FIRST NATION MÉTIS & INUIT STUDENTS IN ONTARIO'S POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

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First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Students in Ontario's Post-Secondary Education System

Policy Paper

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About Our Organization

The College Student Alliance (CSA) is a member-driven advocacy organization that has been proudly serving Ontario's college students since 1975. The CSA currently represents students from 15 colleges and 23 student associations with over 135,000 full-time student members throughout the province.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the Province of Ontario's pursuit of a 70% post-secondary education (PSE) attainment rate, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people must be a primary consideration to ensure that the province meets its targeted goals. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) peoples are the youngest and fastest-growing demographic in Canada, yet they face a variety of barriers that hinder their educational success. These barriers include, but are not limited to, financial, institutional, historical, geographical, educational, and personal barriers, many of which often intersect. To tackle these barriers, there needs to be a coordinated and holistic approach to resolve the issues that students encounter as they pursue higher education.

In order to improve the educational attainment of FNMI populations, the provincial and federal governments must ensure that FNMI children receive the culturally-relevant early childhood education that is comparable to Ontario's Full-Day Kindergarten. This start will allow students to have a foundation upon which to build up their communities. Furthermore, the federal government must provide additional support to First Nations in developing financial and knowledge-sharing resources in their development of First Nations' education within their communities as students do not have parity to the public school system. In the public system, educators need to include indigenous ways of learning into the mainstream curriculum to facilitate an understanding of FNIM peoples and to engage FNMI students in helping them overcome feelings of alienation. This could be done with the province making FNMI languages, cultures, and worldviews more visible in the provincial curriculum. The province must further expand the provincial curriculum and the teachers' resource guides to highlight the impact of Residential Schools, Treaty Education, and past historical issues whose impacts linger in communities today.

In order to increase the rates of graduation at all levels of schooling, the provincial government must collaborate with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities' educational institutions and other stakeholders to ensure programs and services are designed to address the needs of FNIM and to expand outreach activities with community partners to improve early outreach initiatives. Post-secondary institutions, communities, and secondary schools should expand mentorship programs that help students to make informed post-secondary decisions prior to leaving high school, through advice from family members and high school-aged or adult mentors. In order to continue these efforts, secondary schools, PSE institutions, and the different levels of government must continue to offer and improve preparatory and transitioning programs for secondary school students to ensure access to higher education. A barrier to education is the lack of information at a young age, and so the Ontario government must ensure that teachers and guidance department staff have the 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.

As many students are not able to access a high school education in their communities, the federal and provincial governments should work with communities to create accommodation facilities for high school students who study away from their home communities. Another way to address these geographical issues is for the provincial and federal governments and the Ministry of Education to develop the e-learning strategy for secondary school students in rural and First Nations' communities to improve their access to secondary education, all while allowing students to stay within their home communities. These options would allow students to prepare for a higher education in

their home environments. As many FNMI people pursue PSE at a later time in life or lack preparedness for higher education, the different levels of government must come together with FNMI communities to develop and implement an adult literacy strategy for Aboriginal peoples to ensure their access to post-secondary schooling.

Limited funding available is the most cited barrier to a higher education. As such, the federal government must remove the 2% funding cap placed on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and increase funding to meet the required levels of financial support to ensure access of higher education for students. The National Program Guidelines for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP) Program should be reviewed with First Nations and revised to include options for First Nations coping with additional students and a funding shortfall. As many students cannot access these federal programs and have an aversion to taking on debt, PSE institutions and government should look at expanding non-repayable bursaries and grants for FNMI students, and these must be separated from financial assistance applications. Furthermore, the existence of such funding opportunities should be better marketed to FNMI students so that these programs will have greater uptake rates. With regard to the Ontario Distance Grant, the provincial government should increase the value of this grant, revise the criteria for the grant so that it is more inclusive, and allow students to access the application outside of the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) application. Eligibility for the new Ontario Tuition Grant should also be expanded for FNMI students due to the fact that they have high financial needs.

Once students are in a college or a university, these institutions should increase retention efforts and make childcare facilities available for all students or help students find such services in the community as many FNMI students have dependants. These institutions must maintain or create an orientation program to familiarize FNMI students to the various support services on campus, especially those that are FNMI-specific and work with governments to create targeted-funding relocation grants for rural and northern students. Furthermore, 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 on campus. Furthermore, Aboriginal Educational Councils must be supported in post-secondary institutions.

To further help students cope with the stresses they will experience in their pursuit of a higher education, post-secondary education institutions must offer culturally-specific counselling to FNMI students on campus as well as maintain and expand the Aboriginal spaces or Aboriginal centres that exist on each campus. These institutions should expand or implement Métis-specific programming and support services to help Métis students succeed in a PSE environment. As the retention practices depend on the number of FNMI students on campus, institutions must pay more care and attention to the subtle but important differences of self-identification terminology in order to collect the most accurate data about the participation of FNMI students within PSE institutions. Furthermore, the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities must continue to develop a province-wide system of data collection as outlined in its 2011 Aboriginal Postsecondary Education Framework in consultation and collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and organizations.

INTRODUCTION

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students in Ontario have many barriers impeding their access to a post-secondary education (PSE). First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Canada do not have the same living conditions as non-Aboriginal people. This is seen by the poor socio-economic standards that they must endure. Although the health of FNMI peoples is gradually improving, it is generally still poorer than the health of non-Aboriginal peoples. For example, FNMI 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.

These worrying conditions stem from historical policies and hardships that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples have had to endure. Their situation has also been compounded by addictions and substance abuses that are now prevalent in Aboriginal communities.[1] Fewer First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples have jobs and they spend more time in prisons compared with other segments of the wider population. 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.[2] Furthermore, "an intergenerational cycle of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse and loss of spiritual practices has sprung from this history of devaluation and control" for Inuit and First Nations people.[3]

In the Province of Ontario's pursuit of a 70% post-secondary education attainment rate, collaboration and innovation will need to be at the forefront of the government's agenda. Ensuring the province meets its target, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people must be a primary consideration. First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples are the youngest and fastest-growing demographic in Canada, yet they face a variety of barriers that hinder their educational success. These barriers include, but are not limited to, financial, institutional, historical, geographical, educational, and personal barriers, many of which often intersect. To tackle these barriers, there needs to be a coordinated and holistic approach to resolve the issues students encounter as they pursue higher education.

Over the course of the past four years, the College Student Alliance (CSA) has been working actively to address the issues that FNMI students continue to face. The substandard conditions that are faced by FNMI peoples can be improved by an educated populace, which is why educational achievement in secondary and post-secondary education must be made a priority. The goal of this policy paper is to inform the development of comprehensive policy recommendations for FNMI students' higher education success.

In recognizing the fiscal constraints of the provincial and federal governments, collaboration between all levels of government, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, must be the basis of the government's policies. Both the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada must work in collaboration with FNMI peoples and other stakeholders to help make an educated

population a reality in the near future, as the poor socio-economic standards of FNMI peoples are one of the most important social, moral, and economic issues of our time.

A DESCRIPTION OF FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT PEOPLES

The three indigenous groups discussed in this paper are commonly called Aboriginal Peoples. The term "Aboriginal" may not be preferred or may not be looked favourably upon by some members of the groups below. As a result, the following section describes and attempts to define the terminology and populations of three indigenous groups, namely the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

First Nations

The term "First Nations" came into common usage in the 1970s to replace "band" or "Indian,"[A] which some people found offensive. Despite its widespread use, there is no legal definition for this term in Canada. First Nations (or "First Nations People") is not a synonym for Aboriginal Peoples because it does not include Inuit or Métis. First Nations People generally applies to both Status and Non-Status Indians.[4] According to the 2006 Census, there are 158,395 First Nations people in Ontario, who represents about 65% of the total Aboriginal population in Ontario. Most First Nations people in Ontario—about 70% —live outside of First Nations communities.[B] Of the populations not living in First Nations communities, 57%, or almost 90,000 First Nations people, live in urban areas.[5] "There is much diversity among the 133 First Nations communities and peoples in Ontario. There are thirteen distinct Indigenous Nations, namely the Algonquin, Mississauga, Ojibway, Onondaga, Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Cayuga, Tuscarora, Cree, Odawa, Pottowatomi and Delaware; and each Nation has their own language, dialects and knowledge systems."[6]

Métis

The word "Métis" is French for "mixed blood."[7] Métis people share common histories, traditions, and communities and are the result of unions between very specific Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. The Métis emerged as a distinct people or nation in the historic Northwest during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes Métis as one of the three Aboriginal Peoples. To The Métis National Council, "'Métis' means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, and who is accepted by the Métis Nation."[8] According to the 2006 Census, there are 73,605 Métis people in Ontario, up from 48,340 in 2001.[9]

Inuit

Inuit are the people of Arctic Canada. Inuit live primarily in the Northwest Territories,

[A] 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.

[B] Sometimes referred to as "reservations" or "reserves."

Nunavut and northern parts of Quebec, and throughout most of Labrador.[10] Inuit represent 1% of the total Aboriginal population in Ontario. The majority of Inuit living outside the four Inuit regions in Ontario—82%—live in urban areas. According to the 2006 Census, there are 2,035 Inuit in Ontario, which is about 1% of the roughly 246,000 Aboriginal people in Ontario.[11]

A PROFILE OF FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, AND INUIT PEOPLES IN ONTARIO

According to the 2006 Census and information from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), the total estimated population of Aboriginal peoples in Ontario is 296,495.[12] This represented roughly 2% of the province's total population. According to the 2006 Census, there are more than 1.1 million people in Canada who identify themselves as an Aboriginal person. Ontario—the most populous province in Canada—is also the province with the largest Aboriginal population.[13] One in five of the country's Aboriginal peoples (21%) lived in Ontario in 2006. This demographic information is important for policy and planning purpose, as it highlights the need for greater public policy development for FNMI peoples.

The Aboriginal population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population. More than a third of the Aboriginal population consists of children and teenagers aged 19 and under, compared with a quarter for the non-Aboriginal population.[C] 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.[14]

According to the 2006 Census, between 2001 and 2006, Ontario's FNMI population grew faster than the non-Aboriginal population, increasing 28.3%, or nearly five times faster than the 6.2% rate of growth for the non-Aboriginal population.[D] However, FNMI peoples in Canada do not enjoy the same or similar socioeconomic standards as the non-Aboriginal populations. With regards to educational, labour force, and income, FNMI peoples have consistently had lower educational attainment, higher unemployment rates, and lower incomes than the non-Aboriginal populations in Ontario.

In Ontario, for example, First Nations people do not complete high school as often as Métis and Inuit. Their high school completion rate is 58%, while the Métis rate is 70% and the Inuit rate is 59%,[15] according to the 2006 Census. It would be incorrect to compare this data to the current high school completion rates in Ontario that stood at 81% as of 2010.[16] However, the 2001 and 2006 Censuses show that the direction of the high school graduation trend is at somewhat of a decline with no improvement in graduation rates for

[C] 35.7% of the Aboriginal population when compared to 25.1% for the non-Aboriginal populations, respectively. From the 2006 Census.

[D] 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).

students living in First Nations communities.[17]

Another worrying trend is that of high unemployment. In Ontario, the Métis population has a 10% unemployment rate, which is lower than the First Nations' unemployment rate of 14% and the Inuit's unemployment rate of 15% when compared to the mainstream unemployment rate. The Métis population also has a higher labour force participation rate at 69% than the First Nations' rate of 63% and the Inuit's rate of 65%.[18] This trend is also reflected in the low-income attainment of these populations. The average income of Inuit, at $28,000, is slightly lower than the Métis' average of $29,000 and higher than the First Nations' average of $24,000. These income patterns appear to be related to the level of education achieved and labour force participation rates.[19] In Ontario, within the Aboriginal populations, 21% of families are low income. This is in comparison to the non-Aboriginal population, in which 12% of families are low income.[20]

The low educational and income attainments manifest themselves in other ways. For example, First Nations adults generally have higher body mass indexes (BMIs) than the general Canadian population, and the obesity rate for the First Nations population is twice the Canadian obesity rate.[21] The cause of death due to alcohol use is almost twice the rate in the Aboriginal population than of the general population[E]; however, data on the extent and impact of alcohol use on Aboriginal communities are lacking.[22] Poor mental health is also a characteristic for many communities as shown by rates of suicide that are up to six times higher than the general populations in Canada.

Another detriment of health is that of housing as "both poor quality and lack of accessible housing can affect physical and mental health through."[23] Aboriginal people are disproportionately affected by poor housing conditions, particularly on-reserve First Nations people and Inuit in the North.[24] Also concerning is the rate of incarceration: while Aboriginal peoples represent roughly 2% of the province's total population, they represent about 9% of the inmates in prisons in the province.[25]

To overcome these issues, different levels of government must work with the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations and different stakeholders to help Aboriginal students succeed as education is a way to improve all of the socio-economic issues these groups face. 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.[26]

These efforts cannot stand alone as a single individual, program or initiative will not be able to resolve issues encountered by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners. These problems will require a comprehensive approach by policy makers, with the understanding that the issues are highly complex. As a result, there is no one solution for these problems, as a multifaceted policy issue such as this will need a holistic approach to resolving and

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

untangling the various problems that exist. By working in cooperation, the different groups and levels of government can help support a more promising future for individual Aboriginals and their communities and to build a stronger Canadian economy and society

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early Childhood Education

An aspect of education policy is that of Early Childhood Education (ECE). In 2011, the province began to implement full-day kindergarten for public school children. This is very difficult to compete with for First Nations schools and communities that do not have the resources in place to develop these programs.[27] Coordination of funding and programming envelopes to meet financial need in the development of a coordinated ECE plan is a difficult endeavour that places an undue burden on First Nations communities, especially smaller ones that do not have the administrative infrastructure to support this harmonization.

Early Childhood Education is especially important for FNMI populations as they have the youngest and fastest-growing demographic across Canada. This issue has been highlighted many times, including by the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in their report with the recommendation that the design of this ECE "maximizes Aboriginal control over service design and administration; d) offers one-stop accessible funding; and e) promotes parental involvement and choice in early childhood education options."[28] This recommendation still have not been implemented as shown by the fact that in 2011, the Assembly of First Nations found that 78% of First Nations children do not have access to licensed child care.[29]

The importance of culturally-relevant ECE is also a cornerstone for the National Strategy on Inuit Education, as ECE "sets the standard for better education outcomes by creating expectations of success for children and for those parents who are being introduced to the education system for the first time." [30] The Métis community as well sees that ECE "is the earliest part of the lifelong learning path and the most important part of the path in terms of forming a strong sense of pride, identity, language and cultural knowledge."[31] Policy makers have undeniably recognized the vital importance of Early Childhood Education and the benefits that this brings to children in communities. It is critical that the youngest and fastest-growing populations have access to ECE programs that are being implemented in Ontario. These issues can only be resolved in partnerships with First Nations and Inuit communities.

Barrier: FNMI students may not receive a culturally-relevant early childhood education in Ontario. Furthermore, First Nations community schools, due to underfunding, are not able to provide a comprehensive program that is comparable to Ontario's Full-Day Kindergarten.

Recommendation 1: The provincial and federal governments must ensure that First Nations, Métis and Inuit children receive

the culturally-relevant Early Childhood Education (ECE) that is comparable to Ontario's Full-Day Kindergarten. Children must have access to comparable education opportunities—licensed child care and fully financed full-day early learning programs directed by FNIM—in order to succeed. This must be developed in cooperation with FNMI communities as it is only through a culturally-relevant curriculum that children will succeed.

Benefit: With culturally-relevant early childhood education, children will be able to have a strong foundation for their educational career. Furthermore, by investing in ECE, the two levels of government would be able to ensure that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children can ultimately reach education parity with the mainstream populations.

Elementary Education in First Nations Schools

When discussing elementary (as well as secondary) education, a distinction must be made between First Nations community schools and provincial public schools. Many people are not aware that there is a different construction of schooling for First Nations students who have status and attend "on-reserve" schools. These schools for First Nations children are also known as First Nations schools, or First Nations community schools. Although education in Canada constitutionally falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces, First Nations students' education falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government[F] due to the *Indian Act.*[32] Unlike First Nations schools, the Inuit education system is not regulated by the *Indian Act*. Inuit students' education falls under the jurisdiction of their province/territory. Furthermore, there is limited federal funding provided for post-secondary education, but this funding is not always available to Inuit because of the number of student applicants.

The federal government has a responsibility to provide funding for some students because the Crown negotiated treaties with First Nations. These negotiations resulted in "the several treaties which provided specific guarantees related to the provision of education, which includes funding for formal education."[33] In contrast, Métis students do not receive any federal funding because "once the Numbered Treaties were signed and following the Battle of Batoche

[F] 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).

in 1885, 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."[34] As a result, Métis children attend public schools in Ontario.

Elementary education, as well as secondary education, for First Nations students is strongly criticized because the educational attainment of children is not comparable with children who receive their schooling outside of First Nations communities, usually in public schools. The major reason for this lack of parity is that First Nations schools are chronically underfunded in comparison to public schools, which will be discussed later in this document. This underfunding is partly due to the cap the federal government placed on the funding formula in 1996. To quantify this underfunding, the "Canadian Government provided First Nations children about $2,000 to $3,000 less per student, per year, than the provinces and territories provided to non-First Nations children for education."[35] This cap, along with the highest population growth rate in the country and an increased cost of living has resulted in the chronic underfunding that is detrimental to First Nations communities in Ontario. This is exacerbated by the fact that First Nations schools continue to be funded with the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 1980s' funding formula.

This reality goes against the purpose of the elementary and secondary school programming as, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's own words:

"The overall objective of elementary/secondary education (ESE) programming is to *provide eligible students living on reserve with education programs comparable to those* that are required in provincial schools by the statutes, regulations or policies of the province in which the reserve is located. It is expected that eligible students will receive a comparable education to other Canadians within the same province of residence, with similar educational outcomes to other Canadians and with attendant socio-economic benefits to themselves, their communities and Canada."[36 G]

Almost all federal officials "working in Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)[H] 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."[37] However, the consensus amongst First Nations students is that their schools are not comparable and are in reality, two grades behind public schools.[38] In an internal department audit of the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, only about 20%[I] of First Nations educational administrators and principals believed that transferability between on-reserve schools and provincial schools had been achieved.[39] Of the 25 department officials surveyed in the audit, not one of them believed that transferability had been achieved.[40]

As the Auditor General concluded in her 2004 report, "the Department does not know whether the funding provided to First

[G] Emphasis added.

[H] Now the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC).

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

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."[41] Therefore, claims of parity from AANDC are misplaced and uninformed. Furthermore, this lack of clarity is compounded by the fact that "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."[42] This lack of a formalized education system like the one that exists for the provinces 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.

While 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 First Nations affairs. Additionally, First Nations would reject the transfer, as would most provinces due to a variety of administrative and legal issues. The knowledge pathways that exist need to be improved between First Nations and government, as this is a two-way street that can benefit all parties in support of their goals.

Barriers: The education for elementary and secondary school children in First Nations communities is chronically underfunded and fragmented, thereby denying students ample opportunity to be prepared academically for post-secondary.

Recommendation 2: The federal government must provide additional support to First Nations in developing financial and knowledge sharing resources. Furthermore, the federal government must provide equitable resources to facilitate the creation of First Nations-driven education systems with appropriate linkages and partnerships with mainstream service providers if optimum student success is to be achieved.

Benefit: First Nations children will have a chance to be educated in a culturally-relevant environment that preserves their traditions and worldviews of their communities. The lack of educational attainment for First Nations peoples is one of the most critical moral, social, and economic issues faced by governments and must be addressed as these communities have some of the youngest and fastest-growing populations in Canada.

Elementary Education in Public Schools

The educational experience is completely different for students attending public and provincial schools when compared to First Nations Schools.[J] According to the 2006

[J] Many First Nations pay tuition to public schools at the elementary and secondary school level to enroll children who do not have a school within their communities because elementary and secondary

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 Nations. Based on these ratios, on-reserve, band-operated schools are responsible at any point in time for educating about one Aboriginal child in five and provincial governments are responsible for the other four,[43] which highlights the importance of the provinces in elementary and secondary education. There are over 50,000 Aboriginal students who attend public elementary and secondary schools in Ontario.[44] That is not to say that the government should focus more on the on-reserve or off-reserve population; the needs of students within the two systems must be addressed.

In order for the FNMI children in provincial schools to do well, indigenous worldviews must be included in the mainstream curriculum, as only through the reflection of FMNI culture will students fully engage in the classroom. Simply stated, the inclusion of FNMI culture and history in the classroom will help students from these populations success if they see their identities reflected in the classrooms. Likewise, non-Aboriginal students will also benefit from a multicultural perspective and the diversity that comes from indigenous perspectives.[45]

In Canada, the average performance of indigenous children is below that of non-indigenous students in terms of conventional performance measures. Indigenous knowledge is holistic as 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 modelling, sharing circles, dialogue, meditation, storytelling, practice, and animation rather than through the written word.[46] It is difficult to measure by mainstream, conventional performance measures that are used in Ontario's public schools.

Barrier: Children from First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities have a lower educational performance than non-indigenous children in Canada. This is due partially to the fact that provincial public schools do not reflect indigenous views and ways of learning.

Recommendation 3: Educators need to include indigenous ways of learning into the mainstream curriculum to engage First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students to help them overcome feelings of alienation.

Benefit: Success for all students is improved when there is an inclusion of indigenous worldviews and teaching methods, not just First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children.

High motivation and engagement in learning have consistently been linked to reduced dropout rates and increased levels of student success. A student who is engaged is likely to have more success in school. Student engagement is influenced by a variety of factors, one of which is context. Relating material to students' lives

education for status First Nations children is the responsibility of the federal government. These agreements are called Educational Service Agreements.

makes them much more likely to engage in the material and courses. Teachers need to have a strong understanding of how FNMI 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.*"[K] [47] The Métis Nation of Ontario points out the fact that within a mainstream education, students are disadvantaged by the fact that a that a mainstream education does not recognize "existing knowledge and skill sets upon beginning a formal education contribute to a lack of academic achievement and loss of confidence in these very early years initiating and perpetuating the cycle of students who may never catch up."[48]

Another way that the mainstream education system could be improved is through the expansion of FNMI history, language, and culture in the curriculum. The importance of language inclusion in mainstream curriculum to FNMI groups is paramount to the success of children from these groups. To illustrate this, it is important to note that "the central goal for Métis education is the preservation of the Métis Nation, including the preservation of the history, culture, language and identity and the relationship of the Métis to the land."[49] Likewise, the National Strategy on Inuit Education also emphasizes the importance of a bilingual education for Inuit children.[50]

The provincial schools only teach in one dominant language, which inadvertently denies children with indigenous and First Nations background to learn and master indigenous languages, even if the "provincial teacher may be sympathetic and knowledgeable about First Nations."[51] However, until the principles of First Nations Control over First Nations Education can be fully implemented in education policy, the province must provide a better way of delivering language and culture education to First Nations students that represent their communities. This must also be applied to Inuit and Métis students in Ontario, as four out of five FNMI children are within the provincial public schools.

Barrier: There is a lack of reflection of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit languages, cultures, and worldviews in the provincial curriculum. This impedes the understanding of the general populations of the issues First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities face, as well as alienates students from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities due to the lack of inclusion of their Inuit languages, cultures, and worldviews.

Recommendation 4: The province must make First Nations, Métis, and Inuit languages, cultures, and worldviews more visible in the provincial curriculum. This could be expanded with the provincial Teacher's Tool Kit. 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.

Benefit: Students from FNMI communities will be able to have higher academic

[K] Emphasis added.

achievement and confidence if their languages, cultures, and worldviews more visible in the provincial curriculum.

The enactment and implementation of the *Constitution Act* of 1867 (also known as the *British North America Act*) and of the *Indian Act* (1876)[L] gave responsibility of First Nations education to the federal government. From these two Acts,[M] 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."[52] Treaty Education has not been a priority in Ontario as it has been in other jurisdictions. For example, in 2007 the Saskatchewan Speech from the Throne[N] broadly set out the agenda of the government and identified Treaty Education as a priority for the K–12 education systems and "committed to making mandatory instruction in history and content of the Treaties in the K-12 curriculum."[53]

In order to adequately address the educational issues faced by FNMI students in Ontario, one must be aware of the experiences related to education. Historically, the policy that guided FMNI education in Canada is that of assimilation, meaning that the education system was used to integrate Aboriginal children into mainstream Eurocentric society. As indigenous knowledge and traditions did not mirror the typical Canadian order of life, there was a bias against indigenous ways of life which still lingers today.[O] This led to the idea that FMNI people were not civilized and needed to be enlightened to the so-called "proper" ways of living, which resulted in the creation of residential schools in Canada. Residential schools opened in Canada in the 1880s, and the last residential school closed its doors in 1996.

Due to the assimilation policies adopted by the federal government, more than 150,000 children who were placed in residential schools, often against their parents' wishes,[54] were prohibited from using indigenous languages and culture,[55] 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.[P] In residential schools, Christian

[L] 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. From Henderson.

[M] 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).

[N] By the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, the Honourable Dr. Gordon L. Barnhart.

[O] To the European and Canadian governments of the past, anything that was non-European in origin was not seen as "legitimate."

[P] 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.

religion and European values and traditions were compulsory, and physical, sexual, and mental abuse was prevalent.[56] [57] With a revision of the *Indian Act* in 1911, residential school attendance "became mandatory for all children between the ages of 7 and 15."[58] 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.[59]

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 his or her Indian status. This process, called enfranchisement,[60] 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 families and communities. Residential schools and enfranchisement practices greatly harmed Aboriginal communities across Canada and the issues from these practices remain today. In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an apology to former residential school students, stating that assimilation policies were "wrong, [have] caused great harm and [have] no place in our country."[61]

The impact of education is intergenerational meaning that the education experience and attitudes of the parents and prior generations impact the current generation.[62] While there are an estimated 80,000 former students living today, the ongoing impact of residential schools has been felt throughout generations and has contributed to social problems that continue to exist.[63] The impact of residential schools on FNMI communities has been extremely negative and has destroyed the different cultures and families. One way the federal government has tried to address the legacy of residential schools is with the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), which is the largest class action settlement in Canadian history. In 2006, survivors of the residential school system, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives, and church entities signed an agreement with the Government of Canada in the hopes of achieving a comprehensive resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools.

A component of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This commission is mandated to hold seven national events, support community events, create a public historical record, and promote awareness about the Residential Schools system and its impacts. The TRC will prepare a comprehensive historical record on the policies and operations of the schools and produce a report that will include recommendations to the Government of Canada concerning the IRS system and its legacy. The federal Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996 which found that many of the problems encountered in Aboriginal communities today—violence, alcoholism, and loss of pride and spirituality—can be traced back to the sense of disconnect that Aboriginal children experienced as a result of being sent to a residential school.

The legacy of residential schools remains a major barrier to FNMI students' participation in post-secondary education. Nunavut and the Northwest Territories have expanded the grade 10 curriculum to include mandatory studies of Residential Schools. This curriculum will be taught as part of a mandatory Northern Studies course to all grade 10 students, and was developed in partnership with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Legacy of Hope Foundation to give insight into the challenges faced by survivors.[64]

Barrier: The provincial curriculum does not reflect the history of residential schools or treaty negotiations. As a result, there are many misconceptions of the lingering impact of these events on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities today.

Recommendation 5: The province, in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities must further expand the provincial curriculum and the teachers' resource guides to highlight the history of Residential Schools, treaty negotiations, and past issues whose impacts linger in communities today.

Benefit: The expansion of the public curriculum will allow students to learn about the impact that the past has not only on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, but also on Canadian society today.

Teachers and other staff members who use the Teacher's Toolkit should be aware of the gaps of FNMI history and social issues in the toolkit. While the ideas and strategies for teaching FNMI 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.

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. FNMI youth, like the youth

across Canada, decide whether to attend post-secondary school before the age of 15, sometimes as early as age 9.[65] Likewise, almost half of Canadian youth make the decision of whether or not to attend a post-secondary program before they reach grade nine.[66] FNMI students who want to access PSE are hampered by the low rates of elementary and secondary education success. It is important to note that socio-economic status tends to play a significant role in post-secondary education choices.

Early outreach initiative programs like Pathways to Education must be supported by the provincial and federal governments. This 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."[67] The Pathways to Education program 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.[68] As an economic imperative, the return on investment today for $1 invested in Pathways is $24. The cumulative lifetime benefit to society of a student in Pathways (compared to the pre-Pathways students) is $600,000.[69]

Some Ontario colleges that have early outreach include, but are not limited to, Canadore College, Humber College, and Fanshawe College. For example, Canadore College encourages Aboriginal students to attend its annual Aiming Higher Conference, a one-day event dedicated to informing Aboriginal youth of the benefits of attending a post-secondary institution. Humber College encourages Aboriginal students to participate in its Aboriginal Camp Choice event hosted each summer. The purpose of the program is to engage youth in educational activities promoting awareness of PSE. This program grew by 55% from 2009 to 2010.

Fanshawe College has recently hired a community outreach and transition advisor who is in contact with 10 local First Nations communities. The intent of this role is to promote the institution as well as to increase participation and support for the students. To build lasting and sustainable relationships, colleges should work with Aboriginal communities to build mutually beneficial relationships based on mutual understanding, but they should also allow for the opportunity to gather and promote best practices.

Barrier: Students from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities do not see a clear pathway to post-secondary education due to the intersection barriers they encounter. The lack of mentorship and preparation they face can be addressed with early outreach initiatives (EOI) that have been proven to help students see higher education as a viable option.

Recommendation 6: The provincial government must collaborate with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities; educational institutions; and other stakeholders to expand early outreach activities with community partners to improve EOI.

Benefit: Increasing EOI targeted towards First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students will help increase the rates of higher education attainment for these communities.

EOIs ought to be community-based in order to develop strong ties between these programs' participants and members of their communities, such as the different FNMI populations 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 FNMI communities. These "outreach programs have the advantage of allowing students to remain in their home communities, while simultaneously maintaining family ties and community support."[70] The utilization of community partnerships, like with Friendship Centres that exist throughout the province,[Q] 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 FNMI communities and other stakeholders is vital to the success of early outreach initiatives.

In order to build lasting and sustainable relationships, colleges should work with FNMI communities to build mutually beneficial relationships based on mutual understanding. Colleges that have forged these relationships have better FNMI 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 grades seven or eight. 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.

For example, Fanshawe College, which enrols over 250 aboriginal students, has recently hired a community outreach and transition advisor who is in contact with 10 local First Nation communities. The intent of this role is to promote the institution, but also to increase participation and support for the students. In order to build lasting and sustainable relationships, colleges should work with Aboriginal communities to build mutually beneficial relationships based on mutual understanding.

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.

[Q] Friendship Centres are not-for-profit corporations which are mandated to serve the needs of all Aboriginal people regardless of legal definition. This necessitates responding to thousands of Aboriginal people requiring culturally-sensitive and culturally-appropriate services in urban communities.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

In order to succeed in the modern economy FNMI children need to acquire an acceptable education which 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.[71] 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.

FNMI students have lower high school graduation rates compared to the non-Aboriginal population, which presents greater challenges to participating in Ontario's knowledge economy. Data suggest that the drop-out rate for Aboriginals before completion of grade nine is about 20% and 40% before completion of grade 12, compared to with 3% and 16%, respectively, for the non-Aboriginal population.[72] Approximately 60% of First Nations on-reserve residents ages 20–24 still have not completed high school nor obtained an alternative diploma or certificate.[73] Similarity across Canada, "the stark reality of Inuit education today is that roughly 75% of children are not completing high school, and many who do find that their skills and knowledge don't compare to those of non-Aboriginal graduates."[74 R]

[R] Data for the high school completion rates for Inuit were not available from all four Inuit regions; the 75% could be higher or lower.

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.[75] The issues that FNMI students face in elementary school are only exacerbated in secondary school. These issues encompass a variety of barriers, including personal, institutional, familial, and geographical barriers. 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.[76]

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 students become parents themselves at a very young age. It is a common experience when First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students are the first in their families to pursue a PSE; they often lack mentorship to help them with the transition.[77] These issues are further intensified by the misunderstanding of the existing issues by those who are trying to help students succeed. The barriers can be

overcome with a stronger emphasis from both levels of government, institutions and communities by increasing early outreach, mentorship, and predatory programs.

Barrier: Due to the low PSE attainment of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Ontario, many youths do not see a higher education as a viable option. Mentorship plays a large role in the development of these views as the interaction of those who have attained a higher education can make the accomplishment seem feasible.

Recommendation 7: Post-secondary institutions, communities, and secondary schools should expand mentorship programs that help students to make informed post-secondary decisions prior to leaving high school, through advice from family members and high school-aged or adult mentors.

Benefit: Mentorship programs would allow students from FNMI communities access a PSE by providing students with guidance that is tailored to their life experiences.

The expansion of mentorship programs would give students 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. As research shows, 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."[78] This can also be help by the early outreach initiatives mentioned above, as the goal of the government should be to make sure that students in Ontario can access higher education, especially those students from vulnerable groups who do not finish high school.

Not only are Aboriginal students facing barriers due to low high school graduation rates, they are also less academically prepared for higher education, which then leads to higher dropout rates at the post-secondary education level. 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 who is older, female, has family responsibilities, and enters a PSE program. This is why bridging programs are so vital.

Barrier: Many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students who wish to access a higher education may not have the requisite level of knowledge needed to succeed in a PSE environment. This situation can be improved with remedial preparatory and transitioning programs.

Recommendation 8: Secondary schools, PSE institutions, and the different levels of government, in partnership with FNMI communities, must continue to offer and improve remedial preparatory and transitioning programs for secondary

school students to ensure access to higher education.

Benefit: Transition and preparatory programs can fill in the educational gaps that students may experience on their pathway to post-secondary education.

A great preparatory program is the University and College Entrance Program (UCEP), a federal program only available to First Nations that have status under the *Indian Act* and Inuit people. UCEP helps under-qualified Aboriginals participate in PSE through preparatory programs. The federal government provides financial assistance for one year to eligible First Nation and Inuit students to enable them to attain the academic level required for admittance into a post-secondary education program. The curriculum contains cultural components, focuses on Aboriginal role models, mentoring and peer support, and participation in cultural events.[S] This upgrading program covers concepts from grades 10, 11, and 12 in a PSE setting.

Preparatory programs can also include, but are not limited to, literacy programs, adult basic education, Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) equivalency programs, and dual credit programs. For example, dual credit programs allow students in high school to take college-level classes in their senior years in high school. Upon completion, the credits earned can count towards their high school diploma as well as a post-secondary certificate, diploma, degree, or apprenticeship certification. The program's objectives are to increase accessibility by allowing students to experience post-secondary education in a seamless manner. They allow students to acculturate to the PSE realm before they even leave high school and a great retention and accessibility tool. Targeting these programs for FNMI students would definitely be a step in the right direction.

What secondary schools could do to improve students access PSE is provide more information for students on the realities of college and university studies, including the costs and benefits associated with higher education. One of the ways to address these issues is to improve the mandatory Career Studies course for grade 10 students. The course curriculum makes reference to the importance of post-secondary education but places a much greater emphasis on employment-related topics such as self-assessment, the job market, and employment strategies than it does on educational planning.[79] With regards to the high school curriculum, improved information about financial assistance and the different streams and opportunities available to students could increase students' participation in PSE.

Research suggests that students from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, such as Aboriginal students, may be more averse to

[S] Aboriginal administrative organizations manage the program and provide information on the application process.

borrowing and the possibility of default, a phenomenon known as debt aversion.[80] 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. This issue needs to be addressed very early on as students make the decision to attend a higher education institution at a very early age.

Furthermore, research has found that many bursaries targeted at low-income and underrepresented students have not increased access partly because these bursaries reach those who have already succeeded in applying and enrolling in post-secondary education. The bursaries' impact was limited in secondary school, because many students were unaware of their existence and qualification criteria.[81] With that in mind, the benefits that students attain from a PSE, including better socio-economic conditions, need to be better communicated to the students, as do the variety of options available to students, including financial aid, debt management, and bursaries in secondary school would make programs more effective in reaching those with the greatest need. The act of filling out a mock bursary, scholarship, or loan application in school could be a way for FNMI students that the applications are accessible.

Canadian studies show that "school guidance counsellors and teachers were thought to have very little impact on the decisions made by students" and that students needed more information on admissions, programs, career choices, costs, and financing options.[82] School counsellors who facilitate guidance and career education through credit courses, exit programs, and informal assistance are helpful to 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 counsellor services can be improved.

Barrier: Students do not have access to the information they need to make informed decisions regarding their educational pathways and are not aware of the benefits of higher education due to the supports and curriculum in secondary school. Furthermore, counselling and student support services in First Nations communities are critical to assisting students to succeed but these services are underfunded.

Recommendation 9: The Ontario government must ensure that teachers and guidance department staff have the 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. Moreover, the federal government must ensure that the counselling and student support needs are also met in First Nation community schools.

Benefit: Students will be aware of the benefits of higher education and would have the knowledge needed to advance their education within Ontario.

As mentioned above, many students face geographical barriers when trying to access secondary school. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit 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.[83] 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 urbanized 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.

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 practice of students boarding began, especially due to the suicide and disappearance rates of Aboriginal youth, such as in Thunder Bay. Most notably, 24 Nishnawbe Aski communities in the Sioux Lookout District in north-western Ontario have suffered more than 300 child and youth suicides over the last decade.[84] In Thunder Bay, seven native teens have disappeared and died since 2000. All came from remote northern First Nations communities to attend high school because there was no suitable school for them in their home communities. 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.

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 to attend high school. These housing facilities would have to be designed, built, and overseen in cooperation with FNMI 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[T] in

[T] 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.

Thunder Bay. This will help First Nations and Inuit students successfully complete high school as they will be supported in their educational endeavours by qualified staff.

Barrier: Some students from rural and northern communities do not have secondary school facilities available to them in their communities in order to pursue a high school education.

Recommendation 10: The federal and provincial governments should work with communities to create accommodation facilities for high school students who study away from their home communities.

Benefit: The creation of accommodation facilities that have support services geared towards FNMI students will ensure that these students can attend secondary school with culturally- relevant supports that will ensure their academic and personal success.

One other way that the geographical barrier could be solved is through the expansion of online learning for secondary school children from rural and northern areas. This method of learning has been extremely successful into college and university sectors. To illustrate this, Ontario's higher education system has more than 18,000 courses and over 1,000 online programs and distance learning opportunities,[85] with more than half a million student registrations in college and university online courses.[86] The most significant aspect of online learning for First Nations communities are Contact North's[U] online distance centres,[87] of which 29 are placed within First Nations communities.[88] These physical "online learning centres" are equipped with distance education technologies such as audioconferencing, videoconferencing, web conferencing, computer workstations, and high-speed Internet (where available).[89]

The Ontario Ministry of Education has E-Learning, a strategy designed to allow students access to online learning for learners from K-12. A component of this strategy is the provincial Learning Management System (LMS), which is geared towards secondary school students that are not able to access specific courses due to scheduling conflicts or the unavailability of certain classes within their home school.[90] These courses are standardized and must meet the same requirements as courses delivered in a traditional classroom, specifically with regards to the "assessment and evaluation of student achievement of curriculum expectations, the recording of students' marks, and other relevant information."[91] The Keewaytinook Internet High School is an example of an online secondary school developed by First Nations communities and is the first internet high school approved by the Ontario Ministry of Education.[92] The Keewaytinook Internet High School allows students to stay in their home communities and pursue education as the community provides a place for students to learn.

Barrier: Due to geographical barriers, many students are not able to access a high

[U] Contact North/Contact Nord is Ontario's distance education and training network. Established in 1986, it is a non-profit corporation—funded by the Government of Ontario—that offers access to education opportunities for Ontarians through online learning.

school education in their home communities.

Recommendation 11: The provincial and federal governments and the Ministry of Education should work to develop the e-learning strategy for secondary school students in rural and First Nations communities to improve access to secondary education all while allowing students to stay within their home communities.

Benefit: Online learning has been proven to increase access to post-secondary schooling by allowing students who are not able to relocate for school. The expansion of this practice would greatly benefit those young students who cannot access a secondary education in their communities and would allow them to stay within those communities at such a young age.

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.[93] 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.[94]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION (PSE)

In general, colleges in Ontario have higher rates of participation of students from under-represented groups than universities. According to the 2006 Census 38% of the Aboriginal population has some type of post-secondary education.[95] This specifically includes 19% with a college credential, 10% with apprenticeships, 7% with a degree, and 2% with a diploma. This 38% attainment shows a 13% gap when compared to the 51% of the non-Aboriginal population has attained a higher education.

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.[96]

Colleges are less expensive, as the average Ontario tuition fees for college students in 2011 are $2,311[97] for regular programs of study, while for universities the average is $5,138.[98] 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.

Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning

Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning, also known as Indigenous 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 Indigenous institutions to partner with mainstream postsecondary institutions in order to access funding and to ensure the credibility and portability of student credentials.[99] Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning (IIHL) have proven to be very successful in helping students attain a PSE. Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning in Ontario receive funding from two primary sources: through AANDC's Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) funding and through the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities post-secondary funding. However, funding is very limited.[100]

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.[101] 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.[102] 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 of between 60% and 90% per year.[103] The diverse practices used in these IIHLs should be looked at as models for mainstream institutions looking to support FNMI learners.

Barrier: Mainstream educational institutes are not able to provide First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners with the support that Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning (IIHL) have offered and that have proven to be extremely successful.

Recommendation 12: Mainstream institutions such as the public colleges and universities in Ontario should look the Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning (IIHL) to gain clarity and adapt best practices to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners. Furthermore, the provincial and federal governments must do more to provide equitable funding for indigenous institutions and must facilitate increased partnerships between Indigenous institutions and mainstream institutions to enhance students' access to higher education.

Benefit: Mainstream institutions can better support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners if they are able to reproduce the best practices and support services offered to students in the Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning.

Literacy and Basic Skills

A success of the college system is that of remedial and predatory education. Colleges, due to the smaller class sizes and their placement in the communities, can help those students who lack academic or social preparation for college. Many programs exist that are funded or coordinated by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities that are usually at no cost to the student. These program availabilities at different colleges may include assessments, Academic and Career Entrance Certificate Programs (ACE), college certificate that may be recognized as equivalent to an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), Ontario high school equivalency certificates, college preparation for adults (academic upgrading), and Literacy and Basic Skills Program.

While a plethora of programs exists, one of the most persistent issues preventing the attainment of a higher education is the lack of literacy in FMNI communities. This is especially worrisome as weak literacy skills are associated with poorer labour-force outcomes. In Ontario, there are only three possible funding sources for Aboriginal adult literacy programming on-reserve.[104] One is the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) funding from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Aboriginal organizations and communities may access funds through the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS)[105] or from the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), the Local Delivery Mechanisms (LDMs), and local fundraising efforts on the part of individual programs/communities.[106]

The results from the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey were scored on a five-level scale, with Level 3 considered to be the level required "for coping with the increasing skill demands of the emerging knowledge and information economy,"[107] which is arguably the minimum for participation in the knowledge economy. For Aboriginal adults, the employment gap between those with strong and those with weaker literacy skills are below that of the non-Aboriginal population. For example, among First Nations in urban Saskatchewan, 65% of those at or above Level 3 are employed versus only 31% for those below Level 3. For all Canadians, 77% of those with literacy skills at or above Level 3 are employed, and only 66% of those with literacy skills below Level 3 are employed.[108] This is a 12% and 35% participation labour participation gap between working-age Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, respectively.

Barrier: Due to the educational barriers at the elementary and secondary school levels, many First Nations, Métis and Inuit people do not have the essential literacy and basic skills that are necessary to participate in the higher education sphere.

Recommendation 13: The different levels of government must come together with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to develop and implement an adult literacy strategy for FNMI peoples to ensure their access to post-secondary schooling and the labour market.

Benefit: Ensuring that FNMI people are equipped with the essential literacy and basic skills will result in the ease of access to a post-secondary education.

Targeted training programs are increasingly becoming important development tools, geared toward bridging the gap of disparity

caused by chronic unemployment. Training programs provide meaningful opportunities for FNMI people to develop educational and job experiences that will offer sustainable employment in major economic industries. Furthermore, these programs provide lasting benefits for FNMI communities, families, and individuals seeking to improve themselves. The strategic outcome of training programs is to assist FNMI people to become participants in economic opportunities in all sectors of industry. The government of Canada spends millions of dollars each year on training programs for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. While these [programs are immensely helpful, many people cannot access them because they do not have the functional literacy needed to participate in them.

Funding

The federal government is required to provide First Nations and Inuit peoples with an elementary and secondary education. There is strong disagreement about post-secondary education responsibility—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."[109] Furthermore, the federal government views PSE as a social policy rather than a treaty right.[110] First Nation political leaders assert that education at all levels is a right gained through a treaty based on the treaty's interpretation, the fiduciary obligation of the Crown, and the unique constitutional position of First Nations.[111] 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.

Funding is the most-noted barrier for students that are trying access a higher education. The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) is the federal program that Aboriginal students with status access for funding through their band.[V] 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. Mainly, students must have Indian status and be registered under the *Indian Act.*[W] The PSSSP is intended to cover

[V] 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 is not always necessary for a band member to be a Registered Indian according to the *Indian Act*.

[W] In order to have status, a prospective student must be registered as a member of a band, 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. 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, as part of section 10 of the *Indian Act.*

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.

There are students who are First Nations student but do not have status. Therefore, these students are not eligible for federal funding. A non-status Indian is a person who considers him/herself Indian or a member of a First Nation but whom the Government of Canada does not recognize as Indian under the Indian Act, either because the person is unable to prove his/her Indian status or have lost status rights.[X] [Y] 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*. Non-status Indians are not entitled to the same rights and benefits available to Status Indians, including PSSSP funding, even though they may experience similar socioeconomic conditions and barriers to education. Students that do not have status would strongly benefit from accessing grants and bursaries targeted at Aboriginal peoples. Métis people also do not receive federal funding for education. The federal government claims no fiduciary responsibility for Métis students.

Arrays 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 the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), 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,"[112] and that "guidelines for PSSSP student living allowances provided through the program were 14 years out of date."[113] 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

[X] 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.

[Y] Some First Nations people lost their identities in the Sixties Scoop. 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 taken 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 adopted out to mostly non-Aboriginal families, sometimes outside of Canada, resulting in a loss of culture, and status. From Fournier and Crey, (1997).

Canada Student Loan Program five years ago."[114]

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. Since this report was released seven years ago, and no changes have been made to increase the funding, the allowances are now 21 years out of date. This is a massive impediment to students' ability to access education and, eventually, enter the workforce. 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.

As mentioned above, 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.

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.[115] 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.

Barrier: Status First Nation and Inuit students are impeded in their ability to access a higher education because the federal post-secondary education programs are chronically underfunded. The growing population, rising education costs, and a 2% funding cap on federal programs have resulted in a funding void for students that have Status.

Recommendation 14: The federal government must remove the 2% funding cap placed on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and increase funding to meet the required levels of financial support to ensure access of higher education for students.

Benefit: Students will be able to finance their education and achieve a higher post-secondary education attainment that will benefit the individuals and their communities.

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 FNMI students graduating from high school who are eligible to attend post-secondary education.

This is particularly concerning due to the fact that the FNMI populations are much younger than the non-Aboriginal population and will be well-placed to access PSE in the future.

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. 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."[116] National guidelines do exist[117] 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 imposed 2% cap allows.

While the number of students eligible for PSSSP has increased, funding has not kept up with this growth, neither have tuition increases nor the real cost of a PSE. As a result, many bands have to ration the funds they have been granted or prioritize 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 developed 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.[118] The funding shortfall was well-documented in the 2007 Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's report, titled "No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada." This report's recommendations are yet to be implemented to allow FNMI students the opportunity to access a higher education.

Barrier: First Nations communities are struggling to meet the need for post-secondary funding, and have created waiting lists and have less funding available to meet the needs of students.

Recommendation 15: The National Program Guidelines for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP) Program must be revised to include options for First Nations bands coping with additional students and a funding shortfall.

Benefit: In a chronically underfunded system, bands would be better able to deal with the needs of the qualified student that are not receiving enough funding or may be wait-listed to receive funding.

This must be addressed as bands have had to ration PSSSP funds or prioritize 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 individual community was maintained.

The federal government also funds the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) and the University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP) mentioned above. 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 students needing financial backing.

It must be made clear that only some students are eligible to receive funding from federal programs, namely First Nations and Inuit student that have Status. For more clarification on Status, please see footnotes in at the beginning of the Funding section of this document. Non-status First Nations and Métis students are not able to access funding from the federal government, even though they experience the same barriers.

Barrier: As underfunded as First Nations and Inuit students are, non-status First Nations and Métis students are not able to access any of the federal funding for post-secondary education.

Recommendation 16: The provincial and federal government must ensure that non-status First Nations and Métis students have the ability to fund their post-secondary education.

Benefit: Métis and non-status First Nations student will be able to access a higher education if they are able to cover the costs associated with a higher education

FNMI populations have shown to have more price sensitivity to the increasing costs of higher education. With regards to price sensitivity, it is important to note that that when discussing student financial aid, price sensitivity is defined as "the rate at which the demand for financial aid declines with increases in price."[119] Price is clearly an important factor in explaining the demand for student financial aid; as the price increases, demand drops.[120] This is coupled with debt aversion in that the impression that taking on loans to pay for school may not be beneficial.

PSE costs are overestimated[121] especially among low-income students.[122] In fact, 5%–20% of Canadian high school students will avoid a non-repayable grant if coupled with an optional loan, but will accept the grant if it is offered on its own.[123] However, the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and the Canada Student Grant Program is designed in this way: apply and qualify for

loan first and then get assessed for a grant. There are options available for students separate from band funding and federal programs that include targeted provincial funding for FNMI populations in the form of grants and bursaries. Aboriginal students remain significantly more price-sensitive than others groups,[124] which impacts their use of student financial aid, such as Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP).

Barrier: FNMI students tend to have higher rates of debt aversion and are more sensitive to the cost of higher education than the mainstream population. This makes it unlikely that students will take on student loans to ensure access to higher education.

Recommendation 17: PSE institution and government should look to expand non-repayable bursaries and grants for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, and these must be separated from financial assistance applications. Furthermore, the existence of such funding opportunities should be better marketed to FNMI students so that these programs will have greater uptake rates.

Benefit: Students from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are more likely to access funding for post-secondary education if there are sources of funding available that are not tied to loans. Ensuring this decoupling and promotion of bursaries and grants will allow more students to access a higher education.

The decoupling of loans from grants would streamline student financial assistance. The eligibility for grants should not be contingent on loan applications. By making the grant application more accessible to students outside of financial aid applications, more Aboriginal students would be likely to apply for grants available to them. An example of a grant that is tied to an OSAP application is the Ontario Distance Grant. The Ontario Distance Grant is currently capped at $300 per year. The monetary value should be expanded due to the fact that in many instances, a single trip home to a rural community 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, which may impede access for rural and northern students.

One other grant that needs to be reviewed and revised is the Ontario Tuition Grant that was initiated in January of 2012. It requires students to access their parents' tax return information, which is problematic for those students whose parents live in First Nations communities because many First Nations people do not file income tax if their income is earned in the First Nation community. Furthermore, as most FNMI students access higher education at a later time in life, they would be ineligible for the Tuition Grant because only students that have been out of high school for less than four years are eligible. This program also has philosophical issues for those First Nations communities that sponsor their students through the PSSSP program, as the grant would be given to the student directly and not the First Nations community. Furthermore, the Ontario Tuition Grant can increase the reporting requirements for First Nations, and has created concerns about data collection and sharing in First Nations communities.

Barrier: The Ontario Distance Grant can only be accessed when a student completes a student financial aid application. Furthermore, the amount given with this grant is not enough to cover the cost of even one trip home for many rural and northern students. The Ontario Tuition Grant is extremely difficult for FNMI students to access due to bureaucratic and philosophical barriers.

Recommendation 18: With regard to the Ontario Distance Grant, the provincial government should increase the value of the grant, revise the criteria for the grant so that it is more inclusive, and allow students to access the application outside of the OSAP application. With regard to the Ontario Tuition Grant, the grant eligibility should be extended for FNMI students due to the fact that they have elevated financial needs and are financially vulnerable.

Benefit: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student who live in northern and rural communities will benefit from the Ontario Distance Grant if it can cover the true cost of a visit home and be accessed outside of a loan application as many students from these communities are debt adverse. Through the expansion of the Ontario Tuition Grant criteria, more FNMI students would greatly benefit from being able to access resources for higher education.

Research shows that students from low-income families are ones who would benefit the most from a post-secondary education. All the while, they need the most help paying for post-secondary education and are the least likely to have the support they need. In terms of knowledge about financial aid programs, good preparation and knowledge about funding options is essential. FNMI students need to be aware of their funding options if they are to reach educational parity with the general population.

Retention and Completion

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students—like those groups that are underrepresented in PSE—are at a greater risk of leaving their studies without completing their programs. When considering that FNMI 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.

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. Women make up 60% of Aboriginal people who pursued a college, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate. In 2006, the 29%

of students receiving PSE program funding were between 20 and 24 years of age.[125] More than half of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis university students are 22 years of age or older.[126]

The common profile of students applying to Indspire[Z] shows that they tend to be women, 27 years old, many of whom are single parents.[127] 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 day-care services. Family responsibilities was one of the top reasons 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.[128] This is especially why support services, such as childcare, are so vital.

Barrier: Many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students tend to have family responsibilities and family care that may prevent them from accessing a higher education.

Recommendation 19: Institutions should make childcare facilities available for all students or help students find such services in the community. Information on where to find housing, emergency funding, and medical services providers is also a way that institutions can help students with family responsibilities and facilitate their transition to a post-secondary institution that is outside of their home community.

Benefit: Student with dependants will be able to concentrate on their studies and have their childcare needs met. Furthermore, the transition from their home community to a post-secondary institution community will be smoother if resources are available to students.

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.[129] 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 many different forms as 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, preparation, and transitioning programs; and maintaining motivation in students.

[Z] Formerly the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation.

Barrier: Students do not take advantage of the support services available to them because they may not be aware of the services offered on campus.

Recommendation 20: Institutions must maintain or create an orientation program to familiarize First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students to the various support services on campus, especially ones that are FNMI-specific. Furthermore, FNMI student groups must be supported on campuses across Ontario to ensure there is a visible FNMI student presence.

Benefit: Students will be able to access and have awareness of the services available to them through orientation programs that will allow for higher retention rates.

Orienting students to these practices will help them access more support services and thus help with retention. Many issues that FNMI learners encounter can be helped with these support services and retention practices. FNMI 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 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit 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.

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 the 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 (18%) live in rural and on-reserve areas.[AA] 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.

Barrier: Many students from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups that enter post-secondary education face difficulty in relocating in order to attend schools as many FNMI communities are remote and located in rural areas.

Recommendation 21: Institutions and governments should create targeted-funding relocation grants for rural and northern students.

Benefit: Making relocation grants available is likely to make post-secondary education more attractive to rural and northern students and make them see PSE as a viable option.

This grant would go a long way to help those First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

[AA] 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.

students who live away from home in their move to attend school. 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. The relocation grant would help FNMI 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 and northern students.

While in school, it is important that students have someone to connect with who understands them. A successful practice in integrating First Nations, Métis, and Inuit values into the PSE realm is to make an Elder[BB] or Elder services available for students either on campus or in the community. 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.

The Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities' Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework states that "Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs) or similar governing bodies are required to be in place in order for colleges and universities to be eligible for public funding [like the Postsecondary Education Funding for Aboriginal Learners (PEFAL)] to support Aboriginal students and programming related to Aboriginal education in their institutions".[130] These AECs must be supported by the institution in order to ensure that the surrounding and campus communities, especially members from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups, have access and the ability to voice their opinions through these Councils.

Barrier: College and university campuses are not always welcoming to students from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, and as a result, students feel alienated and disconnected from the campus community.

Recommendation 22: Post-secondary institutions, including staff and faculty, should have access to cultural sensitivity training and should welcome Elders and other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit community members to serve as student advisors, counsellors, guest lecturers and resource personnel. Furthermore, institutions must do all they can to increase the decision making capacity of FNMI peoples beyond the current capacity of the Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs) in order to develop a culture of support for students across Ontario.

Benefit: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students are more likely to persist in their post-secondary education if they are able to see their cultures and worldviews reflected on mainstream campuses across Ontario.

[BB] An Elder is a well-respected member of the community who has 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.

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.[131]

Aboriginal students are most successful in college programs when there is strong community engagement and Aboriginal leadership is supportive.[132] First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students have better retention and graduation rates in institutions that are able to provide good support to FNMI students. One of the ways that this support can be offered is to have an Aboriginal space on campus, whether it is a room, or a centre on campus that the students can utilize. These spaces can go a long way in helping students with the personal, informational and emotional barriers that they face in completing their post-secondary education.

Mental Health

An issue that has gained prominence in higher education recently is that of mental health. More students are accessing counselling services on campus and counselling centre directors consistently report their perception that the severity of students' issues and usage of the services in the previous five years have been increasing.[133] Counselling centre directors are troubled by increases in suicide ideation and behaviours, self-injury reports, crisis counselling needs, eating disorders, past sexual trauma reports, and sexual assaults.[134] While these issues are worrisome for all campus populations, specific attention must be paid to FNMI learners. This is because, in general, suicide rates are five to seven times higher for First Nations youth compared to non-Aboriginal youth and among Inuit youth suicide rates are 11 times the national average.[135] These statistics, coupled with the barriers discussed above show the importance of targeting services toward these populations, especially on campuses across Ontario.

Barrier: Campuses are not ideal places for students to be mentally healthy due to the stressful nature of pursuing studies and due to the specific and inter-related barriers that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students face, there is a potential on FNMI students' health to be negatively impacted in a typical campus environment.

Recommendation 23: Post-secondary education institutions must create linkages with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities to enhance culturally-specific counselling and support to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students on campus to help students cope with the stresses they will experience in their pursuit of a higher education.

Benefit: Creating a safe space for students in which their complex and interrelated issues can be addressed in a culturally-relevant environment will help students be successful in their studies.

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.[136] PSE institutions must be prepared to offer more support to students from these communities, especially First Nations because sadly, "Canadian First Nations suffer from the highest rate of suicide of any culturally identifiable group in the world."[137] The youth fall into the highest-risk age group for mental illness and substance dependencies. Indeed, 18% of youths ages 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.

Services should be targeted to specific populations of students at risk to have maximum impact.[138]A way to help address these issues is with the expansion of FNMI spaces on campuses. These spaces, commonly called Aboriginal services, spaces, rooms, offices, or centres exist on every campus in Ontario and the success and utility of these rooms varies from one campus to the next. A successful example of targeted support takes place in Niagara College. For example, Niagara College's Aboriginal Services offers a computer lab for students to use along with a library of Aboriginal resource materials, guidance, advice, and support to new and returning students.

Barrier: Students from FNMI communities feel alienated on campus due to the lack of their cultures being represented in the PSE environment.

Recommendation 24: Institutions must maintain and expand the Aboriginal spaces or Aboriginal centres that exist on each campus.

Benefit: The maintenance of a supportive environment on campus for FNMI students will ensure an encouraging setting for student success.

These spaces are successful because they can "offer emotional support, a sense of community, peer support, administrative assistance, and educational resources."[139] This can help address the alienation and loneliness that FNMI students feel when they start their studies as many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students leave home in order to attend a post-secondary institution. As mentioned previously, many FNMI 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. A simple acknowledgement from institutions of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures such as painting, sculpture, photographs, in a public space at schools or in hallways would be a very welcoming first sign for FNMI students; this might also help with students' self-identification in a friendlier environment.

Métis Students

Métis students do not have the ability to access the federal funding programs and other programs that only students with status can access. *The Constitution Act* of 1982, which includes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, recognized the Métis people as one of Canada's founding Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, the Supreme Court accepted a definition of "Métis" as a person who self-identifies as Métis, and who is from a historic Métis community.[CC] Even though Métis people are seen as one of the founding Aboriginal peoples, Métis students do not receive any federal post-secondary education funding because historically, "neither the federal nor provincial governments claimed responsibility for the education of Métis children. These children were caught in a jurisdictional void."[140]

As a result of this void when Métis students begin a post-secondary education, they do not receive any funding that First Nations and Inuit people that have status are entitled to under the *Indian Act* receive from the federal government. They do, however, share the same problems as First Nations and Inuit communities. Métis tend to have better quality of life than First Nations populations, but only slightly. 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.

Barrier: Métis students' cultures are not as represented across campuses due to the prevalence of grouping of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures as a single "Aboriginal" culture, or the frequency of First Nations cultures representations on campuses in comparison to Métis cultures.

Recommendation 25: Institutions should expand or implement Métis-specific programming and support services to help Métis students succeed in a PSE environment.

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

Benefit: Métis students will be able to feel more welcomed in the higher-education sphere if their specific barriers are addressed, thereby contributing to higher retention rates for Métis students as well as a richer and more diverse campus environment for all students.

Since the Métis are a distinct group with an identity separate from First Nations and Inuit groups, efforts must be made to include Métis culture, language, and worldviews into all levels of education. Furthermore, institutions must better represent Métis presence on campuses across Ontario to better include Métis students into the cultural and social fabric on PSE institutions. Institutions must be aware of the variety of barriers facing Métis students, especially financial barriers and a lack of cultural representation in the education sphere. One of the difficulties that institutions have is identifying Métis, First Nations, and Inuit students so that they can be properly supported in school.

A very successful program that could be supported by institutions is the *Infinite Reach: Métis Student Network* launched by the Métis Nation of Ontario, in which upper-year Métis students in college or university support each other in their academic pursuits.[141] This is done by assisting students who are at the beginning of their higher education pursuits adjust to their post-secondary lifestyle and providing them a connection to the Métis community through the Métis Nation of Ontario.[142] The Métis Nation of Ontario's *Infinities Reach* program and the development of Memorandums of Understanding with colleges and universities should be supported by PSE institutions in the support of Métis students on campuses across Ontario.

Self-identification and tracking problems

Due to the various barriers that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit 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 FNMI students to better encourage their successes. Not having sufficient and reliable data on the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit 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."[143] Responsibly collecting data on FNMI students while maintaining ethical standards is crucial for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit 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."[144] 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 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in the education system (in primary, secondary, and post-secondary school) stem 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 from FNMI backgrounds. 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."[145] Underfunding 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."[146] 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 the specific community of which one is a member.

These are many avenues for policy makers to support self-identification in many stages of a student's educational experience. One such way to address this issue is the expansion of the Ontario Education Number (OEN), which elementary and secondary students have assigned to them in their K-12 studies. The expansion of the OEN to post-secondary school would help notify institutions which students would potentially need to have more support as they go into higher education. This, of course, is with the condition that the OEN not be used in a harmful way and that the confidentiality, rights, and privacy of the students are maintained.

Another form of data collection that takes place in all post-secondary institutions is with the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MYAA). All institution have to publically report back to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) on how the institution has performed on the principles of access, quality and accountability to then secure funding. Within the section that discusses access, the importance of increasing the number of students from under-represented groups is a key priority. Colleges and Universities then collect data on Aboriginal student that attend their institutions, but this collection of "data are often collected in a nonstandard manner and therefore cannot be aggregated across institutions."[147]

Barrier: Institutions are not able to support all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students on campus due to the reality that students are choosing not to identify themselves as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit while they pursue their studies. This creates an issue for institutions in being able to plan support services for students.

Recommendation 26: Institutions must pay more care and attention to the subtle but important differences of self-identification terminology in order to collect the most accurate data about the participation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students within PSE institutions. Furthermore, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities must continue to develop a province-wide system of data collection as outlined in its 2011 Aboriginal Postsecondary Education Framework in consultation and collaboration with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and organizations.

Benefit: If institutions are able to distinguish the FNMI populations on campus in a safe and culturally-sensitive way, they will be able to better support students in course of studies.

CONCLUSION

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners face complex and interconnected barriers in their educational pathways right from the beginning of their schooling. These barriers are not isolated and need to be addressed in a holistic and comprehensive way. Policy makers need to recognize that there no single specific action that will bring about changes. The different stages of a First Nations, Métis, or Inuit student's journey to post-secondary education are rife with barrier and issues that are specific to First Nations, Métis, or Inuit communities. These barriers and issues must be addressed with consultation of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities if the inequalities faced by students are to be resolved.

The issues that are so prominent in the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities stem from past policies that have severely hurt these peoples. It is imperative that the culture of indifference that has permeated all levels of government and policy making be changed as the living standards of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Ontario and across Canada are not ones that would ever be accepted by the mainstream population. The low educational attainment rates, the cycles of poverty, the substandard housing conditions, and the suicide and incarceration rates must not be allowed to continue for the youngest and fastest-growing segment of our population. It is imperative that there is a combined effort to ensure that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities have access to educational opportunities.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

AANDC—Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

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 indigenous 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.

FNMI—Acronym for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

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 from a historic, distinct peoples or nation who share common histories, traditions and communities and are the result of unions between very specific Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in the historic Northwest during the course of the 18th and 19th centuries.

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 FNMI 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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