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A SUMMARY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN BOARD OF EDUCATION INITIATIVES FOR  
ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT AND STUDENT SUCCESS

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RESEARCH REPORT #09-04



This report was commissioned by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. Thanks is extended to the researcher and writer Cathy Mills for her efforts in developing this resource. The cooperation and contribution of school board representatives is greatly appreciated.

The opinions and information expressed in this report are those of the author's and may not be in agreement with Association officers but are offered as being worthy of consideration.

Saskatchewan school divisions may duplicate this report their own use. Each copy should acknowledge the Saskatchewan School Boards Association as the source.

A copy of this report is available on the Saskatchewan School Boards Association website under 'research' at [www.saskschoolboards.ca](http://www.saskschoolboards.ca)



Thanks is extended to Shelley Brown and Shelley Daye for providing the artwork. The bear paw is symbolic of power & protection and the colours yellow, red, white & black represent the spiritual, emotional, mental & physical health of First Nations people. The Métis sash symbolizes the pride of the Métis people. And we used the dream catcher to unite both First nations & Métis people & to show that nations united are stronger than any one alone and that they can support each other in power, health & friendship.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) has commissioned this report to investigate practices and initiatives across Saskatchewan with respect to First Nations and Métis people. This summary report addresses two specific areas:

- i. School division initiatives to improve the education results of First Nations and Métis students; and,

*The number of Aboriginal young people is rapidly increasing, with an expectation that in the next 15-20 years, Aboriginal students will represent over 25 per cent of the elementary student population in some provinces and territories. There have been many gains in Aboriginal education across provinces and territories in recent years. However, more needs to be done to raise graduation rates.*

- Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) Summit on Aboriginal Education Saskatoon, Saskatchewan – February 24, 2009 Ref: 860-560/004 News release

- ii. School division initiatives and practices designed to create and support a representative First Nations and Métis workforce.

Census Population by Aboriginal Identity 2006 and 2001			
Population	2006	2001	% Change
First Nations	91,400	83,745	9.14%
Métis	48,115	43,695	10.12%
Inuit	215	235	-8.51%
Other Aboriginal	2,155	2,515	-14.31%
Non-Aboriginal	811,960	832,960	-2.52%
Total	953,850	963,155	-0.90%

Census Canada. (2006) Census

This report will be of interest to boards of education, senior administration of school divisions, and other organizations with an interest in responding to the increasing population of First Nations and Métis peoples in Saskatchewan.

This summary is intended to acknowledge the significant efforts underway, to encourage further action to increase the success of First Nations and Métis students, and to build a representative workforce. It is hoped that this report, in providing readers with a snapshot of activities across the province, will also serve to highlight the efforts of school divisions and provide a networking opportunity for school division personnel to further connect with one another.

## RATIONALE

Between 2000 and 2005, the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee Action Plan proposed five principles that would guide actions relating to the education of all students in Saskatchewan and the development of an education system responsive and responsible to the needs of Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan's boards of education have been challenged with three specific responsibilities with respect to Aboriginal people within the province.

- i. **SUPPLY** – To strengthen First Nations and Métis student achievement to increase the number of school graduates
- ii. **DEMAND** – To develop a workforce more representative of the aboriginal population
  - Awareness training for employees of the school board;
  - An inventory of employment opportunities;
  - Changes in practices to facilitate achievement of a representative workforce; and
  - Purchase of goods or services from First Nations and Métis suppliers.
- iii. **REVIEW** – SSBA services and supports to school boards with respect to Aboriginal employment development.

### THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION PROVINCIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO GUIDE OUR EFFORTS:

#### Five Proposed Principles:

1. *Aboriginal world view is a valid way of knowing and understanding the world.*
2. *Accountability is essential to progress.*
3. *Communication throughout the system is key to the achievement of common goals.*
4. *Quality and authenticity are essential considerations in all Aboriginal education policy and program initiatives.*
5. *All people must have equitable opportunities to succeed, coupled with respect for individual experiences and knowledge.*

*“The Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan is growing. Over the ten years from 1996 to 2006, the Aboriginal population in the province has grown by an average of 2.5 percent per year whereas the number of non-Aboriginal people has declined by 0.6 percent per year”*

- Sask. Trends Monitor, January 2008





## METHODOLOGY

This report prepared for the SSBA is intended to be a summary of provincial initiatives relating to the previously identified responsibilities.

School board representatives were asked to respond to the following questions:

- i. **ABORIGINAL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:** What initiatives has your school board implemented to strengthen Aboriginal achievement and increase the number of Aboriginal student graduates?
- ii. **INVENTORY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES:** What are the anticipated employment opportunities that may occur in the next five years within your school division? Please provide a list of these employment opportunities.
- iii. **AWARENESS TRAINING FOR STAFF:** During the last twelve months, has any of your staff participated in Aboriginal Myths & Misconceptions Awareness Training?
  - If so, how many and who was the facilitator?
  - Was the training beneficial to your staff?
  - Would you recommend the training session to others within your school division or other school divisions?
- iv. **POLICY CHANGES:** What policies or special considerations does your school division have related to support for Aboriginal education? For example:
  - Student achievement;
  - Aboriginal recruitment;
  - Aboriginal retention; and,
  - Procurement.

Information for the report was gathered through phone conversations with directors, superintendents and division personnel responsible for implementing a variety of board directives. Twenty-five of the twenty-nine school divisions contributed information to the inventory.

School divisions without self-declared First Nations or Métis students have not begun to address any of the identified issues. School divisions with very low enrolments of First Nations and Métis students do recognize the importance of teaching all students about Aboriginal perspectives and world view for increased understanding and tolerance. It should also be noted that school divisions with low

*Out of the 29 school divisions, 25 contributed information to the inventory.*



numbers of First Nations and Métis students do not notice a difference in student achievement.

Some of the larger school divisions, not having to deal with the issues around restructuring have been able to attend to matters of Aboriginal student achievement without interruption. They have moved from the awareness or beginning stages of understanding to established and reviewed action plans. Given this statement, it would be incorrect to assume however, that school divisions who have gone through restructuring are far behind in this area. Many restructured school divisions have signed partnership agreements with First Nations communities, have established plans to actualize board initiatives, and have been working on the programs long enough to be able to reflect on the successes and opportunities for growth.

It is clear that while school divisions are at very different stages with respect to addressing and understanding these issues, there is much activity throughout the province. The intent behind the actions and programming are genuine. Indeed, one cannot help but notice the enthusiasm created by the various initiatives and the belief that attention to these concerns is critical for the province to move forward.

This report will summarize the actions of school boards and highlight some of the initiatives around the province. The report may also serve as a networking tool for divisions to connect with one another in order to capitalize on previous learning. The decision to highlight some school divisions over others was made for the following reasons:

- **STABILITY** – Some divisions have been providing programming for a number of years or have been working with their respective Boards to change direction over a number of years. Highlighting these efforts is prudent in that other divisions interested in learning more need not repeat mistakes made.
- **INNOVATIVE** - Boards and divisions have different capacity to address provincial initiatives. Necessity is also the mother of invention and bigger does not always mean better. Some school divisions have developed programming/ solutions that are unique but could be replicated to meet the cultural environments of other school divisions.

As indicated, information for this report was gathered in response to four questions. The interpretation of the questions was left to the discretion of school division personnel to determine which actions and division initiatives they wished to highlight. School divisions who have been working in this field for a number of years indicated that because many of their practices were “the way we do business” and they no longer stood out as being special. Attempts to cross-reference the activities with other school divisions were not done given the timeline presented for the report. Readers should interpret the information presented as a snapshot of activities rather than an inclusive inventory.

*There is much activity throughout the province. This is just a snapshot of activity as of March 31, 2009.*





## ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The SSBA has been working with boards of education to address the concerns of a representative workforce through their Aboriginal Employment Development Program (AEDP). The AEDP is a partnership agreement that was signed on February 8, 2007 between the Association and the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations.

The partnership model invites boards of education to work with communities using principles of change management and a business case approach to address issues of Aboriginal recruitment and retention. Boards who enter into a partnership agreement find that they are provided the tools for establishing a solid foundation for the successful integration of Aboriginal people into the labour force and into all sectors of the economy over time.

When a school division signs an AEDP partnership agreement, they are making steps to implementing a Representative Workforce Strategy. The strategy involves having the partners agree on key principles and to then collaborate on three areas of development:

- Employment;
- Education and training; and,
- Economic development.

Signing an AEDP partnership agreement is the first step in bringing about long-term and effective change. The implementation of a Representative Workforce Strategy would assist in:

- Identifying barriers that limit the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal applicants and employees;
- Emphasizing that applicants are hired based on their skills and merit;
- Encouraging Aboriginal people to compete for employment and economic opportunities; and,
- Dispelling myths and misconceptions about Aboriginal people.

*Signing an AEDP partnership agreement is the first step  
in bringing about long-term and effective change.*



Sometimes it is easier to define what a Representative Workforce Strategy is by indicating what it is not. Implementing a Representative Workforce Strategy does not mean:

- Supporting quotas for hiring and promotions;
- Designating positions for Aboriginal applicants;
- Replacing current staff; nor,
- Employment equity and affirmative action.

As of March 31, 2009 eight school divisions had signed AEDP partnership agreements with the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations.

The impetus for change created by the signing of the AEDP partnership agreements will be addressed later in the report. School division personnel do report that the signing of the partnership agreement was a significant first step in creating awareness of and a desire for change.



*In February 2007, the SSBA joined the AEDP Partnership Agreement.*



*Holy Trinity RCSSD signed the AEDP Partnership Agreement in January 2009.*



*Regina RCSSD signed an AEDP Partnership Agreement in March 2009.*

*As of March 31, 2009, the following school boards have signed an AEDP Partnership Agreement:*

- *Holy Trinity RCSSD*
- *Light of Christ RCSSD*
  - *Living Sky SD*
  - *North East SD*
  - *Prairie Spirit SD*
- *Regina Catholic Schools*
  - *Saskatoon Public SD*
- *Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools*



## ABORIGINAL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Saskatchewan boards of education are implementing a number of provincial initiatives designed to improve student learning outcomes. Curriculum renewal from kindergarten to Grade 12 coupled with the implementation of the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF) are tools that school divisions are using to address the Ministry's mandate to attend to improved learning outcomes for all students.



Discussions with school divisions show that school boards have chosen not to target student achievement programming specifically to First Nations and Métis students but to address the learning needs of all students. In many school divisions this also means that programming is primarily targeted to community schools where learning outcomes are lowest and the enrolment of First Nations and Métis students are the highest. The School<sup>PLUS</sup> model encompassed in the community school funding and format allows for structural changes to traditional programming that schools are seeking to take place while continuing to address the need to connect with and engage youth and family in all aspects of student learning.

School boards have chosen not to target First Nations and Métis students, but to address the learning needs of all students.

The decision not to target programming to First Nations and Métis students is deliberate. While boards of education are feeling pressure to address student learning outcomes, they are also sensitive of the need to be inclusive in their programming decisions. Concerns were raised that some of the directions of the Ministry of Education seem to be incongruent to the inclusive nature of programming for which school boards strive.

In response to the CIF and the Assessment for Learning initiative, school division personnel are also trying to use data to measure whether their programs and targeted teaching are making a difference to learning outcomes. School division personnel are working to disaggregate student learning information to determine specific areas on which to target learning interventions. Again there are questions amongst respondents as to whether this practice is in opposition to concerns of sensitivity and inclusiveness. Still, not having specific information as to whether student learning is improving is problematic. Clarity and direction around this issue would be helpful to divisions.



## CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

Student achievement initiatives are evident in all responding divisions. Creating schools that are culturally welcoming and inclusive is an important aspect of the strategy to increase student learning. It is well-documented through research that when students feel that the school respects and reflects their life and community, learning increases.

Cultural programming is present in all community schools and in some divisions in all schools regardless of the student demographics. The decision to include First Nations and Métis cultural programming for all students is conscious and responds to the recommendations of the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) which advises that recognition and understanding of the Aboriginal world view as valid is critical to success for Aboriginal students and for harmonious relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

A number of school divisions ask that each school has a goal connected to First Nations and Métis education. The goals range from dealing with student engagement to incorporation of First Nations and Métis content and perspectives to reflect on the cultural climate of their schools. In some divisions, one component of staff evaluation is directly tied to the inclusion of First Nations and Métis content and perspectives in daily work.

Prairie Valley School Division is one division that has made the decision to offer cultural programming and treaty education in all schools. They have studied the Ministry document *A Time for Significant Leadership (ATFSL)* and conducted cultural affirmation and school climate audits which has lead each school to develop school-based improvement goals.

### **WHAT IS A SIGNIFICANT TIME FOR LEADERSHIP?**

*It is a sophisticated tool for school divisions to utilize at they promote, support and sustain system-wide change focused on First Nations and Métis education goals.*

*Provides a mechanism for schools and school divisions to define and empower leadership within their own professional community.*

*A means to build capacity to ensure authenticity and sustainability as well as a clear connection, alignment and linkages to other system initiatives and the school division's continuous improvement plan.*

- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education,  
April 2008.

Cultural programming may include some or all parts of the following list:

- The presence of Elders in the school and classrooms;
- Kokums and Mosums groups;
- Dancing and drumming groups;
- Feasts;
- Cultural camp experiences; and,
- Pow-wows.

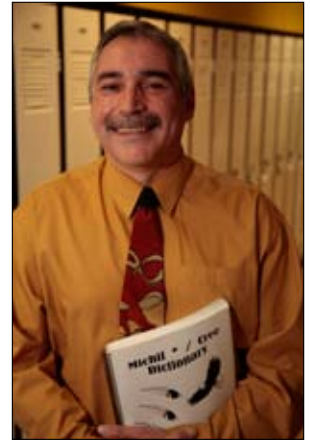






First Nations language classes are provided in many divisions with specific mention given to the instruction of Cree, Michif and Lakota. Once only present in high school programming, many community schools also offer immersion language programming in pre-kindergarten classes and immersion or core language programming most commonly from kindergarten to Grade 4 students.

There is a belief that cultural programming has been effectively offered in community schools for years but conversations indicated a shift to programming that is more collaborative and consultative in nature. The advice and wisdom of Elders and cultural advisors is being sought more consistently and feedback from the community to determine if programming is meeting student needs is evident. Elder Advisory Committees or Councils who work with boards of education to give feedback on strategic plans, the implementation of treaty education, and related initiatives and strategies are becoming more predominant. Elder forums or elder camps during which teaching staff and board members meet with Elders are becoming more prevalent. The consultation process is further solidified in a variety of documents describing accepted protocols, frames of reference, and mandates of advisory councils. Regina Public and Saskatoon Public School Divisions have established their protocols and Prairie Valley School Division is in the process.



Although desired, the prevalence of Elders and their responsibilities varies across divisions. Elders are present in most divisions and may be assigned to one school as Elders-in-residence, or are designated as division Elders with responsibility to many schools. Some divisions have a proliferation of Elders with full-time people linked directly to a single school while school divisions have only one Elder providing services to many students.

The definition and determination of “Elder” coupled with the availability seems to be a large stumbling block for divisions. In an effort to circumvent this problem, school divisions have developed a variety of resources for people to call upon: “Aunties and Uncles”, “Helpers”, and “Traditional Knowledge Keepers”. There is inconsistency in the application of terms here. Some divisions use the term Traditional Knowledge Keeper synonymously with Elder while other divisions see an important distinction. The nature or quality of the relationships with First Nations or Métis Bands also has an impact on the availability of Elders.

*“Aboriginal elders and community / outreach workers can be tremendous human catalysts in the pursuit of culturally relevant and dynamic programs which are created in concert with the communities they serve. They can also provide a voice that will enable schools to become more aware and responsive ... Elders and community / outreach workers can also facilitate meaningful community involvement in the school. When participation grows, communities develop a sense of belonging, which results in higher self-esteem, higher academic achievement, and a lower transiency rate”*

- From *Aboriginal Elders and Community Workers in Schools. A Guide for School Divisions and Their Partners* by Monica Goulet, Saskatchewan Education, March 2001.

Engaging elders and advisory committees is common. Saskatoon Public School Division's definition of Traditional Knowledge Keepers is, "Resource people recognized within our community who possess gifts and talents that would support curricular outcomes for students." (Fall 2008 – Volume 1, Issue 2, page 5 of *FNIM News*, Saskatoon Public Schools).

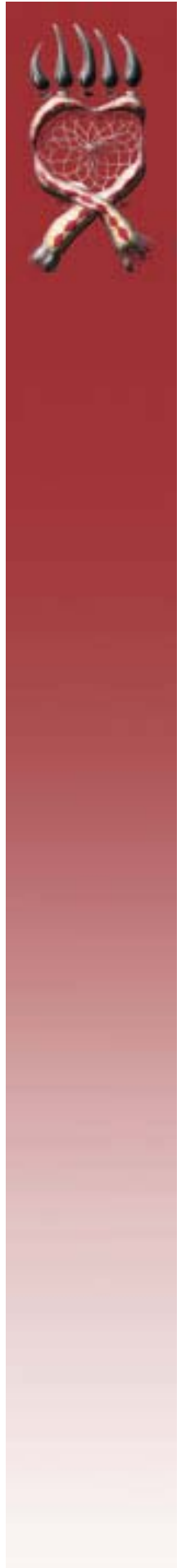
Saskatoon Public School Division also has a System Waokiye or Traditional Helper who is not an Elder but provides guidance to the division in a number of areas such as:

- The inclusion of First Nations and Métis teachings in core curriculum;
- Facilitating cultural awareness education;
- Organizing and coordinating cultural or spiritual events; and,
- Coordinating Elders' services with staff and students.

Saskatoon Public Schools offer seasonal sweat lodge ceremonies throughout the year which are open to all teaching staff. Information sessions are provided prior to the ceremony so that staff understand and are comfortable with protocols. These ceremonies are well-attended and the interest in the sweat lodge ceremony continues to increase amongst all staff.

Exploration and understanding of Native spirituality continues throughout the province. Many Catholic School Divisions have created committees to look at links between Native Spirituality and Catholicism. First Nations prayers and smudging ceremonies are becoming more common. Two school divisions, Regina Public and Saskatoon Public School Divisions have ventilated rooms to accommodate such ceremonies. Saskatoon Public School Division also has plans to install ventilation systems in four schools to accommodate cultural practices.

The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) defines successful schools as places that are culturally affirming for all students and recommends that recognition of the Aboriginal world view as a valid way of knowing is key to cultural affirmation.





## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK GOALS & CURRICULUM RENEWAL

The CIF is being actualized in all school divisions in the province. Most divisions have a goal related to numeracy and literacy. Those goals are enacted through a variety of teaching strategies specific to divisions and are directed at all students regardless of ethnicity.

Only one school division, Prairie Spirit, indicated that they have identified a student engagement goal targeted at First Nations and Métis students within their strategic direction, have identified strategies specific for First Nations and Métis students within that goal, and have targeted specific literacy goals at community schools. Other school divisions have asked for school goals related to incorporation of First Nations and Métis content and perspectives in the classroom. Regina Public is currently developing a plan to integrate Aboriginal peoples' ideas about literacy and numeracy into their current numeracy and literacy initiatives.

The incorporation of First Nations and Métis content and perspectives into all curricular areas is certainly a welcome direction by the Ministry. School divisions, with the capacity to respond, have formed committees to examine present curricular documents for the inclusion of Aboriginal content and perspectives prior to the actual release of the Ministry's documents. Networking groups of teachers, elders and advisors are creating resource binders to support teachers in the classroom. Resource binders for teachers in Grades 1-6, and high school are available for teachers in Saskatoon Public School Division. Prairie Spirit School Division is doing specific work to write curricula with a First Nations and Métis perspective. It is anticipated that this resource will be shared with all school divisions in the province.

The teaching of "Treaties in the Classroom" is evident in all responding school divisions. Teacher training for Grades 7-12 has been ongoing and the release of the kindergarten to Grade 6 curricula and resource binders are much anticipated. Support for classroom instruction is provided through catalyst teachers, team leaders or networking opportunities provided to identified groups of teachers.

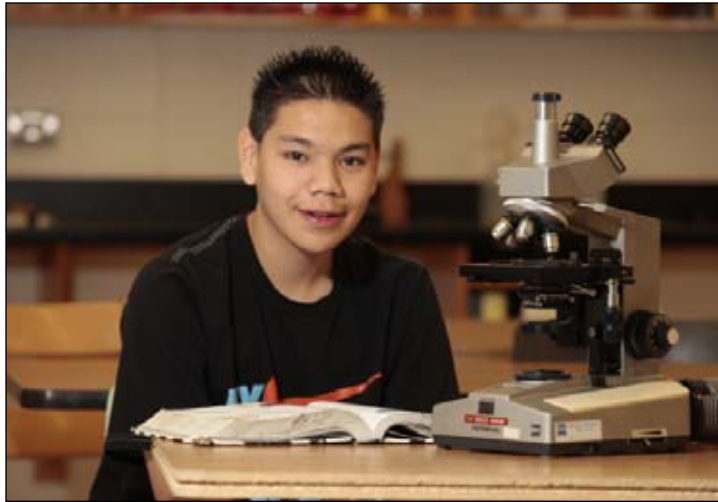
*The Saskatchewan Pre-K-12 CIF provides a common strategic planning mechanism for Saskatchewan Learning, boards of education and school community councils to advance the provincial Pre-K-12 Renewal Priorities of:*

- *Higher levels of literacy and achievement;*
- *Equitable opportunities for all students;*
- *Smooth transitions into and through the system; and,*
- *Strong system-wide accountability and governance.*



## ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING

All responding school divisions have a variety of academic programming geared to increase Aboriginal student success and increase the number of Aboriginal graduates. The majority of that programming is targeted at high school students but there are areas where alternate programming has moved to middle years students sometimes as young as 11 years old.



Elementary programming concentrated in community schools generally includes lower numbers of students per classroom and the inclusion of additional adult support through educational assistants. Christ the Teacher School Division has appointed five learning achievement coaches who are concentrated in schools with high enrolments of First Nations and Métis students in addition to previously mentioned supports. These coaches are not to be confused with and are in addition to education support teachers. Coaches work directly with teachers to effect change in the classroom.

Pre-kindergarten programming is also an important response to targeting increased student outcomes. Early intervention is still seen as vital to student learning and is highly valued by school divisions.

Cultural liaison workers or community school workers provide support to families and deal with attendance issues. Generally, programming with younger students continues to be offered in the “traditional” model of education.

Leadership and mentoring programs are common for older students still connected with schools. These programs are often targeted at students who have shown leadership skills and encourage students to continue to develop those skills and stay connected with schools. Adults are assigned specifically to mentor and guide students. These programs may be offered in a specific classroom setting with lower pupil teacher ratios or in a regular classroom setting. Often programming is more experiential based with several subjects being taught through project work, classroom visits or outdoor experiences. Feedback from divisions is positive in that students who are seen as “at risk” continue to remain in schools and stay positively connected to their schools.

Programs that target the transition from elementary to middle years school and/or high school are seen as critical supports for a number of students. At risk students are identified, tracked, and repeatedly monitored and mentored by school personnel in a variety of ways to ensure that they stay connected with schools. Parent involvement, when possible, is a consistent component of the support.

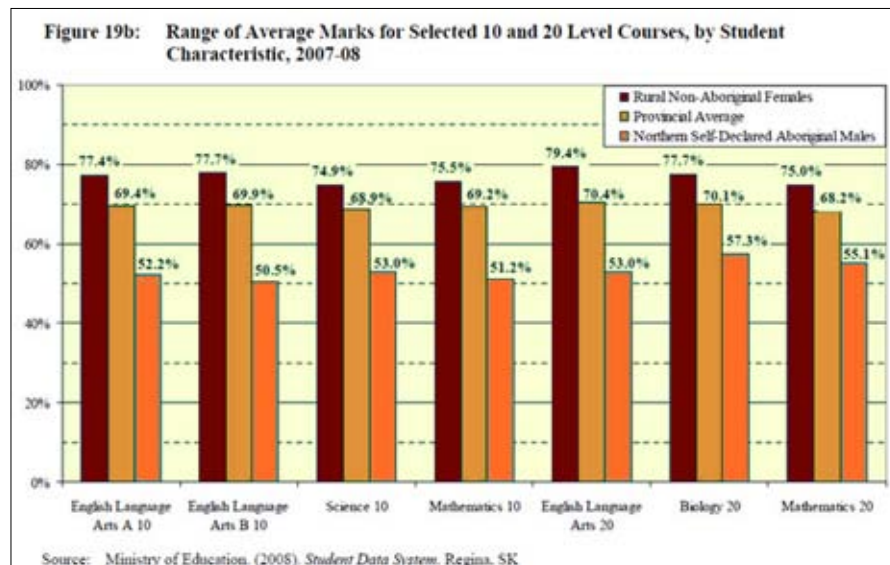




Career development workers and job or student success coaches assist students with transitioning to work. Job and career fairs are common. Questions were raised about the value of career fairs for Aboriginal students, as Aboriginal students do not approach booths in the same manner as other students nor are students making the transition to work out of school. Lloydminster Catholic School Division commented that they are seeing greater success with students when the career and mentorship programming are integrated. Their mentorship program includes meetings with parents, as well as students.

As students get older and the intensity of issues increase, programming becomes less traditional. Lower classroom sizes and more classroom adult support are evident. Opportunities to connect with Elders are more predominant. Drug and alcohol counselling is more prevalent. Many school divisions have programs to reclaim youth from the street and offer education in locations other than schools; for example, apartments, Friendship Centres and a variety of storefront locations. Starting times for classes are more flexible; transportation to and from class is common; class and semester structure varies usually by extending traditional timelines; additional supports from justice and social services are more prevalent; and, day care support is common.

Student ages often vary significantly in these programs. Partnerships with institutions providing Adult Basic Education programming are frequent. Students are usually encouraged and supported to reconnect with the school system but extended timelines to obtain high school credits and GED certificates are often the reality.



## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

School divisions interviewed do not yet have specific data regarding increased student learning outcomes. The discussion and logistics around collection and disaggregation of data continues to be problematic. The efforts of school divisions to incorporate First Nations and Métis perspectives and content into curriculum is in its infancy. The creation of culturally affirming schools continues to develop.

*It is expected that by 2016 approximately 45% of the children entering kindergarten in Saskatchewan will be of First Nations or Métis ancestry.*

Statistics Canada, 2006 Census.

School divisions are looking for ways to measure the connection between attending to cultural issues and increased student learning.

School divisions do report that programs targeted at keeping “at risk” students connected to schools or that offer alternate middle years and high school programming continually see increased numbers of students. Graduation rates in those programs but also in regular programs continue to rise for First Nations and Métis students.

Regina Public School Division has a “Stirling McDowell” grant to look at the connection between Elder involvement in schools and increased student learning.

St. Paul’s School Division is planning on measuring all students’ understanding of knowledge of First Nations and Métis people in Grades 4, 9, and 12. The assessment will be developed this year and administered to Grade 12 students in 2010.

What is evident is that there is a wealth of experience and knowledge amongst school division personnel and Board members regarding efforts to increase student learning. The identification of best practices that can occur through opportunities to network with one another on a variety of levels should be explored and encouraged.

The SSBA is committed to the AEDP. The following outlines a summary of the activities and outcomes towards the goals of the AEDP work plan from April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009.

The Association is working in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations and the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. We are committed to working with Boards to assist in increasing employment opportunities in the Pre-K-to-12 education sector for First Nations and Métis people by raising the profile of available employment opportunities and training. In addition, we would assist in increasing awareness of Aboriginal culture and history and positively influence student achievement.





A reference committee was established to guide the work of the SSBA's AEDP, and is currently working on the Aboriginal Myths and Misconceptions Awareness Training. This training program is to be delivered to school division staff to have an understanding of what it means to implement a Representative Workforce Strategy, explore the changing demographics of the Saskatchewan population and examine some of the misconceptions of Aboriginal people. The suggested length of the training should not exceed more than three hours in length.



An inventory of employment opportunities is a tool to support school divisions in preparing for the increasing participation of Aboriginal people within their workforce. The inventory also assists Aboriginal people in identifying potential employment opportunities. The inventory consists of a complete listing of jobs, job descriptions, educational requirements and other relevant information. As of March 31, 2009, four of the school divisions that have signed AEDP partnership agreements had completed an inventory of employment opportunities.

The SSBA developed an Aboriginal Recruitment and Retention Resources Guide. The "Aboriginal Representative Workforce – Recruitment and Retention Resource Guide" is available on the SSBA's website. The guide provides Saskatchewan school divisions with easy access to some of the best practices designed to assist in working toward creating a more representative workforce within the Pre-K-12 education sector in Saskatchewan. It provides essential tools for five main areas including: Establishing a business case; preparing the workforce; providing information for recruiting employment talent; identifying effective retention methods; and, highlighting successful companies, who excel in recruitment and retention.

The AEDP Coordinator has delivered a number of presentations and speaking engagements to school divisions throughout the province. These sessions included information about: What is a Representative Workforce Strategy; why should a school division sign an Aboriginal Employment Development partnership agreement; what are some of the benefits to signing an agreement; and, what are some initiatives that school divisions have implemented as a result of signing a partnership agreement.



## ANTICIPATED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Response to the kinds of employment opportunities arising within the next five years varied greatly across school divisions. School divisions appear to have very different capacities to address this question. Some school divisions are in the process of developing tracking systems to determine actual numbers of employees required in specific categories while others have well-developed systems. School divisions are also working on clarification of job descriptions given restructuring considerations since 2006, and newly developed and existing CUPE agreements.



There is also inconsistency in the ability of school divisions to address issues of First Nations and Métis employment. Some school divisions have a number of employees with specific responsibilities to address employment and education issues while others have added those responsibilities to already existing roles. Newly created job titles with responsibilities to address employment and learning questions for First Nations and Métis people include:

- Equity Consultant;
- Aboriginal Education Coordinator;
- Aboriginal Employment Development Officer or Coordinator;
- Learning Leaders Facilitator for First Nations and Métis Education System Waakiye; and,
- Human Resources Consultant or Manager.

Divisions may have one or several of each employee to support growth in this area.

It is no surprise that school divisions with targeted personnel are more successful with grant applications, refer to more partnership agreements, and report more success in advancing First Nations and Métis employment and education. School divisions who have signed Education Equity Agreements with the provincial Human Rights Commission or have signed the AEDP partnership agreement with the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations are actively working toward developing a Representative Workforce Strategy.

Hard numbers with respect to employment opportunities are not available but general categories will be referenced in this section. Presently all reporting school divisions have self-declared First Nations and Métis employees in a variety of areas within their organization. School divisions anticipate vacancies in all employment areas within the next five years.



All school divisions indicate they will be hiring teachers within the next five years. These positions range from primary or pre-kindergarten teachers through to high school teachers. School divisions are interested in hiring First Nations and Métis teachers and some are actively working towards a representative workforce but are not always able to do so given the available candidates. The need for school based administrators, principals and vice-principals is expected to grow. Openings will also occur at the senior administration level.

The Regina Public School Division was the only school division to report establishing a target number of First Nations and Métis teachers that they will hire in any given year. This is consistent with their focused Human Resources Equity Plan. St. Paul's School Division prioritizes Aboriginal applicants.

Most school divisions actively recruit teachers from Teacher Education Programs (TEP) such as ITEP, SUNTEP, NORTEP, and the First Nations University of Regina. In some cases, identified personnel have responsibilities to recruit, assist and support First Nations and Métis applicants in all stages of the application and interview process.

Consultants, educational psychologists, speech pathology and senior administration openings will occur within the next five years but anticipated numbers of positions were most difficult to determine in this area.

Employment opportunities exist in a variety of CUPE or support staff positions. Presently there are the greatest number of self-declared First Nations or Métis ancestry employees within the educational assistants category. Cultural liaison workers are generally First Nations or Métis people. Turnover in these areas is higher than in the teaching staff so although the overall opportunities for employment are somewhat less than teachers, the need is continuous. Divisions also indicate that library technicians and computer technicians are needed. The search for bus drivers is universal in any division who provide their own busing.

Openings in the areas of custodial and maintenance staff including journeymen are available although at a much lower rate than the previously mentioned CUPE positions. Many school divisions contract their trades positions so do not keep information pertaining to those opportunities. The job of school secretaries appears to be the most constant and least fluctuating position.

The traditional means of advertising for teaching and CUPE staff is being questioned by some divisions. The SSBA has provided feedback to some divisions seeking advice regarding their written advertising. In some cases, division personnel go to First Nations reserves to recruit staff. Traditional recruiting practices are an area that divisions are reflecting upon and would appear to appreciate discussion upon.



## AWARENESS TRAINING

The topic of Aboriginal cultural awareness is addressed in many of the documents and much of the committee work of the Ministry of Education. Systemically, there are specific directions related to appreciation of First Nations and Métis people that the Ministry addresses.

The first is recognition and acknowledgement that Aboriginal world views and ways of knowing are valid. The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) talks about the importance of recognizing and understanding the parameters of the Aboriginal world view. Respect and understanding of the teachings of the Elders is critical to cultural affirmation and ultimately, success for all students. Cultural understanding will lead to improved and harmonious relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The second area to be addressed is the reformulation of curriculum to recognize the value of the infusion of First Nations and Métis content and perspectives in all subject areas. Documents addressing core curriculum actualization refer to the need for in-service sessions for teachers to understand that the existence of Aboriginal content and perspectives in curricular documents is for the benefit of all students and not a polite addition to the documents. Teaching students Aboriginal content is not optional for Saskatchewan teachers. Further reference to actualization talks about processes and practices for implementing First Nations and Métis content and perspectives into every subject using best practices in an authentic manner.

The final area and one addressed by the question posed by the SSBA tackles the belief system of many of the ratepayers of Saskatchewan. The question asks about the level of myths and misconceptions training experienced by school division personnel and boards of education.

The use of the words myths and misconceptions to label the awareness workshops presupposes that there are long held and generally inaccurate stereotypes or beliefs about a culture or group of people that have had negative effects on relationships between people not of that particular group, and that those misconceptions have served to deter growth and progress of a group of people – in this case First Nations and Métis people.

The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee believes that although the province as a whole has made gains in raising awareness of the goals of Aboriginal education and the importance of teaching to those goals, there is still continued work to do before true understanding is achieved.

*The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) is a Ministry of Education Committee. Their goal is to see the following:*

- *Aboriginal young people with Grade 12 and post-secondary educations, flourishing in all professions; and,*
- *Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and young people knowledgeable about Aboriginal peoples and their history.*





The AEPAC tells us that if the province is to fully utilize the untapped manpower of the First Nations and Métis community and fully appreciate this cultural group then the province cannot be content to remain at the relatively low level of awareness but must move from awareness to true understanding, a much higher level of knowledge and internalization.

*The most popular training is from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC), A Time for Significant Leadership (ATFSL), Elders and AEDP presentations.*

Discussions on activities throughout the province focusing on awareness have shown that there is a variety of work done in some areas in most divisions and in the case of a few divisions, in all areas previously mentioned. Training for central office staff or senior administration, consultants, school administrators, and teaching staff are usually more extensive and have been going on for longer periods of time than training for Board members, largely due to Ministry initiatives.

The work of the Office of the Treaty Commission (OTC) was cited as the most common form of awareness training received by school divisions. The concepts and principles of Treaties covered in the comprehensive resource binders for Grades 7-12 began the first awareness sessions for teachers, school administration, and also for some consultants. Most divisions have trained at least one teacher in each school and in several cases have established catalyst teams, support teachers, or coaches to support the work of teachers in their systems. Treaty commission officers have also met and spoken with Boards and teaching staff.

The release of Treaty materials for kindergarten to Grade 6 is much anticipated by teachers and training of staff in the use of materials again in most divisions is referenced as the most common form of awareness training that staff will undertake. Again school divisions are forming a variety of support networks to assist in the use and actualization of the resource in classrooms.

Core curriculum renewal with the infusion of First Nations and Métis content and perspectives into all aspects of the curriculum instructs teachers to consider and present Aboriginal world views and information as they teach literacy, numeracy, science and history – in effect all subjects.

Teachers, consultants, and central office staff are supportive of the direction of the Ministry of Education and look forward to receiving the resources. Divisions that are working to infuse First Nations and Métis perspective into curriculum – Prairie Spirit, Regina Public and Saskatoon Public School Divisions – are working with groups of teachers, Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Ministry personnel to ensure the work being done is accurate and of high quality.

The second most cited method of awareness training is through the exploration of the *A Time for Significant Leadership* (ATFSL) document released by the Ministry of Education in June 2008. Some divisions have done training with both ATFSL and with the OTC.

The ATFSL document is designed to be a strategy or framework for school divisions to use as division personnel work toward implementing specific and predetermined goals for First Nations and Métis students. Because it is an implementation guide and toolkit it contains processes, strategies and specific examples to enable facilitators to conduct sessions with a variety of stakeholders and build capacity for further leadership with school divisions. The toolkit strives to extend and support existing leadership and to develop additional leaders or trainers to continue division work. Self-reflection questions, assessment protocols, next-steps planning frameworks, and strategies to expand and strengthen division and school teams are provided. The document's intent is for further learning opportunities to occur within regular staff development plans for the division.



School divisions who have received training with the ATFSL document, and who have used the materials, commented that the framework has provided opportunities for reflection on past and present practices when working with First Nations and Métis students and families. The framework identifies protocols for decision-making processes, division audits and next step directions. Division leaders appreciate the framework and step-by-step processes and tools provided in the document and the work of the Ministry personnel as they support understanding and implementation of the document.

School divisions may choose to focus on one or several of the recommended areas of action:

- Cultural affirmation and school climate;
- Shared decision making;
- Core curriculum actualization; and,
- Lifelong learning.

The document presents a great deal of information. Networking between divisions was mentioned as a consideration in continued use of the document.

The work of Elders in schools and with division personnel was referenced as the third most effective type of awareness training available to school divisions. The training is incidental in most cases but continuous. Elders acting as advisors to school division staff or working with students in schools, or in a variety of other capacities lead by example and were consistently cited as strengthening understanding of First Nations and Métis people.

The effects have been so pervasive that Regina Public – the school division with the largest number of Elders – no longer offers stand alone awareness in-service to their staff. Instead First Nations and Métis perspectives are infused into all the staff development they do.

*School divisions may choose to focus on one or several of the recommended areas of action:*

- *Cultural affirmation and school climate;*
- *Shared decision-making;*
- *Core curriculum actualization; and,*
  - *Lifelong learning.*



Connections with Elders, and Advisory councils help to increase understanding, break down walls and clear up misconceptions about First Nations people.

Regina Public is currently developing a *Leadership Enhancement and Development* program to be initiated next year with focus on First Nations and Métis educational leadership. It is part of a three-year plan aimed at increasing understanding of Aboriginal perspectives and building capacity of staff interested in school administration or leadership roles.

After training by the OTC, Ministry personnel, in conjunction with ATFSL and the work of Elders in school divisions, provided information to Boards through the SSBA and the First Nations and Métis branch of the Ministry of Education. These were the next most referenced type of awareness training.

Presentations at SSBA conferences about the AEDP or the Representative Workforce Strategy by Jamie Lerat, were often the first exposure many Board members had to the issues around First Nations and Métis education. These presentations were part of the impetus for Boards to begin to explore partnership agreements with First Nations bands within school division boundaries or to look more closely at the components of the Representative Workforce Strategy. Once partnership agreements were signed, they became the method of operation for Boards and, thus, the awareness training was expanded.

Initiatives by Saskatoon Public Schools in this area are noteworthy as they are attempting to move from specific awareness training to becoming a “Culturally Responsive” school division. The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Unit have been investigating the research on creating culturally responsive schools from studies conducted by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Two schools are piloting the principles of culturally responsive schools. They conduct ongoing research exploring promising practices with respect to First Nations and Métis education using the Cultural Responsiveness Model. Cultural Responsive Advisory Forums provide feedback from a variety of stakeholders including educators, Native leaders, Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers as to the effectiveness of the initiative. The group hopes to set benchmarks for performance regarding curriculum inclusion and cultural understanding. Their work will be expanded to other schools in the division as results can be confirmed and support can be provided.

More information about cultural responsiveness can be found at the Alaska Native Knowledge Network at [www.ankn.uaf.edu](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu).

*When a school division becomes a culturally responsive school division they move the focus “from learning about cultural heritage as another subject to teaching/ learning through culture as a foundation for all education, it is intended that all forms of knowledge, ways of knowing, and world views be recognized as equally valid, adaptable and complementary to one another in mutually beneficial ways and skills routinely taught in schools.”*

- FNIM News, Saskatoon Public Schools, Fall 2008, Volume 1, Issue 2, p. 3



Of all divisions interviewed, the North East School Division was the only one to complete Aboriginal Myths and Misconceptions Awareness Training for all staff. A few school divisions have active plans to provide awareness training to CUPE members, have already provided said training, or plan to fully train all staff within the next two to three years.

There is an acknowledgement by school divisions that more work needs to be done in this area. There is also a desire by divisions to have some assistance. Aboriginal Myths and Misconceptions Awareness Training by the SSBA is not well known nor is the content fully understood but divisions will be looking for support and information within the next two to three years. Some divisions have the capacity to develop their own training but there are many who will need to bring in facilitators to work with staff.

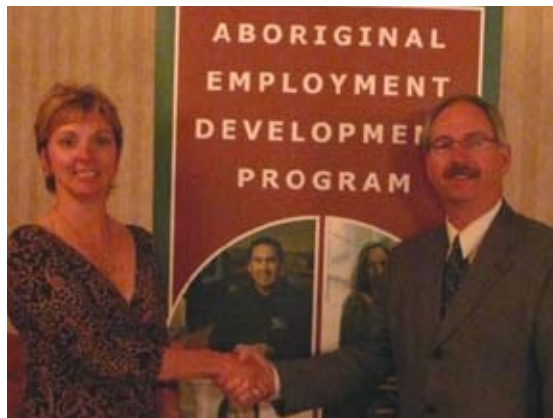
Signing an AEDP partnership agreement, committing to a Representative Workforce Strategy or signing education equity agreements were often the culmination of a series of events that greatly increased board's awareness of some of the issues facing First Nations and Métis students. References were repeatedly made to Ministry of Education personnel, specifically from the First Nations and Métis branch of the Ministry who met with senior administration and Boards as a significant mean of increasing awareness amongst Board members.

Awareness training in cultural activities, curriculum renewal and system supports are well in place. There are still misconceptions among staff with respect to First Nations and Métis people that were left unanswered, causing unease and dissention in the workplace. Taxation issues were specifically mentioned.

Some of the greatest networking and learning opportunities available for Board members will come through opportunities to share with each other experiences of signing agreements, learning to work within those agreements, and reflecting on decision-making processes commonly used. These active learning stories can only help move divisions along the continuum from awareness toward understanding.



*Prairie Valley SD signed an AEDP Partnership Agreement in June 2009.*



*Light of Christ RCSSD signed an AEDP Partnership Agreement in June 2007.*



## SPECIAL SUPPORTS

The final area to be explored with respect to First Nations and Métis people produced the most homogeneous results. Only one school division, Regina Public, has written policy addressing Aboriginal education.

“The intent of the policy is to strengthen First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student academic achievement, in learning environments that are equitable, culturally responsive and meaningful” (Regina Public Schools Board Policy #17 – June 19, 2007). The policy shared highlights five principles that division staff will use to guide their actions:

- i. Partnership Oriented;
- ii. Equitable and Accountable;
- iii. Inclusive;
- iv. Culturally Affirming; and,
- v. Instructionally Innovative.

The policy reflects the importance and belief that inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge is beneficial to all students and required learning for all students.

The fact that only one division has written policy on Aboriginal education should not be construed as lack of interest in addressing issues of First Nations and Métis people; rather, it reflects in part the level of awareness and understanding of Boards across the province and the desire to strengthen practice before writing policy. Still other divisions have made a conscious decision to strengthen administrative guidelines and practices rather than moving to policy.

Given this apparent randomness, there are some definite trends appearing provincially.

For boards who have chosen to sign partnership agreements, these agreements very much guide the practices and protocols for further behaviours in regards to First Nations and Métis programming. Boards are committed to making change and have confirmed this commitment by hiring permanent staff to address specific areas of concern such as developing a Representative Workforce Strategy, creating a welcoming work environment, and including First Nations and Métis perspectives and content into curriculum. As Boards work through these agreements and the responsibilities that they entail, they are increasing their understanding of issues around First Nations and Métis education and employment. Strategic or operational plans specifically identify further directions that Boards desire to move with respect to First Nations and Métis people.



Changes in the decision-making processes used by Boards are also evident. There is a commitment and concerted effort to seek the advice of Elders, Aboriginal policy makers and educators in a variety of areas relating most specifically to education but also to employment as decisions are made and goals are set. These practices are solidified in a variety of documents such as Elder Advisory Guidelines, Advisory Committee mandates, and processes and protocols for regular policy review. Regular Elder forums and partnership forums provide designated opportunities for various stakeholders to express opinions, reflect on past practices, offer suggestions, and set goals for moving forward. It is significant to note that these conversations take place in conjunction with important cultural observances of praying and smudging.

In divisions where relationships are strong, it has allowed divisions to “move from discussing tuition agreements to talking about learning for students.” (Cort Dogniez, FNIM Coordinator, Saskatoon Public Schools)

Just as some boards are making great strides in establishing relationships with First Nations and Métis people, there are also boards that are very cautious about moving forward. Past attempts to establish agreements, primarily around tuition or busing were unsuccessful and relations remain tenuous. Sometimes governance issues of First Nations and Métis groups within school divisions cause difficulties in determining how and whom to approach within Tribal Councils.

There were also concerns regarding the Ministry of Education’s message that school divisions have “capacity” to address First Nations and Métis initiatives proposed through documents such as ATFSL and curriculum renewal. Many divisions feel that they must be allowed the time and given support to grow into that capacity. Some divisions expressed concern that Ministry expectations and parameters were not clear and wondered how to be culturally sensitive and responsive to student needs without identifying specific groups of students.

Capacity is an all-inclusive word that encompasses many facets, each of which require effort and time to grasp. Understanding the issues around culture, First Nations and Métis perspectives and world view are large. Understanding how to provide leadership in this area to Boards and division personnel, and how to approach the leaders within the First Nations and Métis community is considerable. Having the ability to hire people to handle the variety of responsibilities varies significantly among Boards. Boards are required to prioritize direction within budget parameters that are already constrained.

Changing school division priorities and directions with respect to First Nations and Métis people takes time and commitment by senior administration to keep issues continually before the Board. There are Boards who have spent years understanding issues and trying to find solutions. They understand the educational, economic, and political ramifications of standing still. They have much to share with other Board members who are beginning to grapple with these initiatives. Senior division administration also have many experiences to share and can guide inexperienced senior administrators in moving forward and avoiding some of the difficulties. Requests to encourage networking as much as possible to avoid duplication, share work, and build expertise were expressed.





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