust funding limits to meet the needed funding levels (p.28).

RECOMMENDATION 13: Allow Métis and non-status students to access PSSSP and other PSE programs (p.30).

RECOMMENDATION 14: Maintain or create an orientation program to familiarize Aboriginal students to the various support services on campus, especially ones that are Aboriginal-specific (p.31).

RECOMMENDATION 15: Make child care facilities available for all students or help students find such services in the community (p.32).

RECOMMENDATION 16: Encourage institutions and governments to create targeted-funding relocation grants for Aboriginal students to help students overcome geographic barriers (p.33).

RECOMMENDATION 17: Revise the criteria for the Ontario Distance Grant and expand the grant so that all students can access the application, not just those applying to OSAP (p.33).

RECOMMENDATION 18: Encourage post-secondary institutions, including staff and faculty, to welcome Elders and other Aboriginal community members to serve as student advisors, counsellors, guest lecturers and resource personnel where applicable to help overcome personal barriers to education (p.34).

RECOMMENDATION 19: Encourage institutions to create an Aboriginal space, such as a room or center on each campus so students feel welcome at the PSE institution (p.34).

INTRODUCTION

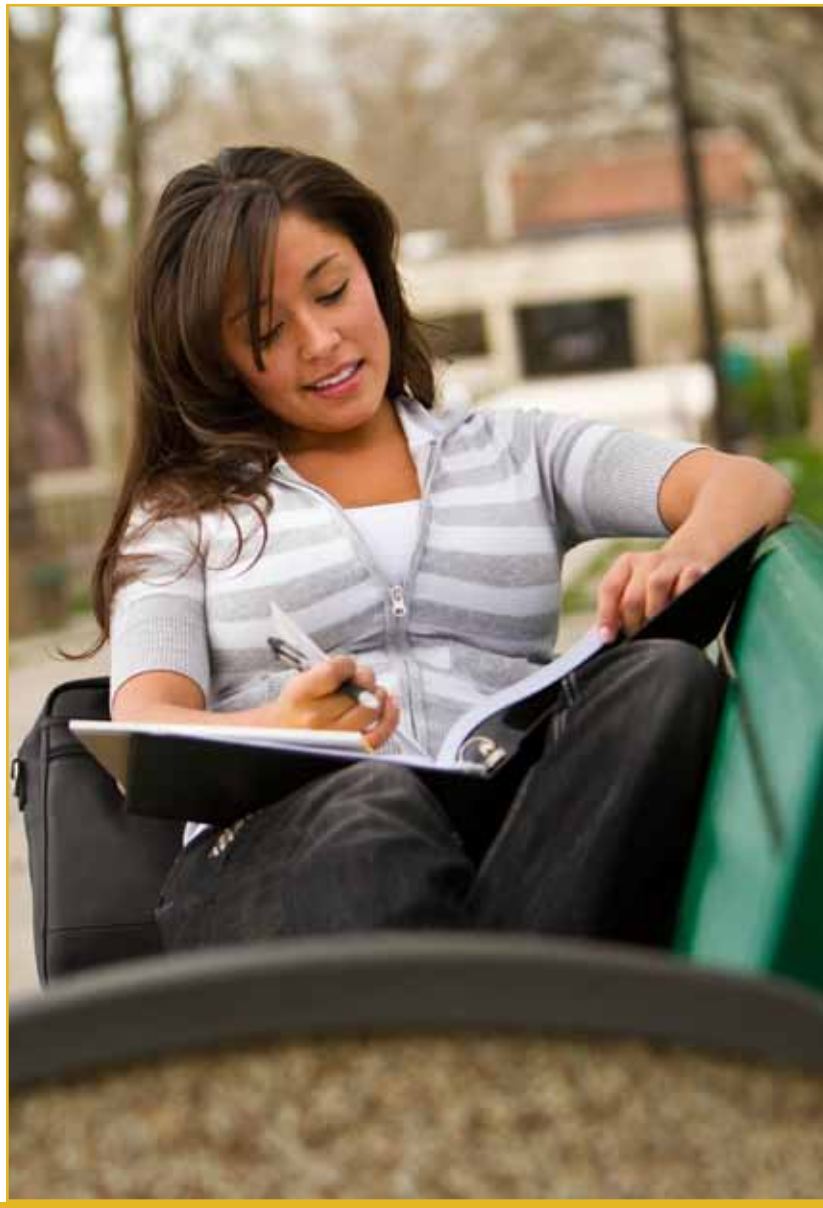
Aboriginal[B] students pursuing a post-secondary education (PSE) in Ontario face many challenges that hinder their success. Aboriginal people in Canada are considered vulnerable, meaning that they "have a greater probability than the population as a whole of being harmed and experiencing an impaired quality of life because of social, environmental, health, or economic conditions or policies".[7] This is shown by the fact that life expectancy for Aboriginal people is lower and illness is more common. In Canada, they face more social issues, from family violence to substance abuse. A smaller number of Aboriginal children graduate from high school than non-Aboriginal children. They are also most likely to be the first in the families to pursue PSE and come from families that have a low income.

The substandard conditions that are faced by Aboriginal people in Canada can be improved by an educated populace, which is why the attainment of a post-secondary education for Aboriginal people must be made a priority. The governments of Ontario and Canada must work in collaboration with Aboriginal people and other stakeholders to help make an educated Aboriginal population a reality in the near future. There are many economic returns on educational attainment for Aboriginal peoples and Canada as a whole:

"If the average Aboriginal Canadian benefited from the same social and economic conditions as those enjoyed by the average Canadian, the different government levels of Canada could [re]allocate $6.2 billion dollars towards other social programs, towards debt reduction or towards a reduction of the tax burden."[8]

[B] The term Aboriginal includes First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people. Where appropriate, First Nation, Métis, and/or Inuit learners are referred to specifically. The term Aboriginal is used throughout this document to include all people of Aboriginal ancestry and heritage.

Canada's Aboriginal communities are historically under-represented in PSE. However, these same populations are characterized by high birth rates and are therefore growing and young. The goal of this issue paper is to provide background information on key issues, and inform the development of comprehensive policy recommendations for Aboriginal PSE success.

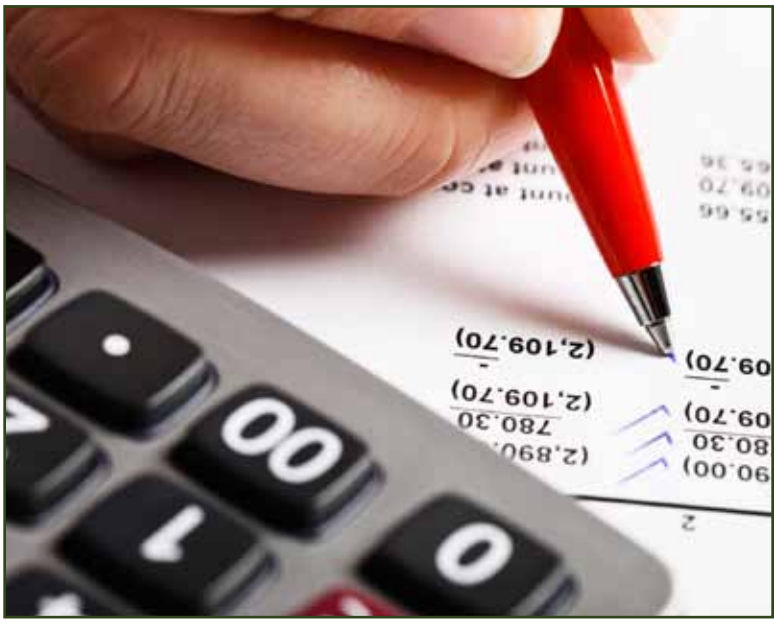


METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology has been chosen for this paper because qualitative research methods can provide acute portrayals of complex events, stakeholders and experiences. A qualitative analysis is especially helpful in this issue paper because it explores cultural and institutional barriers that negatively affect the ability of Aboriginal students to access a PSE in Ontario. The research in this paper has been derived from primary (interviews and publications) and secondary sources (research literature). The literature review and research was conducted by way of various Internet search engines. The search for academic articles took place through such portals as Scholar's Portal, EBSCO Academic Research Premier, Google Scholar, Proquest, and Sage portal. Government publications were retrieved from Statistics Canada, INAC, and other government of Canada websites. Other reports and literature were found through the websites of research institutes that are relevant to the study of Aboriginal peoples and post-secondary education, as well as open-ended searches.

This research is limited to the Ontario case with respect to the Aboriginal demographics and the issues faced by this group. It should also be noted that the author of this paper is not of Aboriginal descent. This paper was informed by consultation with Aboriginal students via the College Student Alliance's (CSA) "Make Your Mark" focus groups carried out on January 21, 2009 at Sault College and on February 4, 2010 at Confederation College. The Make Your Mark project included two focus groups' interviews that were carried out by two student leaders in the Confederation College in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and Sault College in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

The interview process for these focus groups was semi-structured, included scripted questions. Open-ended discussion was encouraged. The interview method was a culturally sensitive one, referred to as a sharing circle. Sharing circles are a unique small-group discussion process in which participants (including the leader) share their feelings, experiences, and insights in response to specific, assigned topics.[9] The interviews were transcribed by the host and confidentiality was maintained by the separation of data from identifiable individuals and storing the code linking data to individuals securely. It was also ensured that those who have access to the data maintained confidentiality by not discussing the issues arising from an individual interview with others in ways that might identify an individual and by not disclosing what an individual said in an interview.



More informal consultations were also carried out in the research process, including an Aboriginal Caucus during the CSA's May 2011 conference, various conversations with Aboriginal students and some support staff in Aboriginal students support centres in colleges in Ontario, and in participation at the 2011 Aboriginal Postsecondary Education Gathering.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In order to adequately address the needs of Aboriginal students one must be aware of the historical experience of Aboriginal people in the area of education. The impact of education is intergenerational meaning that the education experience and attitudes of the parents and prior generations impact the current generation.[10]

In reviewing Aboriginal education history in Canada, some glaring problems must be brought to light to facilitate and lend depth to the discussion that will bring about sound policy. One of the most fundamental issues is that of jurisdiction. Although education in Canada constitutionally falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces, First Nations' and Inuit students' education falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government[C] due to the *Indian Act*.[D,11]

There is strong disagreement about Aboriginal PSE – not only about who should provide what, but also how much should be provided. The argument about where the responsibility falls for PSE comes from the fact that the federal government of Canada "claims that post-secondary education... clearly [falls] under jurisdiction of the provincial government. Yet, the provincial governments, on the other hand view[s]... [it] as falling under the auspices of the federal government."[12] First Nation political leaders assert that education at all levels is a right gained through treaty based on treaty interpretation, the fiduciary obligation of the Crown and the unique constitutional position of First Nations.[13] This debate has yet to be resolved, but understanding the two sides of the argument is critical to understanding the policies relating to post-secondary education.

IS ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION A RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROVINCIAL OR FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?

Because PSE is not named in the *Indian Act*, the federal government argues that it does not have to take responsibility for PSE support. In fact, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada views Aboriginal PSE as a social policy rather than a right.[14] Aboriginal leaders such as those from First Nations communities argue that the government's treaty interpretation does not take into consideration the differences between the written text and text transmitted through oral tradition and reiterate that PSE is a right and not just a social responsibility.

Due to the enactment and implementation of the *Constitution Act* of 1867 (also known as the *British North America Act*) and of the *Indian Act* (1876), the government was required to provide Aboriginal peoples living on reserves[E] with an education. The *Indian Act*, which has been revised numerous times since its inception, is the principal federal statute dealing with: Indian status; local government; the management of reserve land; and management of communal monies.[15] From these two *Acts*,[F] the federal government was given authority of the education of First Nation students, giving them "complete control of education for all Aboriginal students living on reserves."[16] The *Indian Act*'s

[C] However, some Aboriginal communities have authority over education outside of the *Indian Act* due to a jurisdictional transfer, like the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia with the Mi'kmaq Education Act (1998)

[D] The term "Indian" is only used due the historical context to avoid confusion, and only where appropriate. Its use is restricted because it is geographically inaccurate and can carry racist connotations.

[E] Also known as Aboriginal communities.

[F] The 1867 Constitution Act, section 91 (24), vested all legislative authority for Indians and Indian lands in the federal government. As a result, First Nations education was defined as a federal responsibility and separate from provincial responsibility for education (sec. 93).

education section (114 to 122) spells out in careful detail the requirement for First Nation children to attend schools imposed upon them.

Historically, the education policy that was adopted by the federal government was that of assimilation, meaning that the education system was used to integrate Aboriginal children into mainstream Eurocentric-Canadian society. As Indigenous knowledge and traditions did not mirror the typical Canadian order of life, there was a bias against Aboriginal ways of life. To the European and Canadian governments of the past, anything that was non-European in origin was not legitimate. This led to the idea that Aboriginal people were not civilized and needed to be enlightened to the "proper" ways of living, which resulted in the creation of residential schools in Canada. Residential schools opened in Canada in the 1880s. They were brought about by a report from Nicholas Flood Davin.[17] John A. MacDonald, the Prime Minister at the time, commissioned Davin to write a report on the industrial school system in the United States. The report, titled *"Report on industrial schools for Indians and half-breeds"* popularised the notion of "aggressive civilization"[18] in which the duty of the Government was seen as "[affording] the Indians all reasonable aid in their preparation for citizenship by educating them in industry and in the arts of civilization."[19] This was carried out by taking children from their families and enrolling them in residential boarding schools: these schools proved to be an utter failure.

"The history of Aboriginal peoples is not taught – the dark history also needs to be included in the mainstream education system to [show] an accurate history of our country" – A student from Confederation College

The first residential schools were opened in 1883: they reached their height in 1931 with 80 schools, and the last school closed its doors in 1996.[20] Due to the assimilation policies adopted by the federal government, more than 90,000 children who attended residential schools were prohibited from using Aboriginal languages and culture,[21] and were stripped of parenting skills as they did not have role models to show them appropriate and culturally relevant parenting techniques. The government worked with Christian missionaries to run these schools, which were little more than forced labour camps where students spent half the day in the classroom and the other at work.[G] In residential schools, Christian religion and European values and traditions were compulsory, and physical, sexual and mental abuse was not abnormal.[22,23] With a revision of the *Indian Act* in 1911, residential school attendance "became mandatory for all children between the ages of 7 and 15."[24] To illustrate the beliefs of the time, Duncan Campbell Scott, the head of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, notoriously said:

"I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone… Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department."[25]

These racist and discriminatory ideas about the use of education as a tool of assimilation continued on to the post-secondary school realm. From 1876 until 1951, the *Indian Act* stated that any Indian who obtained a college diploma or university degree would automatically lose their Indian status. This process, called enfranchisement,[26] was designed to be a voluntary process that would give Aboriginal people the rights to vote and go to school, which were forbidden from them. However, giving up their status meant that they would have to give up the right to live on reserves, further destroying Aboriginal families and communities. Residential schools and enfranchisement practices greatly harmed Aboriginal communities across Canada and the issues from these practices remain today. In 2008 on behalf of Canada, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an

[E] Students spent half the day in the classroom and the other at work. The theory behind this was that students would learn skills that would allow them to earn a living as adults, but the reality was that work had more to do with running the school inexpensively than with providing students with vocational training. Funding was a dominant factor in the residential school system. From the 1890s until the 1950s, the government tried constantly to shift the burden of the schools onto the churches, whose members made donations, and onto the students, whose labour was a financial contribution.

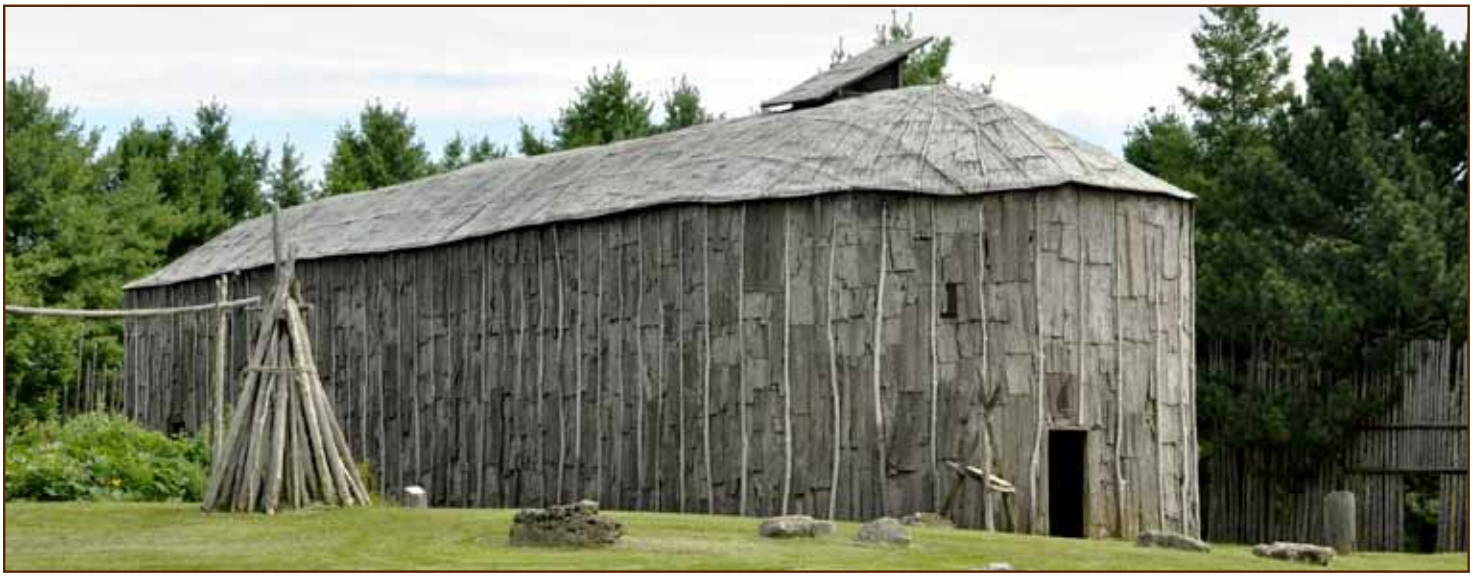
apology to former residential school students, stating that assimilation policies were "wrong, [have] caused great harm and [have] no place in our country."[27]

Moving forward from the struggle brought on by the residential schools and other assimilation policies, the federal government moved to improve PSE for Aboriginal students by providing financial support on a case-by-case basis until 1968. At that time, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)[H] introduced a financial assistance program for technical, vocational, college and university training. The success of this program eventually brought on the Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program (PSEAP) in 1977, and eventually resulted in the 1989 Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). PSSSP caused a rapid increase in the number of status First Nations and Inuit students enrolled in Canadian colleges and universities. Presently, non-status First Nations and Métis students are not covered by the *Indian Act*, despite the recognition of Métis[I] as Aboriginal people in section 35(2) of the Constitution. Therefore, INAC's Post-Secondary Student Support Program funding is not available to them as the federal government does not any accept responsibility for Métis and non-status Indian education.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

EXPAND ONTARIO'S TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDES TO HIGHLIGHT PAST INJUSTICES.

Teachers and other staff members who use the Teacher's Toolkit should be aware of the gaps of Aboriginal history and social issues in the toolkit. The Teacher's Toolkit is a collection of electronic resources for Ontario's elementary and secondary school teachers and is meant to bring Aboriginal perspectives into the classroom. While the ideas and strategies for teaching Aboriginal perspectives are definitely a step in the right direction, the more taboo topics regarding the brutal and embarrassing history and the roles of the Canadian government and other stakeholders played in Aboriginal history should be taught, especially in the higher grades in secondary school. This is especially important with regards to assimilation and residential school policies of the past, as well as the issues that exist in Aboriginal communities in the present.



[H] Since May 2011, the name of the department has been changed to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

[I] Once the Numbered Treaties were signed and following the Battle of Batoche in1885, formal education for Métis children became difficult in that neither the federal nor provincial governments claimed responsibility for the education of Métis children. These children were caught in a jurisdictional void. From CCL, 2009

Who are Aboriginal peoples?[28]

FIRST NATIONS

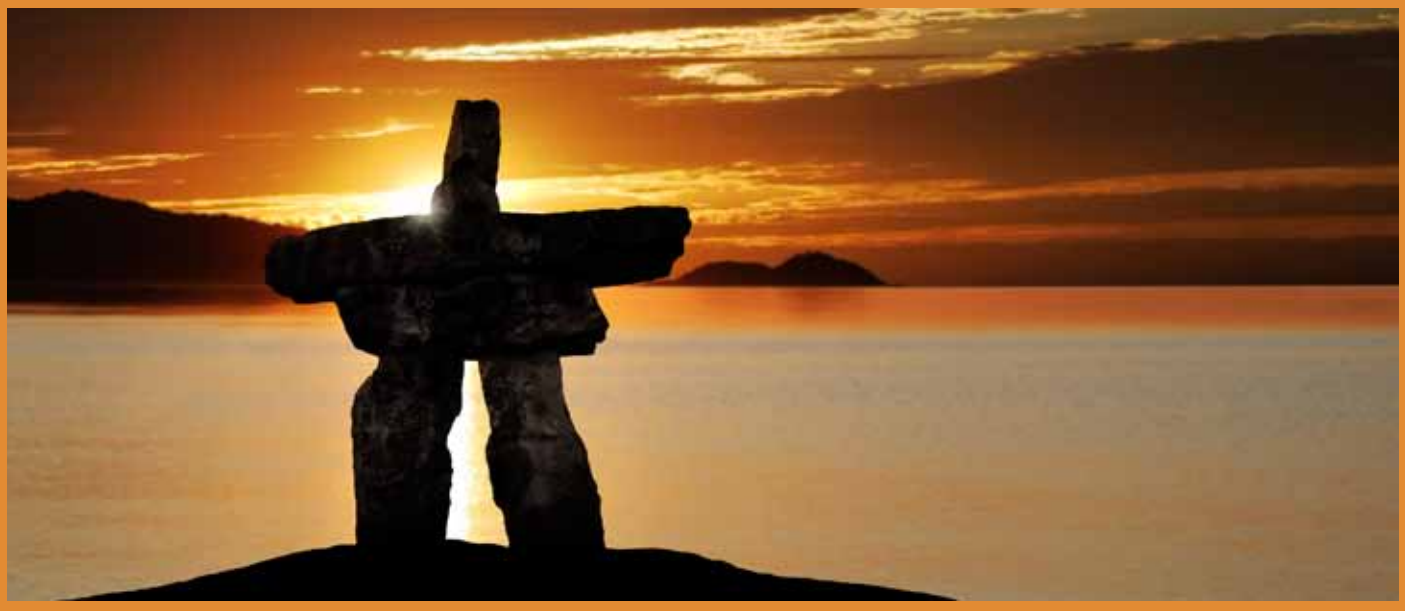
In 2001, 62% of Aboriginal people self identified as First Nations. First Nations Peoples have unique relationships with Canada deriving from treaties or pre-existing Aboriginal rights. First Nations includes both status and non-status Indians living on reserves (45%) or off reserves. The majority of First Nations individuals live in Ontario (188,315), British Columbia (179,025), Alberta (156,220), Manitoba (150,040) and Saskatchewan (130,190). There are more than 50 known First Nations languages.

MÉTIS

Métis people comprise 30% of Aboriginal people. The Métis are self-identified peoples of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry, who are associated with recognized settlements located primarily in the western provinces of Alberta (66,055), Manitoba (56,795), British Columbia (44,265), and Saskatchewan (43,695), and in the provinces of Ontario (48,345) and Québec (15,850). Métis also comprise a significant proportion of the Aboriginal population of Newfoundland and Labrador. The traditional language of the Métis is Michif. Métis are distributed evenly among large cities (39%), towns and small cities (29%), and rural areas (29%). Distinctive social and economic differences exist between Métis sub-populations living in, for example, remote northern Métis communities and those Métis residing in urban centres such as Winnipeg and Regina.

INUIT

Inuit are from Arctic areas of North America, as well as from other countries with polar regions. They have diverse cultural traits and speak six dialects of Inuktitut. The Inuit population of 45,000 comprises 5% of Aboriginal people.[J] Over 70% of Inuit live in the four Northern land-claim areas of Nunavik (northern Québec), Nunatsiavut (Newfoundland and Labrador), Inuvialuit (Northwest Territories) and Nunavut (where almost half the Inuit population reside). The majority of Inuit living outside the four Inuit regions live in urban centres.



[J] Inuit peoples, by force of a 1939 Supreme Court decision, became legally "Indian" under the Constitution and therefore their affairs are also administered under the *Indian Act*

PROFILE OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN ONTARIO

Between 1971 and 2001, the Aboriginal population grew by 322%, while the non-Aboriginal population only demonstrated a 37% increase.[29] According to the 2006 Census, there are more than 1.1 million people in Canada who identify themselves as an Aboriginal person. In Ontario, 242,495 people self-identified as Aboriginal persons (that is, North American Indian or First Nations people, Métis or Inuit). This represented 2% of the province's total population, an increase from 1.7% in 2001.

The majority of the Aboriginal population surveyed in the 2006 census were First Nations, representing 65.3% of the Aboriginal demographic in Ontario (down from 69.9% in 2001). The Métis followed at 30.4% (up from 25.7% in 2001), and the Inuit were at 0.8% (up from 0.7% in 2001). However, in terms of the distinct populations themselves, the fastest gains in population between 2001 and 2006 occurred among the Métis and the Inuit with growth rates of 52.3% and 48%, respectively. The number of First Nations people increased by 19.6%. Between 2001 and 2006, Ontario's Aboriginal population grew faster than the non-Aboriginal population, increasing 28.3%, nearly five times faster than the 6.2% rate of growth for the non-Aboriginal population.[K,L]

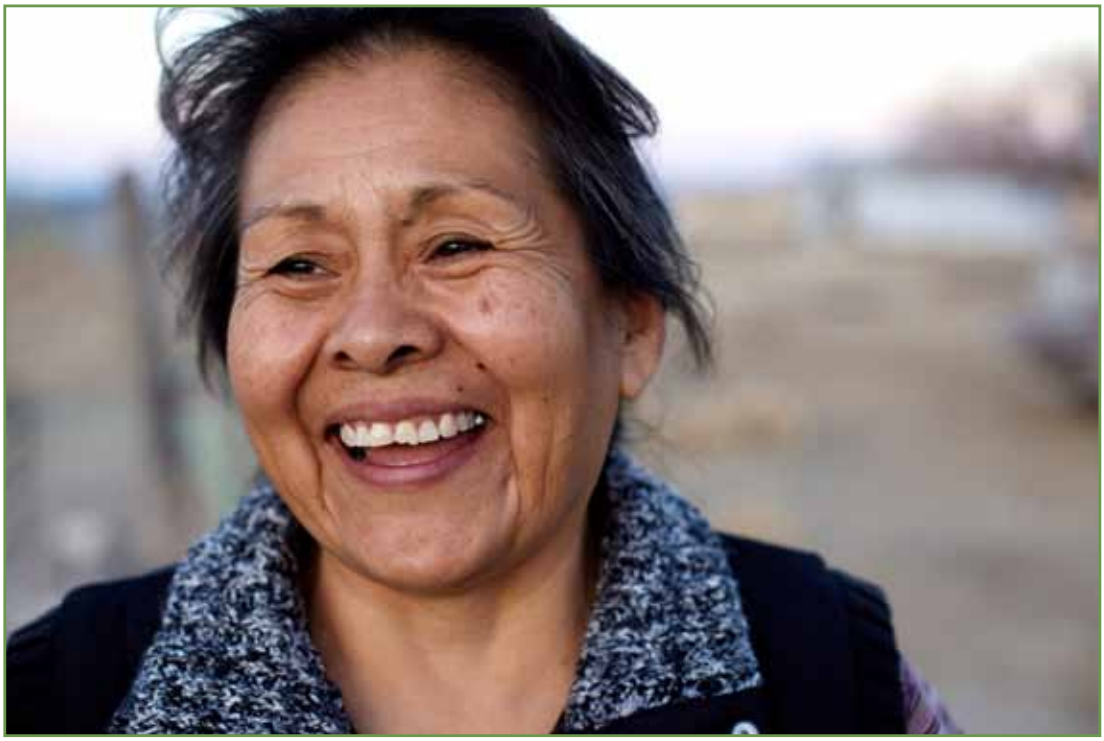
The Aboriginal population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population. More than a third (35.7%) of the Aboriginal population consists of children and teenagers aged 19 and under, compared with a quarter (25.1%) for the non-Aboriginal population. Ontario - which is the most populous province in Canada - is also the province with the largest Aboriginal population.[30] One in five of the country's Aboriginal peoples (21%) lived in Ontario in 2006. This age profile means that improving educational outcomes is critical right now, and cannot be put on hold for many years. The educational failures sown today will be the social and economic costs reaped tomorrow – and in this case, tomorrow is not a distant future.[31]

Although the health of Aboriginal peoples is gradually improving, it is generally still poorer than the health of non-Aboriginal peoples. For example, Aboriginal peoples still have a lower life expectancy, a higher infant mortality rate, higher suicide rates, and much higher rates of infectious diseases than non-Aboriginal peoples. This has stemmed from historical issues as the hardship that Aboriginal peoples have had to endure; it has also brought about addictions and substance abuses that are now prevalent in Aboriginal communities.[32] Furthermore, "an intergenerational cycle of physical, psychological, sexual abuse, and loss of spiritual practices has sprung from this history of devaluation and control."[33] Fewer Aboriginal people have jobs and they spend more time in jails and prisons compared with other populations. Moreover, the homes of Aboriginal people are more often flimsy, leaky and overcrowded, and in Aboriginal communities, water and sanitation systems are more often inadequate.[34]

There are many health issues that need to be addressed in Aboriginal communities that education could help them overcome. For example, First Nations adults generally have higher body mass indexes (BMIs) than the general Canadian population. When looking at First Nations adults, 73.0% are at least overweight, compared to 48.0% of other Canadians: a difference of 25.0 percentage points.[M] This not only puts First Nations at higher risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease and

[K] Several factors may account for the fast growth of the Aboriginal population, both demographic and non-demographic (e.g., more individuals choosing to identify themselves as an Aboriginal person).
[L] From the 2006 Census.

[M] The BMI is a ratio of a person's weight and height. Though BMI is not a direct measure of body fat, it is a widely investigated and, to date, a useful indicator of health risk associated with being underweight and overweight. The guidelines categorize BMI into four groups: underweight (BMI <18.5), normal weight (BMI 18.5 to 24.9), overweight (BMI 25.0 to 29.9), and obese (BMI ≥ 30.0).



certain cancers, but it may also increase the already high prevalence of diabetes among First Nations, along with all the health complications related to this chronic disease.

The cause of death due to alcohol use is almost twice the rate in the Aboriginal population than of the general population.[N] Again, these issues are compounded by the low levels of PSE attainment. This is highly problematic because the misuse of alcohol is known to have a number of negative effects on people. For both males and females, the proportion reporting alcohol consumption is lower for the First Nations on-reserve population compared to the general Canadian population, but the proportion of those reporting heavy drinking is higher among First Nations than the general population.[35]

Substance and alcohol abuse issues are harsh realities in Aboriginal communities and need to be addressed. Long-term alcohol abuse can cause liver damage, stomach problems, brain damage and sexual dysfunction. Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause a variety of developmental, behaviour and cognitive impairments in unborn babies, known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.[36] These substance abuse issues are very concerning because there are such high rates in Aboriginal populations in comparison to non-Aboriginal populations. Also of concern is the fact that while Aboriginal peoples represent only 1.7% of Ontario's population, they represent about 9% of the inmates in prisons in the province.[37]

Education is vital for the success of Aboriginal populations in Ontario: the issues mentioned above can be overcome by Aboriginal peoples if they enjoyed the same PSE attainments as the general population in Ontario. College graduates have lower smoking rates, more positive perceptions of personal health, and lower incarceration rates than individuals who have not graduated from college.[38] To combat these existing social and health issues, education should be made a priority. This is due to the fact that a person's education level is positively associated with health status and health-promoting behaviours. Educational attainment is widely acknowledged as an important determinant of socio-economic status and income, which are both key determinants of health.[39]

Higher levels of education are correlated with higher levels of civic participation, including volunteer work, voting, and blood donation.[40] Higher levels of education also correspond to lower levels of unemployment and poverty, so in addition to contributing more to tax revenues than others do, adults with higher levels of education are less likely to depend on social safety-net programs, generating decreased demand on public budgets.[41]

[N] Aboriginals, 43.7 per 100,000, versus general population, 23.6 per 100,000. From Chansonneuve (2007).

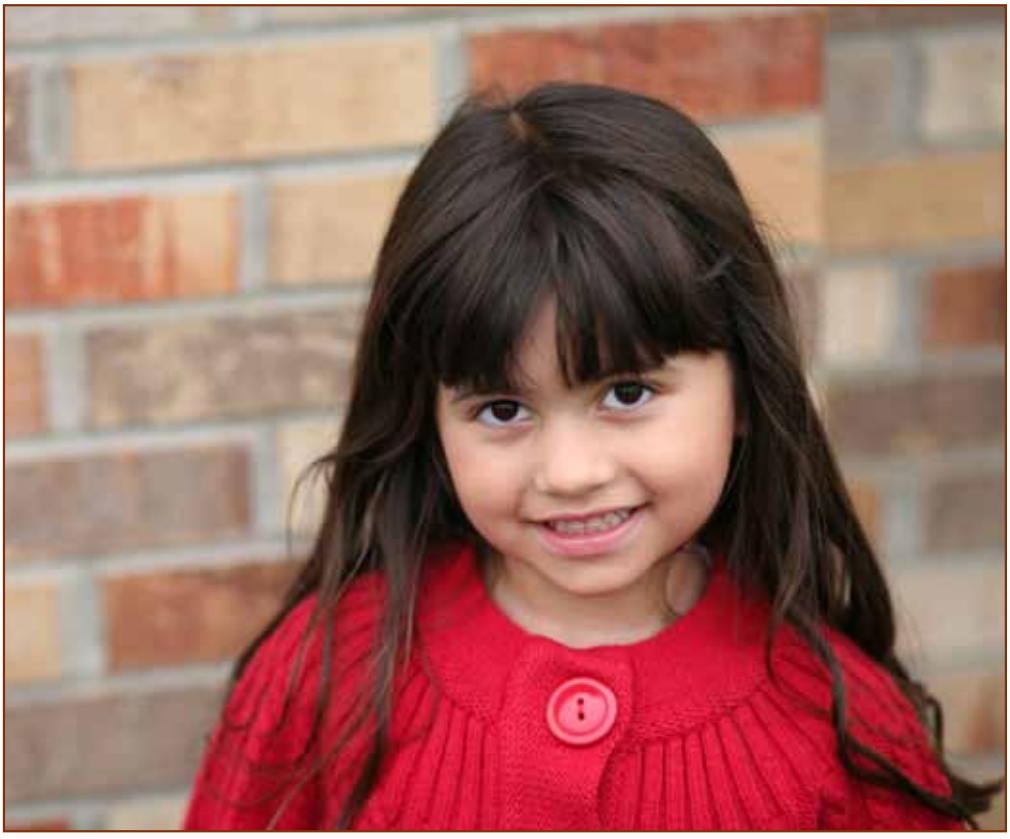
ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Aboriginal students who want to access PSE are hampered by the low rates of success in elementary and secondary education. Aboriginal youth, like the youth across Canada, decide whether to attend post-secondary school before the age of 15, sometimes as early as age 9.[42] It is important to note that socio-economic status tends to play a significant role in post-secondary education choices. When discussing the pathway from elementary to post-secondary education, early outreach initiatives (EOIs) play a key role in increasing PSE participation. EOIs seek to address the academic, personal, and social barriers to valuing and completing education. As well as promoting literacy, math skills, and an appreciation for education, these programs work to enhance the confidence and self-appreciation of the participants.

``I am in college to help people, mainly to try to help poverty and addictions in the many reserves in Ontario: to educate others and to bring awareness to others and organizations about these issues. To advocate for these people who can't do it themselves and to realize the "we" as a community need to come together to stop this!`` – A student at Sault College

``I'm in college for that exact reason, I want to be somebody and be a role model for my community`` – A student from Sault College

Early outreach initiative programs like Pathways to Education must be supported by the provincial and federal government. The program works "alongside the school system, and through a force of volunteers, the program delivers after-school tutoring, mentoring and financial assistance to overcome the barriers that can stand in the way of education."[43] The Pathways to Education program first started in Regent Park, and has now reduced dropout rates from 56% to 12%. In neighbourhoods such as Regent Park, PSE participation rates have gone from 20% to 80% as a result of Pathways to Education.[44] These results have been similarly replicated in communities such as Toronto's Lawrence Heights, Scarborough, and Rexdale, and in cities such as Ottawa, Kitchener, Montreal, Hamilton, and Winnipeg.



RECOMMENDATION 2:

EXPAND ON OUTREACH ACTIVITIES WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO IMPROVE EOI'S EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY.

EOIs ought to be community-based in order to develop strong ties between these program participants and members of their communities, such as the different Aboriginal communities across the province. These EOIs should operate with flexibility, in the sense that programs should be created to address the unique needs of the specific Aboriginal communities.

These "community based programs, synonymous with outreach programs, have the advantage of allowing students to remain in their home communities, while simultaneously maintaining family ties and community support."[45] The utilization of community partnerships would help improve the delivery of services to students by sharing government function with individuals or community groups. Having a cooperative pursuit of shared objectives between organizations would better serve students and would help these programs reach a broader audience. Cooperation between the Aboriginal communities and other stakeholders is vital to the success of EOIs.

In order to build lasting and sustainable relationships, colleges should work with Aboriginal communities to build mutually beneficial relationships based on mutual understanding. Colleges that have forged these relationships have better Aboriginal representation within the colleges themselves. Initiatives that help to build relationships should be started very early, establishing relationships with the students when they are very young because most make the choice to attend PSE as soon as grade 7 or 8. These relationships can help inform students and therefore empower them to choose the correct classes in secondary school so they can begin to forge their own paths to PSE at an early age. These relationships are very important because they help students see post-secondary education as a viable option.

Advice for an 8th or 9th grade student: "Go to college! It's the best decision you can make in life. Everyone should have an education"
- A student from Sault College

According to the 2006 Census, over two thirds of Aboriginal people now live off-reserve and their children attend provincially run schools. The two-thirds of the Aboriginal people include all Métis, the small Inuit population, and roughly half of those who identify as Indian/First Nation. Based on these ratios, on-reserve band-operated schools are responsible at any point in time for educating about one Aboriginal child in five; provincial governments are responsible for the other four,[46] which highlights the importance of the provinces in elementary and secondary education. That is not to say that the government should focus more on the on-reserve or off-reserve population; the needs of both must be addressed.

"Role models don't exist back home, I just want to be better. That's why I'm here, get my education and go home to MAKE it better"
– A student from Sault College

Early outreach initiatives in all communities are thus that much more important. Students must see PSE as a viable option due to the fact that so many children make up their mind to pursue PSE at an early age. Students who see others succeed are more likely to think that they too have the ability to succeed. Many children lack strong mentors to guide them in their path to post-secondary education due to the fact that Aboriginal peoples in Canada generally have a very low PSE participation rate in relation to the general population and that many Aboriginal students are the first in their families to attend a PSE institution.

HOW IS ABORIGINAL KNOWLEDGE MEASURED?

In Canada the average performance of Indigenous children is below that of non-Indigenous students in terms of conventional performance measures. Aboriginal knowledge is holistic: it has both an empirical side (that is, based on experience) and a normative side (that is, based on social values), and distinguishing between the moral and empirical content is difficult. It is often passed on through modeling, sharing circles, dialogue, meditation, storytelling, practice, and animation rather than through the written word. It is difficult to measure by mainstream, conventional performance measures.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

EDUCATORS NEED TO INCLUDE ABORIGINAL WAYS OF LEARNING INTO THE MAINSTREAM CURRICULUM TO ENGAGE ABORIGINAL STUDENTS TO HELP THEM OVERCOME FEELINGS OF ALIENATION.

A student who is engaged is likely to do better in school. High motivation and engagement in learning have consistently been linked to reduced dropout rates and increased levels of student success. Student engagement is influenced by a variety of factors, one of which is context. Relating material to students' lives makes them much more likely to engage in the material and courses. Teachers need to have a strong understanding of how Aboriginal students learn and how to better engage them using a variety of approaches. In fact, "when Indigenous knowledge was systemically and holistically included into schools and curriculum, practices, and programs student achievement improved…when the curriculum reflects both Eurocentric and Indigenous knowledge *success for all students is improved.*"[O,47]

[O] Emphasis added.

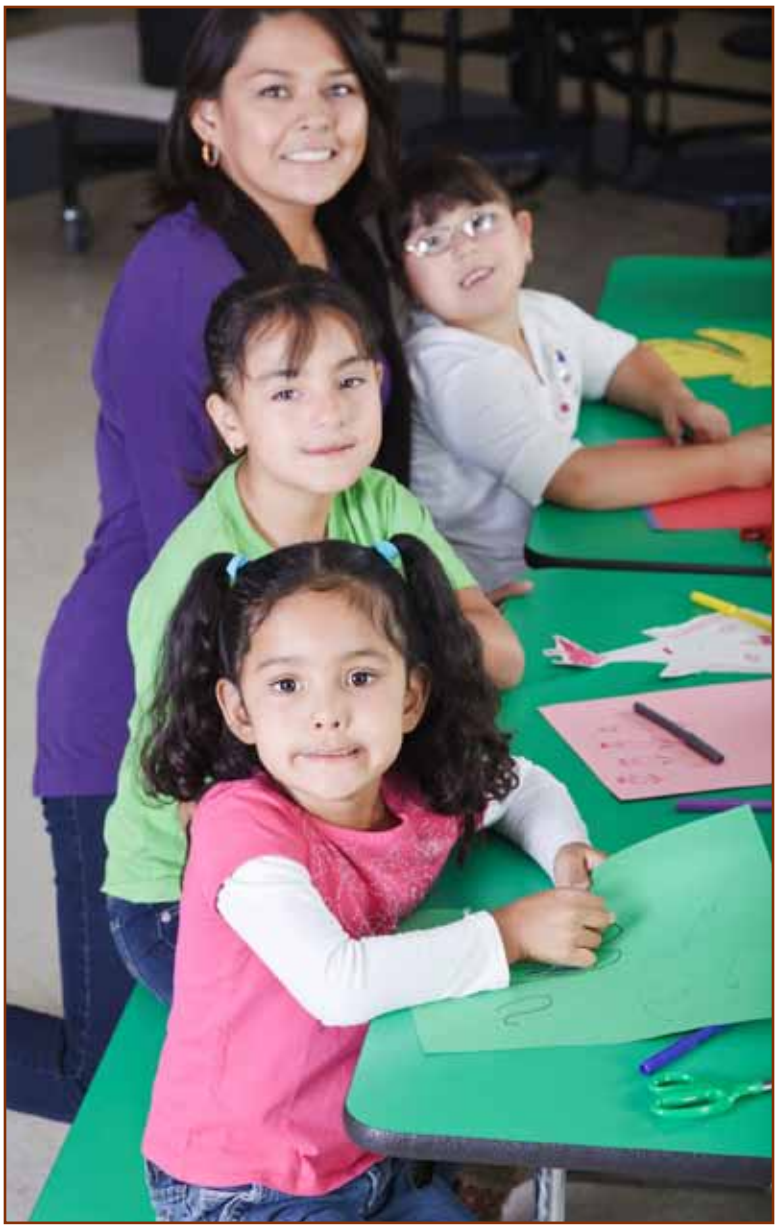
Many people are not aware that there is a different structure of schooling for Aboriginal students who have status and attending on-reserve schools; one that is completely different for Aboriginal students attending off-reserve schools (public and provincial schools). Due to different laws and legislature mentioned above, jurisdiction of on-reserve schools rests formally with the federal government in Ottawa; "in practice, however, the control lies with the relevant band councils."[48] With a few exceptions, jurisdiction of non-reserve schools is provincial. "Most First Nations schools on reserves are stuck in the old model of the village school that existed prior to rural school consolidation and the enhancement of provincial education ministries".[49] This lack of a formalized education system makes it difficult for individual school to develop, plan, evaluate, and implement an education program that can meet the needs of First Nations communities on a greater level. This lack of a tiered system is an issue because the absence prevents, on-reserve schools from providing their students with a long-term, quality education.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

DEVELOP AN EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR GRADES K-12 BY FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES IN COOPERATION WITH THE RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS.

This operation would give children on reserve schools the quality education that they deserve; one that is owed to them due to constitution and treaty obligations.[P] The creation of this school system would empower Aboriginal communities to meet the standards that provincial schools enjoy. This will result in better services and curriculum development for the young on-reserve populations.

[P] Some argue that the provinces should simply take over First Nations schools to provide the students with the support they need. This overly simplified idea does not take into consideration the complexities of Aboriginal affairs. Additionally, First Nations would reject the transfer, as would most provinces due to a variety of administrative and legal issues.



Elementary and secondary education for on-reserve students remains a concern of the government, but the efforts of the government are strongly criticized. Almost all "federal officials working in Indian and Northern Affairs Canada will inform you that the federal government undertakes to fund education for on-reserve residents to levels comparable to those to be found in similarly provincially-funded schools."[50] However, the consensus amongst First Nations students is that their schools are not comparable and are "in reality, two grades behind public schools."[51] In an internal department audit of the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, only about 20%[Q] of First Nations educational administrators and principals believed that transferability between on-reserve schools and provincial schools had been achieved.[52]

Of the 25 department officials surveyed in the audit, not one of them believed that transferability had been achieved.[53] The absence of a cohesive school system also negatively impacts the funds that are given to First Nations schools, as the federal government funds these schools. As the Auditor General concluded in her 2004 report, "the Department [of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada] does not know whether the funding provided to First Nations is sufficient to meet the education standards it has set and whether the results achieved, overall and by the different delivery mechanisms, are in line with the resources provided."[54] This confusion and lack of knowledge could be resolved if the separate schools became more established and cohesive within a system. To ensure success in improving educational outcomes for the Aboriginal population both the on-reserve and off-reserve population must remain a priority.

[Q] 18% of the First Nations educational administrators and 22% of the school principals

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Aboriginal children need to acquire an acceptable education to have a chance of succeeding in the modern economy. An acceptable education today means more than high school graduation – a post-secondary diploma or degree, or a trade certificate, is required – but high school graduation is the door through which most students must pass to go on to post-secondary schooling.[55] Finishing secondary school is a key step on the way to earning a post-secondary education. In today's knowledge economy, students need to remain competitive and a post secondary education is a necessity.

"I am here to learn: to get a career. I think many [others] are not because of fear, drug addiction... low self-esteem" –A student from Sault College

There are over 50,000 Aboriginal students who attend public elementary and secondary schools in Ontario.[56] However, Aboriginal students have lower high school graduation rates compared to the non-Aboriginal population, which presents greater challenges to participating in Ontario's knowledge economy. Aboriginal students have to overcome many more issues in order to graduate high school than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. These issues encompass a variety of barriers, including motivational, familial, and geographical barriers. Data suggest that the drop-out rate for Aboriginals before completion of grade 9 is about 20% and 40% before completion of grade 12, compared to with 3% and 16%, respectively, for the non-Aboriginal population.[57] Approximately 60% of First Nations on-reserve residents aged 20-24 still have not completed high school nor obtained an alternative diploma or certificate.[58]

A component of the federal program for Aboriginal PSE is the University and College Entrance Program (UCEP). The UCEP, created in 1983, helps under-qualified Aboriginals participate in PSE through preparatory programs. The federal government, through INAC, provides financial assistance for the equivalent of one year to eligible First Nation and Inuit students to enable them to attain the academic level required for admittance to post-secondary education programs. UCEP allows Aboriginal learners to participate in an eight-month, full-time program that allows them to gain the entrance requirements to the post-secondary institution of their choice. The curriculum contains cultural components, focuses on Aboriginal role models, mentoring and peer support, and participation in cultural events.[R] This upgrading program covers concepts from grades 10, 11 and 12 in a PSE setting. However, only those who are registered as per the *Indian Act*, have status or are recognized Inuit are eligible to apply.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

EXPAND SUPPORT PROGRAMS IN HIGH SCHOOLS BY EXPANDING UCEP TO ALL ABORIGINALS, NOT JUST THOSE REGISTERED WITH THE *INDIAN ACT*.

Not only are Aboriginal students facing barriers due to low high school graduation rates, they are also less academically prepared for PSE which leads to higher dropout rates. Rural, remote and reserve schools typically do not offer the academic preparation required for a successful transition to post-secondary education. Transitioning programs are essential in helping Aboriginal students progress their education as the typical non-Aboriginal student is a young high school graduate, which differs from the typical Aboriginal student that is older, female and has family responsibilities and enters a PSE program. This is why bridging programs like the ones mentioned above are so vital.

[R] Aboriginal administrative organizations manage the Program and provide information on the application process.

"When I started, I had a hard time with the computer programs, most people (non-Aboriginal) have been on them for a while – I follow the lessons and do not fall behind" – A student from Sault College

RECOMMENDATION 6:

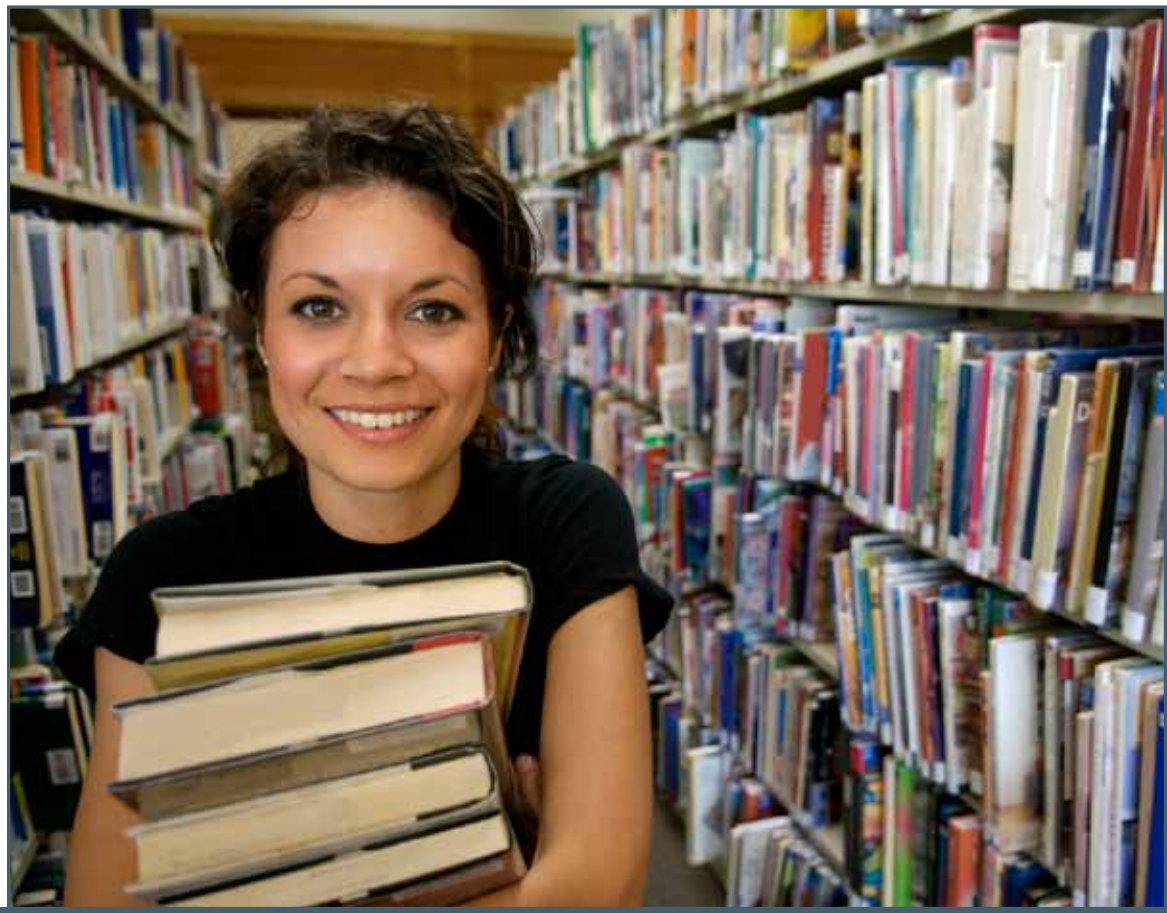
ENCOURAGE PSE INSTITUTIONS TO CONTINUE TO OFFER AND IMPROVE PREPARATORY PROGRAMS TO ENSURE THAT ABORIGINAL STUDENTS CAN ACCESS PSE AND OVERCOME BARRIERS.

These programs include, but are not limited to, literacy programs, adult basic education, Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) equivalency programs, and dual credit programs. Dual credit programs allow students in high school to take college-level classes in their senior years in high school, and upon the completion of these courses, the credits can count toward their college program requirements. This allows students to see post-secondary education as a viable option.

There are many reasons why youth drop out of school: racism; lack of parental involvement and guidance; resentment and embarrassment caused by feeling less successful scholastically than other students; instability caused by high rates of residential mobility; feelings of isolation caused by being in environments that are not culturally-sensitive; an inability to afford textbooks, sporting equipment, and excursion fees; an unstable home life; and, poverty.[59]

Anecdotally, many children are hampered in their success by taking on responsibilities for family care at a very young age. Brought on by the legacy of residential schools, many children deal with serious issues within their families such as alcoholism, drug addiction and abuse. Many high school aged students become parents themselves at a very young age. It is a common experience when Aboriginal students are in the first in their families to pursue a PSE; they often lack mentorship to help them with the transition.[60] These issues are further intensified by the misunderstanding of the existing issues by those who are trying to help students succeed.

"I'm from the Residential School Era and sometimes something will remind me of that era. I'm still here and I've learned to deal with it, shake it off and just keep going" – A student from Sault College



RECOMMENDATION 7:

EXPAND ON MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS THAT HELP STUDENTS TO MAKE INFORMED POST-SECONDARY DECISIONS PRIOR TO LEAVING HIGH SCHOOL, THROUGH ADVICE FROM HIGH SCHOOL-AGED OR ADULT MENTORS.

This would give students the opportunities such as; career shadowing, involvement in community activities and participating in volunteer initiatives. Having a program in school that helps these students to set positive examples would improve their knowledge of options that are available.

"I had children at a very young age (16) so I dropped out of high school. Now I want to do better for them. I first came back to get my grade 12... and that was my foot in the door: I love school now" – A student from Sault College

As the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) states, more attention must be paid to "improving student motivation and performance at (or before) the high school level, providing better information to students and their families about the costs and benefits of education from an early age and carrying out other interventions targeted at the early-rooted and family-based factors that seem to be the most important determinants of access."[61]

RECOMMENDATION 8:

ENSURE GUIDANCE DEPARTMENTS HAVE ADEQUATE STAFF AND RESOURCES TO HELP STUDENTS IN THEIR TRANSITION TO LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL AND INCORPORATE MORE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND FINANCIAL AID INFORMATION INTO THE CURRICULUM.

School counsellors who facilitate guidance and career education through credit courses, exit programs and informal assistance are vital in helping students to plan for and transition into PSE. Counsellors and the Provincial governments have made considerable progress in recent years to improve guidance through both the establishment of Student Success Teams and the expansion of compulsory courses to include guidance credits, but guidance councillor services can be improved upon.

As mentioned previously, students face geographical barriers to accessing a post-secondary education. However, many students face these same barriers when trying to access secondary school. Aboriginal youth who live on reserves, or in rural and remote communities, do not always have access to a high school education because there might not be a high school near them. As a result, students leave home to access secondary education in more urban areas, such as in Thunder Bay. Leaving their home communities requires reconciling Native values, dealing with disruptions to the usual support system, and attempting to acculturate to an urban lifestyle.[62] In Ontario, only 62% of Aboriginal people live in urban areas, while the rest of the Ontario population (48%) live in rural and on-reserve areas. Currently, students from rural communities board with host families in urbanised cities to attend secondary school. While this seems like a good practice from which many have benefited, there is definitely room for improvement as there are many issues that exist.

"I was personally ready. I want a career and not just a job. People are satisfied with just getting by but I want to prove to myself that i can be better. I will enforce it on my own children. I think our parents didn't force us to go to school because their parents were forced to go. It wasn't pleasant for their parents. It all goes back to residential schooling" - A student from Sault College

Students' emotional, physical, spiritual and mental needs for safety are not addressed when students move outside of their communities to attend secondary school. There have been grave concerns expressed by the communities and families of the students attending schools in urban areas since the practise of students boarding began, especially due to the suicide and disappearance rates of Aboriginal youth, such as in Thunder Bay. In general, suicide rates are five to seven times higher for First Nations youth compared to non-Aboriginal youth; among Inuit youth, suicide rates are 11 times the

national average.[63] Most notably, 24 Nishnawbe Aski communities in the Sioux Lookout District in the north-western Ontario that have suffered more than 300 child and youth suicides over the last decade.[64] In Thunder Bay, seven native teens have disappeared and died since 2000. All had come from remote northern reserves to attend high school because there was no suitable school for them back home.

Research shows that there is a link between cultural continuity and youth prosperity, meaning that if culture plays a prominent role in a youth's life, they are dramatically more successful in decreasing the risk of youth and adolescent suicide.[65] Suicides need to be prevented in these communities especially because sadly, "Canadian First Nations suffer from the highest rate of suicide of any culturally identifiable group in the world."[66] The youth fall into the highest-risk age group for mental illness and substance dependencies. Indeed, 18% of youth aged 15-24 reported symptoms associated with mental health issues, compared with 12% of 25-44 year olds and 8% of 45-65 year olds. Additionally, suicide has been found to be the second leading cause of death amongst youth, following unintentional injuries such as accidents. Boarders who feel alienated and estranged from the greater community are more likely to need support services that will address the students' emotional, physical, spiritual and mental needs for safety.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

THE FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS SHOULD WORK WITH COMMUNITIES TO CREATE ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO STUDY AWAY FROM THEIR HOME COMMUNITIES.

Accommodation facilities, such as student housing, could be a way to address the complex issues that students face when they move from rural communities without secondary schools to urbanized areas to attend high school. These housing facilities would have to be designed, built, and overseen in cooperation with Aboriginal communities in order for them to succeed. The accommodation facilities would go far in addressing the social, emotional, mental and physical needs of the students, in line with their cultural teachings. This recommendation stems from an accommodation facility proposal from the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council[S] in Thunder Bay. This will help Aboriginal students successfully complete high school as they will be supported in their educational endeavours by qualified staff.

Advice for students entering high school: "Don't mind the eyes that are looking. Keep your head up and be positive. Get involved, and make friends" – A student from Sault college

Access to a quality secondary school education is paramount to the success of students in higher education. The acceptance of a student into post-secondary program is largely dependent upon his/her high school grades.[67] It is worth noting, however, that Aboriginal students who have graduated from secondary school have similar, though slightly lower, overall PSE participation rates as the non-Aboriginal population. This indicates that increasing the secondary school completion rate is an important step in raising post-secondary participation of Aboriginal youth as a whole.[68] However, many Aboriginal students do not complete high school but attend post-secondary education as mature students. Other students graduate from high school but without necessary courses such as mathematics and science, or lacking study skills, time management abilities and computer literacy.[69]

[S] The author would like to express her thanks to Jennifer Manitowabi for sharing the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council's Business Plan for the Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School Accommodation Facility.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

"I am currently in college, this is my second year and I absolutely love it" – A student from Sault College

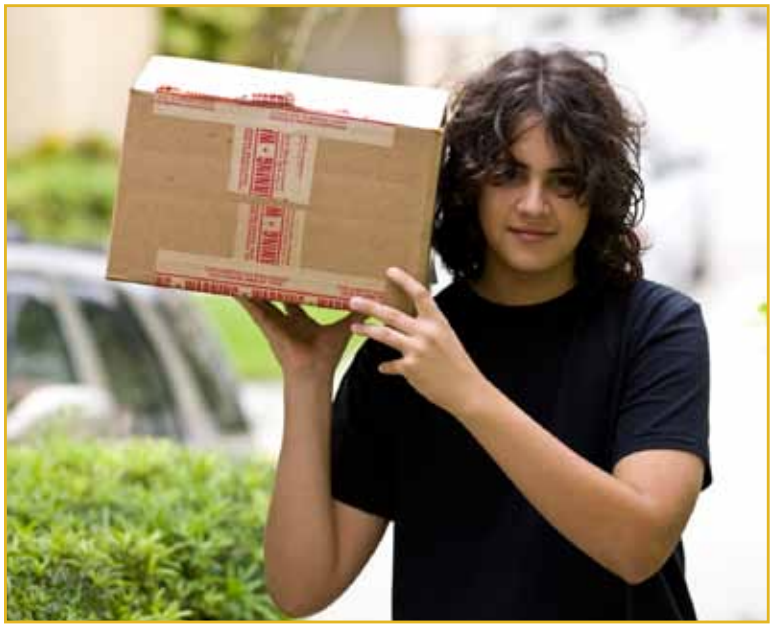
In general, colleges in Ontario have higher rates of participation of Aboriginal students than universities. Advocating for the increase of Aboriginal students in PSE will better the future for Aboriginal people, their families and communities. Although high school graduation rates among the Aboriginal population are lower than those of the non-Aboriginal population, Aboriginal people are very likely to pursue an apprenticeship, trades certificate or diploma.

"Wow. What a great opportunity it was for me to meet new people. This college experience is so welcoming and was the best decision I have ever made in my life. I regret not going to college earlier" – A student from Sault College

According to the 2006 Census, more than one-third, or 38%, of the Aboriginal population has some type of post-secondary education. This includes apprenticeships, trades certificates, diplomas, and college and university degrees. Of those who pursue post-secondary education, 19% chose college, CEGEP, or another non-university diploma. While 38% of Aboriginal people have post-secondary education, 51% of the non-Aboriginal populations have achieved this goal. Aboriginal people are three times less likely than non-Aboriginal people to complete a university degree, as only 9% of Ontario's Aboriginal populations hold a university degree.[70]

"[I'm in college] to receive my diploma, to be able to serve my community with the adequate knowledge required to do so" – A student from Sault College

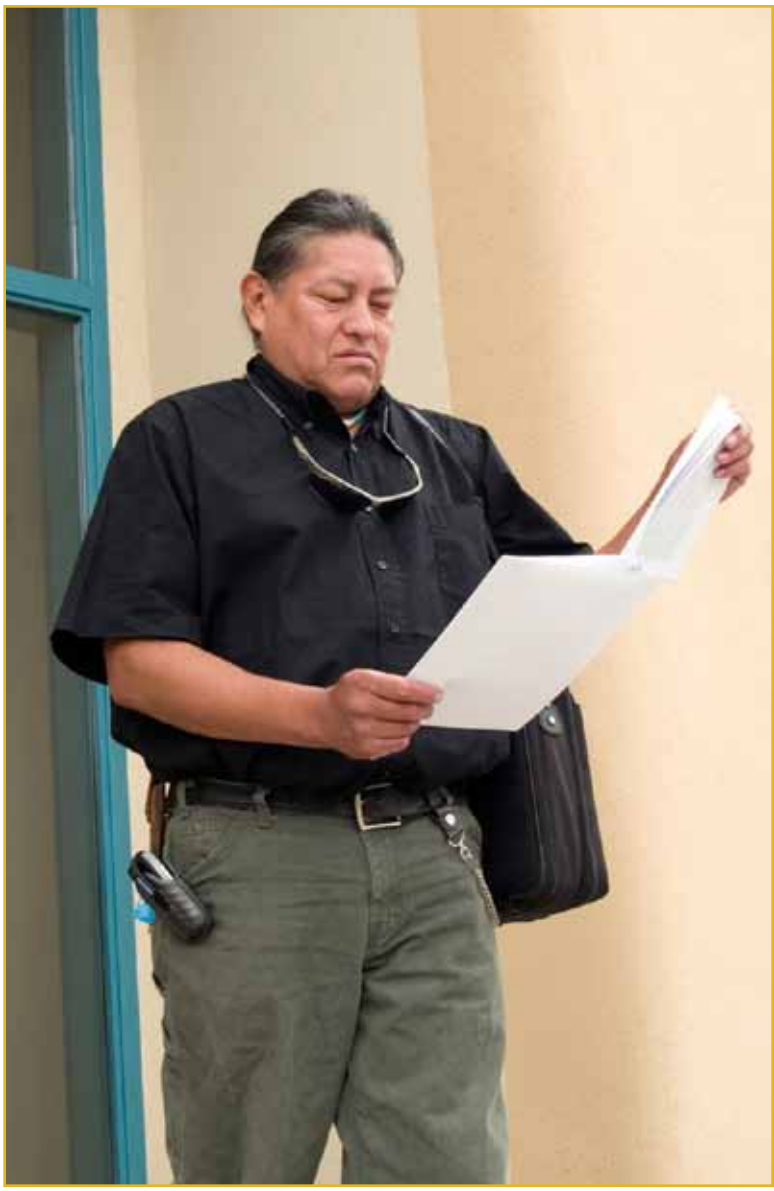
Colleges are well placed to support Aboriginal students for a variety of reasons. In general, colleges have higher participation rates of groups who are traditionally underrepresented in post-secondary education institutions. This could be stem from the fact that there are more colleges in northern and rural Ontario than there are universities. Geography plays a large role in the selection of a post-secondary institution as students living out-of-commuting distance are far less likely to attend than students living within commuting distance.[71] Colleges are less expensive, as the average Ontario tuition fees for college students in 2011 are $2,311[72] for regular programs of study, while for universities the average is $5,138.[73] Colleges, due to the nature of the small programs, enjoy smaller classes that grant students more interaction with their instructor. Anecdotally, students have found this to result in greater flexibility and the ability to develop closer relationships with staff. Another benefit to colleges is that they cater more to the communities in which they are located, as many colleges have Aboriginal-specific, community-based programs that meet the learning needs of Aboriginal communities.



ABORIGINAL INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING

Aboriginal institutes of higher learning, of which there are about 50 in Canada offer PSE programs; however, these institutions have not been given complete autonomy enjoyed by mainstream institutions. Instead, current federal and provincial policies require Aboriginal institutions to partner with mainstream postsecondary institutions in order to access funding and to ensure the credibility and portability of student credentials.[74] Aboriginal Institutes of Higher Learning, also known as Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning (IIHL) have proven to be very successful in helping students attain a PSE. Aboriginal Institutes in Ontario receive funding from two primary sources: through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Indian Support Program funding and through the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities post-secondary funding. However, funding is limited.[75]

These institutions deliver a wide range of programs including basic literacy and secondary upgrading, language and Indigenous knowledge based programs, skilled trades, and university graduate degree programs.[76] The graduates of Aboriginal Institutes attribute their success to the culturally relevant programs that are taught, along with the unique blended program delivery models that include classroom setting, online learning and independent studies, that respond to their unique learning needs.[77] There is significant variation in both the size of the institutes, and the type and number of programs which are delivered. The student retention and graduation rates are also higher, with high program completion rates, between 60% and 90% completion rates per year.[78]



FUNDING

"As an adult student returning to college, lack of income was a barrier from coming to college" - A student from Confederation College

The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) aforementioned is the federal funding program that Aboriginal students with status access. PSSSP is intended to cover the costs of tuition, books, supplies, travel and living allowances for students and their dependents, as well as the costs of providing tutorial, guidance and counselling services to eligible students enrolled in post-secondary education programs. While some students do enjoy the benefits of the PSSSP program and all that it offers, the majority of students who are eligible for PSSSP do not.

First and foremost, it must be made clear that there are many criteria that must be met in order for students to have access to funding. First and foremost, students must have Indian status. This is linked to the *Indian Act*. In order to have status, a prospective student must be registered as a member of a band,[T] which is a process that does not happen automatically when one is born (as some commonly assume). When a child is born to registered parents, the child has to be registered officially to receive the rights that their parents have.[U] Different bands have different registration policies and some have the ability to determine their own membership, while some allow registration directly through the Office of the Indian Registrar in the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.[V]

Only registered First Nations and Inuit students can access PSSSP; and they must maintain and display a satisfactory level of academic aptitude. In contrast, non-Aboriginal students who apply for government loans, such as for the Ontario Secondary Assistance Program (OSAP), do not need to maintain a level of aptitude or a specific grade point average in order to receive funding. They must, however, successfully complete at least 60% of a full course load while receiving OSAP funding.

"Some Aboriginals do not have the funds to make it to college or university. Some do not have access to funds or enough support for them to make it day to day" – A student from Sault College

If the student is registered, the funding then has to go through the band council[W] for approval. The power of many band councils is highly centralized and fused with financial decision making. Some individuals face challenges in attaining funding due to nepotism or because they live off-reserve. Research shows that Aboriginal peoples who live off-reserve feel that they must compete with others for funding, and that the distribution of funds is unfair and vague.[79] After the funding has been given to students, "individual bands are allowed to retain 'unexpected balances' at the end of the year... if there is money left over, it does not go to the students for whom the money was intended. It stays with the bands, to be spent at

[T] The term "band" is used commonly to describe a First Nation community that has its own form of self-government. The term band is used in the *Indian Act* to and is defined as a body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Crown, or who have been declared to be a band for the purpose of the *Indian Act*. Many Indian bands have elected to call themselves a First Nation and have changed their band name to reflect this. With the 1985 amendment to the *Indian Act* of Canada (Bill C-31), many bands exercised the right to establish their own membership code, whereby it was not always necessary for a band member to be a Registered Indian according to the *Indian Act*.

[U] The period known as the "Sixties Scoop" attributed to a loss of identity and status for many Aboriginal children. For more, please see footnote AA

[V] As part of section 10 of the *Indian Act*

[W] The legal decision-making body for most bands consists of a chief and a band council. To avoid confusion, this paper uses "bands" to refer to the body entitled to exercise the band's legal power.

"Getting funding set up was a pain... I don't live on my reserve so communication was hard. I never... grew up on reserve" – A student from Sault College

the discretion of chiefs and councils."[80] While this is an issue that affects Aboriginal communities, it is by no means an issue in every single community. The mismanagement of funds is not only a problem for Aboriginal communities but also exist in mainstream affairs. Political scandals - especially ones tied to finances - are a staple in the Canadian political landscape.

The problems of nepotism and corruption do not exist in every band; certain bands have effectively distributed funds to students who are in need. The barrier to funding is created by those bands that do not have fair practices. Those who do not have transparent and fair distribution practices are especially worrisome considering the fact that many Aboriginal students have said that financial barriers are the most common barrier to accessing PSE. Many students are wait-listed to receive funding, and may not attend at all if the money is not available. Some students may receive funding but not as much as they would need to finance their education. Nepotism is not the only issue with the band-distributed funding. Some bands have influxes of applicants or receive less money than originally expected. For example, "even when students are told they will be supported by the band, their funding is not always guaranteed. Funding can run out before the end of the academic year or it can come too late."[81]

RECOMMENDATION 10:

TO HELP REDUCE MISSPENDING, A FORMAL DISTRIBUTION FORMULA SHOULD BE DEVELOPED BY ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES IN COLLABORATION WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO ALLOW FOR TRANSPARENT AND FAIR DISTRIBUTION.

Currently, there is no national funding formula that guides First Nations' distribution of funds: current formulas vary by region. This has resulted in great concern and confusion about how funding should be distributed. National guidelines do exist[82] but they are very limited with respect to specific distribution of inadequate funds. Available PSSSP funding students has decreased because tuition has increased more than the 2% cap imposed in the mid-1990s allows.

While the number of students eligible for PSSSP has increased, funding has not kept up with this growth, neither has tuition increases nor the real cost of a PSE. As a result, many bands have to ration the funds they have been granted or prioritise some students over others: this issue is not addressed in the national program guidelines. The way that these issues are addressed, differs from one band to the next. Some have develop their own criteria and priorities and they only provide funding for those students that meet certain standards, some spread funding evenly among all who apply and others allocate funds on a first-come first-served basis.[83]

"Funding! Not having enough money for food or books makes it hard to focus and do well... when I'm in class, when I have so much to worry about and I'm hungry..." – A student from Sault College

RECOMMENDATION 11:

THE NATIONAL PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR THE POST-SECONDARY STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAM (PSSSP) AND UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE ENTRANCE PREPARATION (UCEP) PROGRAM SHOULD BE REVIEWED AND REVISED TO INCLUDE OPTIONS FOR BANDS COPING WITH ADDITIONAL STUDENTS AND A FUNDING SHORTFALL.

This must be addressed as bands have had to ration PSSSP funds or prioritise students due to limited financial resources as more and more students access PSE. The lack of data and policy guidance for bands coping with additional students and a funding shortfall is an issue that must be addressed. If the cap will not be lifted to better reflect the cost of post-secondary education, bands must be given guidance in addressing these issues. Bands that have been able to successfully distribute funds should be used as examples to other bands, and this process could be formalized as long as the respect for each Aboriginal community was maintained.

The federal government also funds the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). The ISSP was developed in 1989 to provide funding for programs within PSE institutions that support Aboriginal culture and people. ISSP funding is allocated to institutions and education organizations if the federal government approves the submitted proposals that outlining the need for the program, the targeted population, the objectives and methods, as well as a detailed financial plan. In some cases ISSP funding is delivered directly to First Nations communities, rather than to PSE institutions.

While the ISSP and UCEP programs are important for increasing the participation of Aboriginals in PSE, the PSSSP is the most relevant for student needing financial backing. As mentioned above, the federal government provided financial support on a case-by-case basis in a very limited capacity. In 1977, the Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program was introduced and later evolved as the 1989 Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). These initiatives caused a rapid increase in the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in Canadian colleges and universities, moving from 2,684 students utilizing the postsecondary education assistance program in 1977 to 15,572 in 1989.[84]

Array of issues exist with the PSSSP, but the primary issue is that in 1997, a 2% cap on funding was established for annual program funding. As a result of this 2% cap, thousands of Aboriginals with status are being denied access to PSE each year. Even INAC, in its evaluation of the different PSE programs, has admitted that "PSSSP student support levels fall below the allowances set for other Canadians under the Canada Student Loans Program,"[85] and that "guidelines for PSSSP student living allowances provided through the program were 14 years out of date."[86] To elaborate:

"It was found that guidelines for PSSSP student living allowances are 14 years out of date; that PSSSP students are, on average, receiving between $500 and $4,000 less per academic year than they are paying in living expenses; and that current per student allowances are below the national average established under the Canada Student Loan Program five years ago."[87]

This means that funding has remained at the same level and has depreciated because the number of Aboriginal youth has increased; the cap has not kept up with inflation, much less the growing cost of education. This places a yet another burden on First Nations and Inuit students who want to access a PSE as school becomes more and more unaffordable.

RECOMMENDATION 12:

REMOVE TO THE 2% FUNDING CAP ON PSSSP FUNDING AND READJUST FUNDING LIMITS TO MEET THE NEEDED FUNDING LEVELS.

The lack of funding negatively impacts the abilities of the different band to adequately support students that apply to the PSSSP. This cap does not represent the true cost of education as the cost of tuition and living costs have increased at a rate higher than inflation. This cap is also problematic because there are more and more students graduating from high school who are eligible to attend post-secondary education: this is particularly concerning due to the fact that the Aboriginal population is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population[X] and will be well-placed to access PSE in the future.

While funding for PSSSP has been capped, funding for OSAP has been expanded. However, the expansion of loans is not having too much of an impact on student debt due to the fact that the cost of school has risen so sharply. The increase is more modest once figures are adjusted for inflation: students are receiving 10% more in real terms than they were at the beginning of the decade.[88] Furthermore, due to the increasing cost associated with a post-secondary education, the increase in available loan funding has served only to maintain students' financial situations from deteriorating further. The increase in loan availability has failed to improve the financial situation of students due to the higher costs of education and the increase in loan applicants.

The inability of students to finance elevated PSE costs has resulted in students graduating with an

[X] Aboriginal populations are characterized by high birth rates and are therefore growing and young

escalating debt load. With rising post-secondary education costs, more students are relying on student loans to help finance their postsecondary education. Research suggests that students from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, such as Aboriginal students, may be more averse to borrowing and the possibility of default, a phenomenon known as debt aversion.[89] This is especially worrying due to the fact that debt aversion appears to be the most important single financial obstacle to participation in post-secondary education, both among those who did not pursue a post-secondary education after high school for financial reasons, as well as for those who dropped out for financial reasons.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND TRACKING PROBLEMS

Due to the various barriers that Aboriginal students face in accessing and completing their PSE programs, they need more support from their institutions. In order for students to access support the institutions need to identify these Aboriginal students to better encourage their successes. Not having sufficient and reliable data on the Aboriginal student populations is very problematic. In fact, "Inadequate unsystematic data collection and tracking systems are recognized as one of the leading causes of financial barriers met by Aboriginals in PSE."[90] Responsibly collecting data on Aboriginal students while maintaining ethical standards is crucial for Aboriginal populations to be comfortable with the process of self-identification and tracking. In order for students to feel safe and comfortable with self-identifying, "Aboriginal persons must have established a level of confidence and trust in the agency collecting the information."[91] Moreover, in order for the self-identification process to be successful, the institutions that are collecting data must develop good and stable working relationships with Aboriginal communities.

Students' concerns regarding the tracking of Aboriginal students in the education system (in primary, secondary and post-secondary school) stems from a lack of trust. Tracking of Aboriginal students has been used in negative ways historically, such as in the residential school system. Another concern is that the information will be used in a way that will discriminate against those students who are Aboriginal. However, this issue needs to be addressed as it is one of the main barriers in the distribution of funding. In INAC's evaluation of PSE programs in 2005, a lack of credible data was an issue as INAC states that it "has rendered administrative authorities unable to fully address basic management concerns about PSSSP in a systemic manner."[92] A lack of funding remains the primary reason as to why Aboriginal students can't access higher education.

Aboriginal self-identification patterns show that students sometimes declare and sometimes do not declare themselves as Aboriginal in the course of their studies. These variances can be attributed to a variety of factor, some of which include "the way in which the question is posed, the words used, and the medium in which the question is situated."[93] Identity is a fluid concept, and some dimensions of identity can fall under: ancestry and ethnic origin; Aboriginal identity; identification as a North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit individual; legal status as a treaty or registered Indian; membership in a First Nation, Indian band or Aboriginal community; and specific community of which one is a member. Care and attention must be paid to these subtle but important differences in order to collect the most accurate data.

MÉTIS AND NON-STATUS STUDENTS

Métis and non-status students do not have the ability to access the PSSSP and other programs that students with status can access.[Y] The definition of "Métis" differs slightly from one organization to the next, but generally, a person who is Métis is a person who has mixed First Nations and European heritage. The *Constitution Act* of 1982, recognized the Métis as one of Canada's founding Aboriginal peoples. The Supreme Court accepted a definition of "Métis" as a person who self-identifies as Métis, and who is from a historic Métis community.[Z] A non-status Indian is a person who consider themselves Indians or members of a First Nation but whom the Government of Canada does not recognize as Indians under the *Indian Act*, either because they are unable to prove their Indian status or have lost their status rights.[AA,BB] The Chiefs in Ontario identify 133 distinct First Nations communities in Ontario, of which 127 are officially recognized as First Nations by the *Indian Act*. Métis and non-status Indians are not entitled to the same rights and benefits available to Status Indians, including PSSSP funding.

Due to the legal complexities regarding the definitions of Métis and non-status Indians, they are not eligible to receive benefits and rights as people that have status are entitled to under the *Indian Act*. They do, however, share the same problems as First Nations and Inuit communities. According to the 2006 census, there are 73,605 Métis in Ontario. There is awareness of issues such as poor health, higher unemployment, a lower socioeconomic status, and a lower educational attainment in comparison to non-Aboriginal populations. Métis tend to have better quality of life than First Nations populations, but only slightly.

In 2005, the median income of the Métis in Canada was lower than that of the non-Aboriginal population by approximately $26,000. Between 2001 and 2006, the employment rates for Métis aged 25 to 54 years increased by 4% to approximately 75% but consistently remain lower than that of the non-Aboriginal population at approximately 82%. Because of the high tuition costs and the fact that generally the income level of most Métis is lower than that of other non-Aboriginal Canadians, the access that Métis have to educational opportunities and the chances of successful completion are lower. The post-secondary education rates are very similar for Métis students as they are for First Nations, in that both access a college education at higher rates than they do a university education.[94]

RECOMMENDATION 13:

ALLOW MÉTIS AND NON-STATUS STUDENTS TO ACCESS PSSSP & OTHER PSE PROGRAMS.

This could be done by allowing those who are direct descendents of a parent(s) or grandparent(s) who is on the Government of Canada's Indian Band Registry list and holds a valid Certificate of Indian Status card and Métis students who are registered with a Métis organization such as the Métis Nation of Canada or the Métis Nation of Ontario to access the programs. This would help Métis and non-status students overcome many financial and transitional barriers.

[Y] For more information on Métis students and the jurisdictional void, see footnote 'I'.

[Z] The Court did not define "historic Métis community."

[AA] The mechanism by which people lost their status was through enfranchisement. The most common method of enfranchisement was through intermarriage, whereby a Status Indian woman marrying a non-Indian man lost her Indian status—as did her children; this law existed until the *Indian Act* was amended in 1985. Other ways in which individuals could be enfranchised in the past was by obtaining the federal right to vote, freeing simple title to land, or receiving a college or university degree.

[BB] The sixties scoop refers to the adoption of Aboriginal children in Canada between the 1960s and 1980s. It is referred to as the 60s scoop because in many instances children were literally scooped from their homes and communities without the knowledge or consent of families and bands. In 1959, only 1% of children in social care were of Aboriginal ancestry. However, by the late 1960s, 30%-40 % of legal wards of the state were Aboriginal children even though they formed less than 4% of the national population. The children were adapted out to mostly non-Aboriginal families, sometimes outside of Canada, resulting in a loss of culture, and status. From Fournier and Crey, (1997).

RETENTION AND COMPLETION

"I would say that college is a great place to feel welcome and that staff are friendly. The staff are there to answer questions and provide as much as they can" – A student from Confederation College

Aboriginal students - like those groups who are underrepresented in PSE - are at a greater risk of leaving their studies without completing their program. When considering that Aboriginal peoples have a risk of high school drop-out that is more than twice the national average, retention in PSE programs becomes that much more important. Students who beat the odds to attend a PSE institution have a gamut of other challenges that they face in order to complete their programs.

"My past challenge was to get through high school and be accepted in college. Now it's focusing on college and graduating" – A student at Sault College

Retention can take many different forms: they are programs and strategies to help students succeed and complete their programs. Retention statistics are used in many different research projects as a measurement of program and student success. Different retention practices focus on identifying students who are at risk of dropping out, supporting students in their studies academically, emotionally, socially and financially; connecting students with peers and mentors; orienting students to campus services, supports, and facilities; engaging students in tutoring, and preparation and transitioning programs; and maintaining motivation in students.

"I find myself wanting answers, and I want the best for my daughter and I want her to learn what I learned..." – A student from Sault College

RECOMMENDATION 14:

MAINTAIN OR CREATE AN ORIENTATION PROGRAM TO FAMILIARIZE ABORIGINAL STUDENTS TO THE VARIOUS SUPPORT SERVICES ON CAMPUS, ESPECIALLY ONES THAT ARE ABORIGINAL-SPECIFIC.

Orienting students to these practices will help them access more support services and thus help with retention. Many issues that Aboriginal learners encounter can be helped with these support services and retention practices. Aboriginal students face geographical, financial, and motivational barriers. Several Aboriginal students come from rural areas and have a higher chance of coming from low income families, and many are the first in their families to access post-secondary education. Various institutions already have programs in place that new Aboriginal students might not be aware of. Familiarizing students about various services will help them access these services and help them stay in their program. This orientation could be carried out by the Aboriginal Student Centre or Office if it exists on campus or the Registrar or Recruitment Offices.

ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN PSE

There are significant gender differences within the Aboriginal population in the type of post-secondary education pursued after high school. Of those who pursued a trades certificate or diploma, 65% were men. Of those who pursued or completed a university education, 63% were women. Sixty percent of Aboriginal people who pursued a college, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate are women.

"I'm just trying to better life for my son and myself. Motivation has a lot to do with me [being here]" – A student from Sault College

The common profile of students applying to the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation shows that they tend to be women, 27 years old, many of whom are single parents.[95] More Aboriginal women are enrolled in post-secondary education than men and are more likely to have dependants, which has implications for the types of support they require for meeting family demands, in particular funding and accessibility of daycare services. Family responsibilities was one of the top reason among the Aboriginal non-reserve population aged 25-64 for not finishing postsecondary studies, cited by 23% of individuals in the Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2006.[96] This is especially why support services, such as childcare, are so vital.

RECOMMENDATION 15:

MAKE CHILDCARE FACILITIES AVAILABLE FOR ALL STUDENTS OR HELP STUDENTS FIND SUCH SERVICES IN THE COMMUNITY.

The lack of available and affordable childcare is an issue for many students with children. The burden of finding accessible and affordable childcare is one of the most frequently cited challenges, especially for Aboriginal students who are typically female, 27 years old, and a single parent. Female students have reported that significant family obligations competed for their time, energy, and resources and presented a threat to their continued studies during their first semester.[97] This issues needs to be addressed due to the fact that Aboriginal women have higher participation rates in post-secondary education than men.

Retention can take form in different ways, as there are emotional and motivational barriers to be addressed. As mentioned above, an Aboriginal student entering his or her first year is usually the first in their family to attend a PSE institution. There also is a high possibility that Aboriginal students come from rural areas in Ontario because according to the 2006 Census, only 62% of Aboriginal people live in urban areas, while the rest of the Ontario population (48%) live in rural and on-reserve areas.[CC] The geographical barriers can be difficult on those students moving from their home communities to attend PSE, not only for the financial aspect of moving but also because of the isolation and adjustment that many coming into urbanized areas face.

[CC] The Chiefs in Ontario identify 133 First Nations in Ontario, of which 127 are recognized by the *Indian Act*. Of the 133 First Nations, one in four communities are small and remote, accessible only by air or by ice road in the winter. Ontario has more remote First Nations than any other region in Canada.

"I'm a mother of two kids; 8 years old and 8 months old. I travel by public transit daily and juggle my home life and education"
– A student from Sault College

RECOMMENDATION 16:

ENCOURAGE INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNMENTS TO CREATE TARGETED-FUNDING RELOCATION GRANTS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS.

Having these grants is likely to make post-secondary education more attractive to Aboriginal students, and make them see PSE as a viable option. This grant would go a long way to help those Aboriginal students who live away from home in their move to attend school. It would help Aboriginal students overcome various barriers, including financial, geographical and motivational barriers. This could be available to students who relocate from fly-in-only communities (that are not accessible by any other transport than airplanes) at the beginning and expanded to other rural Aboriginal students.

RECOMMENDATION 17:

REVISE THE CRITERIA FOR THE ONTARIO DISTANCE GRANT AND EXPAND THE GRANT SO THAT ALL STUDENTS CAN ACCESS THE APPLICATION, NOT JUST THOSE APPLYING TO OSAP.

"Many [students that] live on reserves way up north... come to town to go to college or university end up dropping out because they are too far from home and can't handle it" – A student from Sault College

As mentioned previously, Aboriginal students have high rates of debt aversion, as do many underrepresented groups. By making the grant application more accessible to students outside of the OSAP application, more Aboriginal students would be likely to apply. With regards to the expansion of the grant, which is currently capped at $500 per term, the monetary value should be expanded due to the fact that a single trip home to rural communities costs more than the allotted maximum. Also, the existing grant is meant only for full-time students with a home address that is 80 kilometres or more from closest college or university.

"Being able to leave and go home every couple weeks would be a positive. Life goes by too fast in the city: people don't even know where they're going half the time"
– A student from Sault College

While students are in school, it is important that they have someone to connect with who understands them. A successful practice in integrating Aboriginal values into the PSE realm is to make an Elder or Elder services available for students either on campus or in the community. An Aboriginal Elder is a well-respected member of the community who have an excellent knowledge of the culture and traditions of their people. They are willing to share this knowledge by passing it on to the younger generations, and are an essential link to the past and to the future. In the PSE sphere, Elders provide students with a balance in maintain their roots and adjusting to a new environment by providing guidance, advice and counselling in a non-judgmental and empowering way.

RECOMMENDATION 18:

POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING STAFF AND FACULTY, SHOULD WELCOME ELDERS AND OTHER ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO SERVE AS STUDENT ADVISORS, COUNSELLORS, GUEST LECTURERS AND RESOURCE PERSONNEL WHERE APPLICABLE.

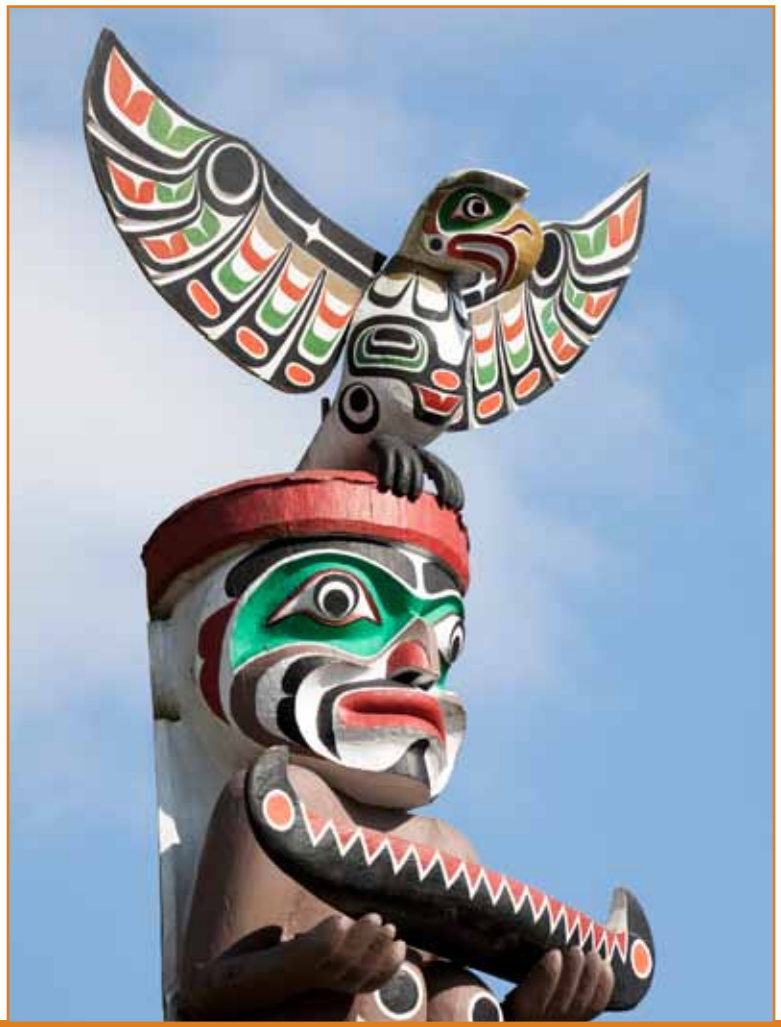
Post-secondary education institutes must strive to support Aboriginal students in their educational pursuits. This intention must be coupled with an understanding of what Aboriginal communities would consider a quality education. As mentioned previously, Aboriginal education differs in that it is holistic. The Assembly of First Nations suggests that supporting students in their education means: including Elders in the educational process; recognizing and encouraging pride and identity of Aboriginal values; employing qualified and caring teachers and teachings; and promoting growth through culture and language.[98]

Aboriginal students are most successful in college programs when there is strong community engagement and Aboriginal leadership is supportive.[99] Aboriginal students have better retention and graduation rates in institutions that are able to provide good support to Aboriginal students. One of the ways that this support can be offered is to have an Aboriginal space on campus, whether it be a room, or a centre on campus that the students can utilize. There spaces can go a long way in helping Aboriginal students with the motivational and emotional barriers that they face in completing their post-secondary education.

RECOMMENDATION 19:

ENCOURAGE INSTITUTIONS TO CREATE AN ABORIGINAL SPACE, SUCH AS A ROOM OR CENTER ON EACH CAMPUS.

These spaces are successful because they can "offer emotional support, a sense of community, peer support, administrative assistance, and educational resources."[100] This can help address the alienation and loneliness that Aboriginal students feel when they start their studies as many Aboriginal students leave home in order to attend a post-secondary institution. As mentioned previously, many Aboriginal students are the first in their families to go on to PSE and as such, need support in addressing the various informational, motivational, emotional barriers that they face in accessing PSE.



CONCLUSION

Canada's First Nations, having a relatively young population compared to the general Canadian population, represent a potential pool of skilled labour that could make valuable contributions in reducing Canada's expected labour shortages due to the aging population. In order to bring up the participation rates of Aboriginal students in the post-secondary realm, the different barriers to access must be addressed. These include, but are not limited to: financial, bureaucratic, historical, emotional, educational, institutional, motivational, and geographical barriers.

Many PSE programs exist to help students access education. To overcome these issues, different levels of government will have to work with the Aboriginal populations and different stakeholders to help Aboriginal students succeed. Just as education had been used in the past to destroy Aboriginal culture and language, education can now be used to build, restore and revive Aboriginal culture, history, values and beliefs through the schools in which Aboriginal students attend.[101]

"College helps us prepare for the real world" – A student from Sault College

These efforts cannot stand alone as a single individual, program or initiative will solve all the problems encountered by Aboriginal learners. By working in cooperation, the different groups and levels of government can help build a more promising future for individual Aboriginals and their communities and to build a stronger Canadian economy and society.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

ABORIGINAL – The term Aboriginal includes First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Where appropriate, First Nation, Métis, and/or Inuit learners are referred to specifically. The term Aboriginal is used throughout this document to include all people of Aboriginal ancestry and heritage.

ABORIGINAL INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING – Aboriginal-focused PSE institutions, also known as Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning.

BAND – The term "band" is used commonly to describe a First Nation community that has its own form of self-government. The term band is used in the *Indian Act* to and is defined as a body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Crown, or who have been declared to be a band for the purpose of the *Indian Act*. Many Indian bands have elected to call themselves a First Nation and have changed their band name to reflect this. With the 1985 amendment to the *Indian Act* of Canada (Bill C-31), many bands exercised the right to establish their own membership code, whereby it was not always necessary for a band member to be a Registered Indian according to the *Indian Act*.

BAND COUNCIL – The legal decision-making body for most bands consists of a chief and a band council. To avoid confusion, this paper uses "bands" to refer to the body entitled to exercise the band's legal power.

ELDER – A well-respected member of the community who have an excellent knowledge of the culture and traditions of their people. They are willing to share this knowledge by passing it on to the younger generations, and are an essential link to the past and to the future.

ENFRANCHISEMENT – Legal mechanism to make Aboriginal people lose their Indian status. The most common method of enfranchisement was through intermarriage, whereby a Status Indian woman marrying a non-Indian man lost her Indian status—as did her children; this law existed until the *Indian Act* was amended in 1985. Other ways in which individuals could be enfranchised in the past was by obtaining the federal right to vote, freeing simple title to land, or receiving a college or university degree.

EOI – Early Outreach Initiatives.

FIRST NATIONS – First Nations Peoples have unique relationships with Canada deriving from treaties or pre-existing Aboriginal rights. First Nations includes both status and non-status Indians living on reserves or off reserves.

INDIAN – The term "Indian" is only used due the historical context to avoid confusion, and only where appropriate. Its use is restricted because it is geographically inaccurate and can carry racist connotations. It is still in use today because it is included in many legal documents.

INDIAN ACT – This is the Canadian federal legislation, first passed in 1876, which sets out certain federal government obligations, and regulates the management of Indian reserve lands. The act has been amended several times, most recently in 1985.

INDIGENOUS INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING – Aboriginal-focused PSE institutions, also known as Aboriginal Institutes of Higher Learning.

INAC – Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Since May 2011, the name of the department has been changed to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

INUIT – A member of an Indigenous people of northern Canada.

ISSP – The Indian Studies Support Program.

MÉTIS – A person of mixed American Indian and Euro-American ancestry.

NON-STATUS – Non-Status Indians are people who consider themselves Indians or members of a First Nation but are not entitled to be registered under the *Indian Act*.

OSAP – Ontario Student Assistance Program.

OSSD – Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

PSE – Post-secondary education.

PSEAP – Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program.

PSSSP –Post-Secondary Student Support Program.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS – A school system that was intended to force the assimilation of the Aboriginal peoples into Canadian mainstream society

SELF-IDENTIFICATION – process in which students identify themselves as being of Aboriginal descent

STATUS – An individual's legal status as an Indian, as defined by the *Indian Act*

UCEP – University and College Entrance Preparation

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