
ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT IN SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL DIVISIONS: A REVIEW



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The opinions and recommendations in this report are those of the author(s) and may not be in agreement with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) officers but are offered as being worthy of consideration by decision makers.

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Thanks is extended to Shelley Brown and Shelley Daye for providing the artwork. The bear paw is symbolic of power and 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 and Métis people, and to show that nations united are stronger than any one alone, and that they can support each other in power, health and friendship.

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INTRODUCTION

The education sector in Saskatchewan has recently seen a dramatic increase in its number of Aboriginal employees, but very few details underlying this growth are understood. Data supporting this contention is scattered and methodologies mixed, but a consistent trend indicating growth appears present. In 1998, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, in its annual Indicators report, noted the number of teachers of Aboriginal descent employed by a sample of school divisions in the province. Between 1989 and 1997, the percentage of teachers in the total teaching sample population who claimed Aboriginal descent grew from 4.2% to 6.7%. In 2004, the Ministry reported that the percentage of Aboriginal teaching staff had grown to 7.9% in the previous year (a doubling in employee numbers since 1989); non-teaching staff of Aboriginal descent in the same sample had increased from 9.7% of total non-teaching staff in 1989 to 11.9% in 2003. These samples are limited and specifics of the methodology employed to collect the data are unknown, but given that the total population of teachers within the sample in any of the given years was greater than 3000 (and frequently greater than 4000), it is reasonable to expect a similar demographic trend existed among teaching and non-teaching staff province-wide.

Following the 2001 census, Statistics Canada provided access to never-before released data on a variety of labour-force characteristics of Canada's Aboriginal population; similar access was provided following the 2006 census. In 2001, 3,654 self-identified Aboriginal men and women were employed in education services in Saskatchewan. In 2006, an increase of at least 40% among all self-identified Aboriginal men and women in the same sector was recorded. This rate of increase is interesting when compared against a collection of statistics released in the two census data sets that note a general decrease in total Aboriginal labour-force activity by 8%, a modest 1.4% increase in total (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) population labour-force activity in Saskatchewan, and a 10% increase in total activity in education services during the same period. Furthermore, if the data provided in Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Indicators reports were examined in terms analogous to those provided in the Statistics Canada dataset, the total Aboriginal education sector staffing (teaching and non-teaching) in Saskatchewan between 1989 and 2003 grew by 82%.

While, on its own, the more recent 40% increase in Aboriginal employment in the education sector reported by Statistics Canada over five years appears *prima facie* noteworthy, many questions remain beyond those born in light of the additional decrease in general Aboriginal labour-force activity—questions that are neither answered through analysis of existing federal nor provincial data sources. What is the impetus for this increase in the education services area? How are these statistics





disaggregated to provincial, federal, K-12, post-secondary, or tertiary educational environments, and to specific roles within educational environments? What are the implications of this increase as it pertains to both a variety of equity-fostering programming and stakeholder groups within the community?

The general purpose of this study is to begin the examination of the noteworthy increase of Aboriginal employment in the education sector in Saskatchewan by collecting and analyzing demographic and qualitative data within the provincial primary and secondary school system. This study has been commissioned by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) to bring clarity to some of the questions noted above, particularly given the Association's recent initiatives aimed at fostering Aboriginal employment within provincial educational entities. In its commissioning of this study, the SSBA sought particular focus be placed on the perceptions, demographics, practices, and practical commentary of school divisions in the province. Clearly stated, the criteria, scope, and research interests of the SSBA included the following:

- School trustee and senior education administrator perceptions of provincial programs in support of increasing Aboriginal employment;
- Changes in school board employment of Aboriginal staff from 2000 – 2010;
- Identification of barriers and concerns;
- Identification of effective practices;
- Description of 3-4 exemplary case studies;
- Perceptions of Saskatchewan School Boards Association services and supports for school boards with respect to Aboriginal employment development; and
- Identification of needs and recommendations for improvement.

This report begins by detailing the methodology and method employed by the researchers in data collection. Two central themes that emerged from the study are discussed, and these are followed by a discussion of themes related to barriers and promising practices within Saskatchewan school divisions. Next, perspectives on provincial programs are surfaced. Finally, the services provided by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association on Aboriginal employment are explored and recommendations are offered. Three appendices provide examples of exemplary practices.

METHODOLOGY

In light of the research interests articulated for this study, the researchers elected to employ a pragmatic methodology to guide research question articulation, participant identification, and data collection techniques. Mixed-methods has been identified by researchers as a research methodology that permits a focus on practical (as opposed to esoteric, theoretical, or philosophical) results in the research process (Beista & Barbules, 2003; Creswell & Clark, 2007). In a mixed methods approach, the interpretations of the results of quantitative and qualitative forms of data collection within a study may inform each other and yield a more rounded view of the object of interest (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005).

The study began with the identification of school divisions within the province that were home to the highest percentage of Aboriginal student population as reported by the Ministry of Education in its 2007 Provincial Assessment for Learning document. Appropriate school division staff personnel were contacted, and agreement to participate was sought. The researchers employed the following commonplace quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques.

- Conversational active interview techniques (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) were employed during one-on-one and focus group interviews with selected senior staff and board members from the identified school divisions, Ministry officials, and SSBA personnel.
- Surveys featuring quantitative (demographic) and qualitative (open-ended) questions were distributed to all school division Human Resource Superintendents.
- A search of school divisions' websites was undertaken related to employment of persons of Aboriginal ancestry. Data were integrated through the use of thematic content analysis techniques (Krippendorff, 1980).

All interviews, focus groups and survey data were conducted/collected between November, 2009 and February, 2010. Interconnecting thematic analysis (Creswell, 2002) of the various types of data was conducted. Quotations noted within this report have been taken from these data sources.





PRESENTATION OF DATA

ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT THEMES

Interviews, focus groups, and survey data were thematically analyzed using the interconnecting thematic analysis technique described by Creswell (2002) and two primary themes were identified: (a) relationships and (b) welcoming environments.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with Aboriginal communities, organizations, and political entities were seen to be at the heart of building lasting communities of Aboriginal employees. The consistency with which relationships were identified by all respondent groups reinforced its importance to the issue of Aboriginal employment. Included in the array of relationships were those with First Nations, Tribal Councils, Métis organizations, Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs (ATEPs), other school divisions, post secondary institutions, and Aboriginal officials and communities. Relationships can be both positive and negative, so removing obstacles to positive relationships was seen as advantageous to the respondents in the study.

In a focus group of directors of the school divisions with the highest percentage of Aboriginal employees, the directors identified the importance of forming relationships with Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) organizations in order to encourage their students to apply for teaching positions in the respective divisions. The ATEPs included:

- Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) at Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert;
- Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) at the University of Saskatchewan; and
- Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) in La Ronge.

These organizations were identified by the directors of education and human resources superintendents as important venues for the training of Aboriginal teachers. Forming relationships with key officials in these programs was seen as important in order to get to know the students and who was graduating and thus available to be employed. One director commented, “the best way we are addressing Aboriginal employment is in our relationship with SUNTEP. We support their program...we encourage new Aboriginal teachers to apply to our school division”.

The theme of relationships was also articulated by the board chairs, who supported the efforts of their administration to recruit Aboriginal employees, but also noted that it was important for boards to foster relationships with Aboriginal people built on integrity and trust. One board chair said:

Our recruitment worker meets and spends time with SUNTEP and ITEP interns. This is part of our practice to understand them and their culture and ensure they understand [our policies and practices]...this helps to demystify the hiring process in our school division.

Human resources (HR) superintendents also identified relationships as an important factor in the recruitment process. In addition to the Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs and teacher education, HR superintendents noted that Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT) also offered training programs and graduated individuals whose skills are needed in various positions within their divisions. As well, HR superintendents identified their ongoing work with local First Nations or Tribal Councils to indicate the “networking with First Nations communities to get information about job opportunities out to communities or organizations”. The human resource personnel also noted that they mailed position announcements directly to First Nations organizations to be posted in Band Offices to ensure wide distribution of vacancies.

Combined, the Northern Lights and Île-à-la-Crosse School Divisions have the highest percentage of Aboriginal students within the provincial school system in their schools. Carefully fostering relationships, both with employees and the provincial universities, has made some unique practices possible. The Northern Lights School Division has encouraged local residents to attend teacher-training programs and sponsored its teaching staff to attend graduate off-campus education programs offered through contractual arrangements with the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan. This practice is consistent with the division’s philosophy of supporting Aboriginal employees to not only increase their own qualifications but to utilize their studies in their classrooms and schools to foster improved student learning environments.

One board chair stated that his division undertook an initiative to establish ten new, permanent, substitute teaching positions (on full-time permanent contracts). The purpose of this initiative was to designate positions in an effort to implement a key school division priority: hiring Aboriginal teachers in their schools. This practice represented a systematic approach to hiring Aboriginal teachers.

Directors, board chairs, and HR superintendents who participated in the study perceived positive relationships with First Nations and Métis authorities (and educators working for those authorities) would enhance the opportunities for school divisions to hire Aboriginal employees. Such relationships, it was suggested, were challenging to develop and maintain, but well worth the effort. Alternatively, it was the belief of some participants that negative relationships rooted in funding disagreements and misunderstandings often represented barriers to recruiting and retaining Aboriginal employees.

While Directors of education primarily focused their attention on the provincial system, they noted that relationship building was required beyond their own jurisdictions. Comments to this effect were made in reference to difficulties that had arisen when students transferred between First Nations’ and provincial schools, or when students had tuition paid for them to attend provincial schools. Financial conflicts based on tuition were mentioned by directors as harming relationships with First Nations authorities.





WELCOMING ENVIRONMENTS

The second key theme that emerged from the analysis of data collected within this study reflected the importance of creating a welcoming, culturally affirming environment within schools and school systems for Aboriginal employees. Representing a bifurcation in the responses of participants, a welcoming environment was raised as both a success story and a major challenge for school divisions. Virtually all participants in the study recognized that the placement of a single Aboriginal teacher in a school could often lead to the isolation and disillusionment of that teacher. Simply put, the individual Aboriginal teacher was often expected to be the expert on all Aboriginal issues and a role model for all students. Participants articulated their belief that pressure embodied in such expectations was significant. A successful mitigation effort appeared in the reports of Regina Public School Division representatives. The division reported on its plan to address this issue. Described in greater depth in Appendix B, Regina Public School Division's exemplary practice addressed the pressures of isolation through the hiring of 22 new Aboriginal teachers, and the deployment of Aboriginal teachers in teams.

It was the perception of many participants that Western cultural bias in schools and school divisions was pervasive in many situations, especially those schools without a significant number of Aboriginal students. To overcome this, in part, a number of school divisions are conducting Myths and Misconceptions training for staff. This gives focus to the issues/misconceptions related to worldviews, culture, language, and beliefs. This and similar training enables staff to be cognizant of their own understanding of (or lack thereof) dominant culture symbols and expectations, and to gain deeper understandings of others. The study's participants credited the SSBA with strong leadership in this area.

One school division reported that it has created an Aboriginal Employees' Network. The division further provides a cultural room in division office to encourage the celebration of Aboriginal culture. The SSBA provided support with the process of establishing Aboriginal Employee Networks in a report on its website. See the following link:

<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/old/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchReports/IndianAndMetisEducation/09-08.pdf>

Other divisions identified supportive initiatives they had established. In a focus group of board chairs of divisions with the highest percentage of Aboriginal students in the province, one board chair said, "We have more supports in our schools [including] an Aboriginal support worker, dancers, and Elders. I really think it is good for our school division because it shows we are diverse and welcoming". Another stated, "... we work closely within our school division and focus on being inviting and welcoming. We cannot force anyone to come to us [for employment] but we can create an environment that is welcoming and caters to all cultures".

PERCENTAGES OF ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT

In addition to the data discussed in the Introduction to this report, HR superintendents were asked to provide demographic data on the percentage of Aboriginal employees within their divisions for the years 2000 and 2010. Data provided seems to indicate that employment of individuals of Aboriginal ancestry is modestly increasing in most of the surveyed Saskatchewan school divisions. Definitive commentary is difficult to provide given that reported data was incomplete due to inconsistent, or a lack of, collections among school divisions.

Figure 1 on the following page presents the data collected. In 2000, data were not available in seven school divisions; in 2010, data were not available in three. Of the eleven school divisions that provided data in both years, eight reported an increase in their percentage of Aboriginal employees, two reported no change in percentage, and one school division reported a large percentage change decrease. On average for all school divisions who provided data in both years, it can be said that the percentage of Aboriginal employees within a school division increased by 1.2% between 2000 and 2010.

Figure 1: Aboriginal Employment by School Division as a Percentage of Total Employment in 2000 and 2010

Division	2000	2010	Change
A	-	-	-
B	-	-	-
C	5%	8.7%	3.7%
D	3%	3%	0%
E	3.5%	6.2%	2.7%
F	-	3%	3%
G	67%	75%	8%
H	12%	15%	3%
I	70%	53%	(17%)
J	1%	5%	4%
K	5%	5%	0%
L	-	2%	2%
M	3%	6%	3%
N	-	3.6%	3.6%
O	-	0.008%	0.008%
P	2%	3%	1%
Q	5.3%	8.6%	3.3%
R	-	-	-
Average known change			1.2%





Census data collected by Statistics Canada, and reviewed in the Introduction of the report seems to provide a different trend than the data collected directly from school divisions. Little can be meaningfully gained from comparisons, however, since there is neither consistency in methodology for collection, nor is there disaggregation of the Statistics Canada data to provincial publicly funded school divisions. The SSBA has provided information for school divisions on self-declaration of Aboriginal employees through a recently commissioned paper. See the link below.

<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/old/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchReports/IndianAndMetisEducation/09-06.pdf>

BARRIERS TO ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT IN SCHOOL DIVISIONS

Barriers to Aboriginal employment in school divisions were identified in the interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Themes emerging strongly were specifically related to the numbers of Aboriginal teachers and staff available, tax issues, and involvement of Aboriginal peoples in school governance.

ABORIGINAL STAFF AVAILABILITY

Concern was expressed by almost all those interviewed that there are not enough qualified teachers and other employees of Aboriginal ancestry to meet the hiring needs of school divisions. Those interviewed noted that not only was there a limited number of Aboriginal candidates for teaching positions but that school divisions were in competition with each other and First Nations authorities for teachers, educational assistants, and other personnel.

Divisions outside of the major centres in the province perceive themselves at a disadvantage in hiring Aboriginal people because the perception is that Saskatoon and Regina have an advantage in attracting grads from SUNTEP, ITEP, and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT). In addition to that, they feel that they are in competition with nearby First Nations schools for NORTEP and other Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs (ATEPs) for prospective teachers and other personnel who would like to return to their home areas.

While directors and HR superintendents who participated in this study identified the ATEPs as excellent sources of Aboriginal teachers, they noted that in some situations in the province there remain insufficient numbers of qualified applicants graduating from these programs to meet the needs of their students. For divisions outside of Regina and Saskatoon, participants suggested that the competition for the graduates with urban divisions and First Nations authorities was a complicating issue. It was suggested by key officials in one-on-one interviews that increasing the number of graduates from the ATEPs would be a helpful step in increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in their schools.

INCOME TAX

First Nations people in Canada do not pay income tax if they work on reserve, but they do when they accept off-reserve employment. This “tax issue” was raised by all respondent groups in this study as a limiting factor in hiring First Nations employees. Simply put, the participants saw the varied amounts of take home pay as an initial visible barrier. Having said this, some interviewees noted that the provincial salary scale, the teachers’ pension plan, and other benefits help to overcome the financial differential caused by taxation. It was suggested by respondents that information sessions on the salary and benefits available in provincial systems should be undertaken to ensure that individuals are fully aware of the financial benefits available to employees and prospective employees in school divisions.

After examination of SSBA documentation, and in discussion with SSBA officials, it is obvious that much work has been done provincially to support boards in addressing the taxation issue. The concerns around tax issues raised by the participants in this study appear to have been raised previously through the SSBA and have received attention. A paper commissioned recently by the SSBA provides helpful information and a useful perspective. See the link below.

<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/old/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchReports/IndianAndMetisEducation/09-07.pdf>

GOVERNANCE PARADIGM

Several respondents mentioned the lack of Aboriginal people on boards of education (even in divisions with a high percentage of Aboriginal students) as a systemic barrier to Aboriginal employment. While there are exceptions (see Appendix A), most trustees, except in the northern school boards (Northern Lights and Île-à-la-Crosse), are not of Aboriginal ancestry. Data solicited through interviews and surveys suggested that there are few examples of Aboriginal individuals involved in school division governance beyond a few individual representatives from First Nations communities sitting on provincial school boards (again, except for the northern boards). This was an issue that needed to be surfaced because of the frequency with which it was raised by respondents, including the Ministry. The area of representative governance in provincial public education, identified here as a barrier, is closely related to symbolism and governance identified as a promising practice later in this report.





PROMISING PRACTICES

Three themes emerged that are linked to promising practices in enhancing Aboriginal employment. While currently some practices are more fully developed, the themes explored below highlight successes and promising directions.

SYMBOLISM AND GOVERNANCE

Several respondents, including the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, highlighted the Horizon School Division Board of Education and its four First Nations board members as a positive role model for other divisions to follow. Participants identified the symbolism of having four Aboriginal people in key positions of leadership in a school division as important. Participants saw Aboriginal participation in decision-making at the system level as a positive step that, they believed, would influence future endeavours—including employment practices.

While there is no direct evidence that governance by Aboriginal people will improve student achievement, there is evidence that effective school board governance can contribute to student success (<http://www.schoolboardresearch.org/content/document/detail/689/>).

ABORIGINAL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS (ATEPs)

School divisions' personnel who participated in this study believed that the ATEPs are an excellent professional resource for the Province and enhance Aboriginal employment in the provincial education system. One director commented, “the best way we are addressing Aboriginal employment [in our division] is in our relationship with SUNTEP. We support their program. Once that relationship is established, we encourage new Aboriginal teachers to apply to our school division.” Another participant noted, “we had an arrangement with SUNTEP to bring teachers into our schools for their practicum. So by the time they graduate the individuals all know each other.” Board chairs were aware of their administration supporting the ATEPs, and viewed this as positive professional practice. One board chair noted, “we actively recruit and we have a coordinator who works with SUNTEP and ITEP. We help applicants build and create resumes.”

HR superintendents also cited ATEPs as important to their work. Several mentioned direct relationships with ITEP and SUNTEP, as well as hiring NORTEP graduates, as keys to increasing the component of Aboriginal teaching staff. HR superintendents further explained how their divisions encourage teachers to apply to host student teachers from the ATEP programs.

Regina Public School Division has maintained a very aggressive hiring practice with SUNTEP students (see Appendix B) and recently hired 22 SUNTEP graduates on permanent contract in one school year. While the ATEPs were generally perceived to be an excellent source of teacher employee candidates, the Northern Lights School Division stated that it would like to see increased numbers of students in NORTEP. This school division articulated its belief that there is tremendous need for NORTEP graduates, and often the Division is in direct competition with First Nations education authorities for graduating teachers.

High turnover rates for its teaching staff was identified as a significant issue within the Northern Lights School Division, and hiring local NORTEP graduates who want to return to their home communities is perceived to be one of the promising practices for addressing that issue. As noted previously, divisions outside the major urban areas noted the competition with urban divisions and First Nations authorities for the ATEP graduates. Related to this, the Ministry of Education and others suggested that the SSBA might wish to consider an advocacy role in supporting increased in-take numbers for Aboriginal students in the ATEPs.

ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (AEDP)

The AEDP is a partnership between the SSBA, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations. The goal of AEDP is to create a supportive environment in which to foster a representative workforce in school divisions in Saskatchewan. School divisions are encouraged to sign a formal agreement to become part of the AEDP to have full access to its resources. Human Resource superintendents who participated in this study spoke very highly of this program and suggested that it represented a promising practice within Saskatchewan. Under the auspices of this program (but not exclusively), “Myths and Misconceptions” training was occurring in a number of school divisions. One human resource superintendent said, “the Aboriginal Myths and Misconceptions training is an excellent training session.” One school division reported that it has recently hired an Aboriginal Employee Development Program coordinator to build on this program and expand the training within its own division.

Leadership at the provincial level was welcomed, and the AEDP was seen by participants to be a promising practice with real potential for success. Both SSBA and Ministry of Education support for the AEDP were seen by participants as important to ensure its future and encourage involvement of school divisions. Several directors indicated that they had “bought into the AEDP” at their respective division levels, and saw it as a promising provincial initiative. The Ministry indicated that it was pleased with the success of the program so far.

As of May 15, 2010, 12 school divisions have signed Aboriginal Employment Development Program partnership agreements. These school divisions are Light of Christ RCS, Living Sky, North East, Prairie Spirit, Saskatoon Public, Greater Saskatoon Catholic, Holy Trinity RCS, Regina RCS, Prairie Valley, Northern Lights, Creighton, and Île-à-la-Crosse.





PROVINCIAL PROGRAMS ON ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT

In the context of the interviews, focus groups, and surveys associated with this study, provincial programs, except those programs directly associated with the SSBA (such as the AEDP), did not become a theme of the data. However, the concept of a Representational Workforce was mentioned by two HR superintendents when responding to a survey question concerning present practices. In an individual interview, and in one of the case studies, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission Education Equity Program was cited. Also mentioned multiple times was the “Teaching Treaties in the Classroom” program. No other provincial programs were mentioned more than once by participants during the data collection process.

Several HR superintendents reported their goal for a “representative workforce,” and this language could be interpreted as being directly linked to the provincial Representational Workforce Strategy. This strategy was first adopted by the Province in 1995. See the following link for more information on this program. <http://www.fnmr.gov.sk.ca/aed/RWS1-Overview.pdf>

Northern Lights and Regina Public School Divisions both identified the Education Equity Program as critical for focusing attention on the issue of Aboriginal employment at one point in the development of policies and procedures. Regina Public School Division reported that it publishes equity statistics on its website and produces a comprehensive annual report. Northern Lights School Division identified continuous effort and progress in hiring Aboriginal employees since Education Equity began in the 1980s. Northern Lights also referred to its annual Education Equity Report where it reports its statistics on Aboriginal employment.

The Horizon School Division and two HR superintendents from other divisions mentioned “Teaching Treaties in the Classroom” and implied that this being implemented in their school divisions was a sign of respect and understanding for First Nations people. Participants in the study seemed to see Teaching Treaties in the Classroom as part of creating a positive environment for Aboriginal employees with school divisions.

SSBA SERVICES ON ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT

Participants reported inconsistent understanding of SSBA services among the respondent groups. The HR superintendents in the surveys seemed well aware of the services offered but the directors and the board chairs less so.

CURRENT SERVICES

The HR superintendents who participated in this study were consistently complementary about the services of the SSBA. In their responses they were particularly complementary of the AEDP Coordinator, who recently joined the association. Of the 17 divisions who replied to surveys administered, at least 14 divisions perceived that the SSBA and its AEDP Coordinator provided positive support to school divisions with regard to their efforts around Aboriginal employment. “The addition of such a professional [the AEDP Coordinator] is much needed,” said one superintendent. “SSBA’s Aboriginal Employment Development Coordinator has been an asset,” said another. One respondent described an information session organized by the Coordinator to “learn what other divisions are doing” as “very helpful.” There were several other positive comments from HR superintendents: “[We] appreciate the support of SSBA staff in encouraging and coordinating Aboriginal employment policies through the province.” “SSBA is a strong advocate for hiring Aboriginal employees.” “SSBA work is helping to give focus to Aboriginal employment.”

Directors and board chairs, alternatively, seemed somewhat less sure of the services SSBA offered. The question “What are your perceptions of the supports and services provided by the SSBA for school divisions with respect to aboriginal employment?” was asked to both the focus groups of directors and board chairs. Of those in the group, several directors said they had signed or would be signing on to AEDP agreements, but none mentioned any specific supports. One director indicated that his division was “going its own way” with enhancing Aboriginal employment and was “not sure what services the SSBA could provide.” One board chair said, “we really do not have a good understanding of SSBA supports—communication of these supports is a problem at the board level.” Board chairs indicated their willingness to learn about the supports, but none felt qualified to speak to the SSBA services at the time the focus group was held.





POSSIBLE FUTURE SERVICES

Suggestions for future services came almost exclusively from the respondents to the HR superintendent survey. Perhaps this was because they have been both the most directly affected by the services of the SSBA, and have been engaged in activities organized by the Association.

Of those who responded to the HR superintendent survey, 11 suggested a formal succession planning process for leadership positions in education, particularly for replacing Aboriginals in leadership positions. It should be noted that the SSBA has, in conjunction with the other education partners, initiated a succession planning study in school divisions. A recommendation articulated in the responses of a number of divisions was for the SSBA to conduct a public awareness campaign promoting interest among Aboriginal people to work for school boards, the variety of occupations available within school divisions, and the need for a more representative workforce. Ideas suggested by one or two respondents are listed in bullet form below.

- Further training modules for divisions to use.
- Develop a toolkit for divisions including self-declaration examples, research information on topics and examples of best practices by Saskatchewan school divisions.
- Lead the development of a regional AED partnership group that would meet on a regular basis.
- Continued guidance.
- Share successful strategies from other school divisions.
- Continued support with AEDP and policy/procedure development.
- Encourage Aboriginal people to stand for school boards elections.
- Develop a mentorship strategy to bring more Aboriginal people into school divisions and into the SSBA offices.
- Liaise with First Nations and Tribal Councils.
- Build links with SIIT for training programs – Caretaker Training Program.
- Continue sharing best practices.

CONCLUSION

Reports from HR superintendents generally were encouraging, and articulated their perception that Aboriginal employment in school divisions has increased (in some cases substantially) since 2000. There was a strong feeling, however, that more can be done to promote and facilitate Aboriginal employment in the education sector. Some key participants in the study expressed the belief that, in Saskatchewan, the issue of Aboriginal employment in the provincial school system is getting a higher profile and there seems to be positive momentum for continued action. Respondents who took part in this study were in general agreement that a “representative workforce” is a worthy goal and that students should see themselves in those that work in their schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The SSBA leadership in Aboriginal employment initiatives has been perceived as successful and has the support of many in the system, and thus should continue and be enhanced. This includes continued focus on the Aboriginal Employment Development Program.
- The SSBA may want to continue to ensure senior administrators and trustees are aware of the services offered in the area of Aboriginal employment.
- The SSBA should continue to encourage First Nations and Métis candidates to participate in elections for school boards, and should take formal steps in this regard in the next province-wide election.
- The SSBA should advocate for more spaces in the Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs to meet rising demands for Aboriginal teachers and limited supply.
- School divisions, with SSBA support, should continue to build relationships and explore promising practices as means of working toward a representational workforce.
- Consistent methods of data collection on Aboriginal employment within school divisions in the province should be explored, where legally possible.





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APPENDIX A

EXEMPLAR 1: HORIZON SCHOOL DIVISION ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES

The environment in the Horizon School Division has been influenced by the strong symbolism and practical message of having four First Nations members on the Board of Education. This sends a powerful philosophical message throughout the division. The First Nations board members are selected by the Muskowekwan, George Gordon, Day Star, and Fishing Lake First Nations. They are fully recognized and active board members who take a strong leadership role in all aspects of the school division. Darren McKee, Associate Deputy Minister, recognized this as an exemplar of aboriginal involvement and participation in the governance of a provincial school division. Staff members within the division recognize the significance of this governance model and note the influence it has on the climate of the division.

The foundation of the relationships goes back to pre-amalgamation days and the legacy school division, Saskatchewan Central, which did much work in developing partnerships with First Nations. Horizon School Division has continued to develop and enhance the partnerships and the working relationships. A unique relationship with the George Gordon First Nation also stemmed back to a solid partnership between Saskatchewan Central and the Band.

While George Gordon First Nation School is on reserve, Horizon School Division staffs the school, with involvement from the First Nation, and the teachers there are members of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) and the support staff is part of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 4799. First Nations teachers at this school are working on reserve, so do not have income tax deducted from their pay, but are fully participating members of the STF, meaning they get paid at provincial scale and have all provincially negotiated benefits including pension, sick leave, and income continuance (among others). Similarly, the support staff members have access to all of the benefits provided by the CUPE agreement for Local 4799.

At George Gordon School 75 percent of the teachers are aboriginal as is 60 percent of the support staff. Professional development opportunities are conducted in accordance with the activities of the school division and the supervision and evaluation policies are similar to those of other staff.

The schools in Punnichy, which are virtually 100 percent aboriginal students, are staffed with the input of the First Nation and there is a strong desire to hire aboriginal role models whenever possible. The division is working hard to create a welcoming environment for aboriginal staff across the division. As a key strategy focused on accomplishing this goal, the school division has made a commitment to become fully engaged in the Aboriginal Employment Development Program sponsored by the First Nations and Métis Relations branch of the Ministry and the SSBA. The division will begin implementing "Myths and Misconceptions" training for staff beginning in the fall of 2010.

The division has hired an experienced Aboriginal Programs Coordinator and has made relationships with First Nations and Métis groups within the division a priority. The work continues, but the underlying philosophy is in place.





APPENDIX B

EXEMPLAR 2: REGINA PUBLIC SCHOOLS ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES

The Regina Public School Division has made considerable efforts to have a representative work force, especially with respect to aboriginal employees. From a philosophical perspective, the division was interested in approaching aboriginal ways of knowing and felt that one way to address that perspective was to hire aboriginal employees and put them where they needed to be. Deploying First Nations and Métis staff members where they could have the most impact was an important principle for the division.

What does strategic deployment mean? When spread out across the system and placed individually in schools, aboriginal employees often felt that they had to answer all cultural questions and be the “expert” on aboriginal issues. In response to this, aboriginal employees were deployed in groups of three or four, with inner city schools being the first priority and then moving to other areas. There was a desire for a First Nations and Métis influence across the system.

The teams of First Nations and Métis teachers were placed so as to be complimentary to each other. For example, if one teacher was interested in drama, one placed with that person might be someone more into mathematics or dance. This was to set up opportunities for collaboration both among aboriginal teachers and with the remainder of the staff.

In order to have teams of teachers to deploy, the division took an aggressive approach to hiring. The division established relationships with key individuals at the First Nations University, Gabriel Dumont Institute and especially the SUNTEP program. Those institutions were contacted early in the New Year, and, in its first effort four years ago, the division hired 22 permanent contract First Nations and Métis teachers. This has continued annually since then with results that vary based on applications received. Every Aboriginal teacher that self identifies upon application is guaranteed an interview.

To support First Nations and Métis teachers once they have been hired by the division, an aboriginal teachers’ network was established. This group meets in division office two times per year, including one meeting over supper, and members of the group are recognized for their value to the system. There are also six “Hawk’s Nest” cultural materials classrooms available in schools that have a significant number of First Nations and Métis students and staff. In addition to this, there is a cultural room available in division office for those aboriginal staff members who wish to celebrate their spirituality or their culture.

Regina Public Schools documented that in 2000 they had an aboriginal employee compliment equal to 5.3 percent of the total number of employees including 3.1

percent of teachers. In 2009, they employed 8.6 percent aboriginal staff including 7.1 percent of teachers. The proof of the division's success is in the outcomes and these percentages show the gains that have been made in recruiting, hiring and retaining aboriginal staff.

APPENDIX C

EXEMPLAR 3: NORTHERN LIGHTS SCHOOL DIVISION ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES

The Saskatchewan Education Indicators: Prekindergarten to Grade (2008) report identified that for the 2008-2009 school year, 16.6% of the total number of students in Saskatchewan schools self-declared as Aboriginal, while 6.3% of the total number of teachers self-declared as Aboriginal and 5.1% of school administrators self-declared as Aboriginal. It is estimated that of the total number of superintendents and directors of education within the province, four are of Aboriginal ancestry.

Northern Saskatchewan has the both the largest number of students and teachers of Aboriginal ancestry in the province; however, similar to other divisions, the Northern Lights School Division does not have a representative work force at the superintendent/director levels. In order to actively work towards a more representative workforce Northern Lights School Division pursued employment initiatives to increase Aboriginal representation in senior educational administrative and leadership positions within the division.

Jason Young is an Aboriginal person who has been employed as Superintendent with the Northern Lights SD 113 for the last five years. He completed a B.Ed and a Master of Educational Administration (2005) in the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. Upon completion of his graduate degree he was hired as a superintendent by Northern Lights School Division. Jason indicated that completion of his master's degree gave him the knowledge and confidence to apply for a leadership position. It was, however, a number of other factors and initiatives particularly by Northern Lights that supported Jason in his new position.

In establishing a succession plan, Northern Lights Board agreed to "over staff" in the area of superintendent positions to provide mentorship to the newly hired superintendent. Thus in his final year prior to retirement, Neil Doel, Superintendent with Northern Lights worked with Jason. As Neil and Jason drove to northern schools, Neil's truck became Jason's "classroom". Together the two discussed and talked through issues, assessed their day's work, and planned for the future visits and initiatives in the schools. By the end of the year, with strong mentorship from Neil Doel, Jason felt ready to "go it alone".

The Northern Lights School Division established a succession plan and supported the individual it hired with mentor. However, the benefits of these decisions and actions go beyond the success of one individual. Having a superintendent who is Aboriginal has led other employees to consider administrative positions – "if Jason can do it, I can do it".





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