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# NATIONAL ABORIGINAL TRUSTEES GATHERING: A SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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 SASKATCHEWAN  
**School Boards**  
ASSOCIATION

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RESEARCH REPORT #11-03

This report was commissioned by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association.

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This report was prepared for the Saskatchewan School Boards Association by Cheryl Hoftyzer, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. Funding support from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education for this research is greatly appreciated.



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 and black represent the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health of First Nations people. The Métis sash symbolizes the pride of the Métis people. The dream catcher is used to unite both First Nations and Métis peoples and to show that nations united are stronger than any one alone to support each other in power, health and friendship.

# CONTENTS



<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Purpose of the National Aboriginal Trustees Gathering .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>National Aboriginal Trustees Gathering Agenda .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Strategies for Strengthening First Nations and Métis Parent and Community Engagement .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Student Voices .....	8
Strengthening Our Voice: A Guide for Engaging First Nations and Métis Peoples in Public Schools .....	9
What Participants Said.....	10
<b>Strategies for Strengthening First Nations and Métis Student Academic Achievement .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Supporting Student Success.....	12
What Participants Said.....	14
<b>Provincial Perspectives .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Saskatchewan Perspective.....	16
Northwest Territories Perspective .....	19
Yukon Perspective .....	21
British Columbia Perspective.....	22
Alberta Perspective.....	23
Manitoba Perspective .....	24
Ontario Perspective .....	25
Nova Scotia Perspective .....	26
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada .....	27
Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada .....	29
<b>Appendix A.....</b>	<b>31</b>
List of Participants .....	31
<b>Annotated Bibliography .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Research Practices.....	32
Successful Practices.....	41





## INTRODUCTION



*Duane Favel*

Education is important to children's success in life and to the economic health of our communities. It is appropriate that Aboriginal school board members take a leadership role in strengthening Aboriginal student achievement. On behalf of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association's (SSBA) Provincial Executive, we were honoured to host the inaugural National Aboriginal Trustees Gathering focused on engaged discussion and reflection.

School boards are all working towards eliminating the academic achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and this gathering provided us with an opportunity to reflect on the work being done to engage First Nations and Métis parents and strengthen student achievement. The theme of our gathering, *Powered By Engagement, Creating Success*, is appropriate for this unique opportunity for Aboriginal school trustees to share strategies from across the country.

In this spirit of sharing, a participant from each province was asked to share information from their region about interesting initiatives in support of strengthening Aboriginal student achievement. The goal in this was to help broaden our perspective and make this a truly National Gathering. The most important component of the agenda was the discussions and sharing that occurred among the participants. We are confident that the ideas and connections that were shared during our discussions will continue to be valuable to all participants, and hope that the ideas will be shared with colleagues and school boards across the country.

This summary of the presentations from the 2011 National Aboriginal Trustees Gathering in Saskatoon is offered to you as a resource to assist you in your work.

All the best as we move forward on this mutual priority,

Duane Favel  
Chair, National Aboriginal Trustees Gathering  
Aboriginal Constituency Representative, SSBA Provincial Executive





## PURPOSE OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL TRUSTEES GATHERING

Aboriginal education has become a priority across Canada and the main goal in this is to eliminate the academic achievement rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the K-12 system. Building relationships and partnerships between First Nations and Métis peoples, provincial and federal governments, and school districts are essential if this goal is to be actualized. In order for there to be improved educational outcomes shared management, which involves effective leaders and partnerships, needs to become a priority.

It is appropriate that boards of education and Aboriginal trustees play a leadership role in leading this effort. This National Aboriginal Trustees Gathering (National Gathering) represents the first event focused on bringing Aboriginal school board members together to address this work.

It is our goal and our vision that through strengthening engagement with all stakeholders in education the elimination of the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students will become reality. In order to bring about improved outcomes, strategic alliances require relevance in planning and decision making processes. This work demands that each of us challenge ourselves to consider the role we play in relationship building and shared management, and to reflect upon how this can be improved.



# NATIONAL ABORIGINAL TRUSTEES GATHERING AGENDA

The National Gathering was held from June 19-21, 2011 at the Delta Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon. The National Gathering was organized and sponsored by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association with support from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. Its purpose was:

*To provide a forum for school board members of Aboriginal ancestry to examine and identify strategies for strengthening First Nations and Métis parent engagement and student achievement.*

Approximately 60 individuals representing six Canadian provinces and territories participated in the National Gathering. The names of the individuals and organizations participating appear in Appendix A.



## SUNDAY, JUNE 19

Elder's Blessing

Greetings:

- His Worship Don Atchison, Mayor of Saskatoon
- Chief Felix Thomas, Saskatoon Tribal Council

Presentations:

- First Nations and Métis Student Achievement Panel Discussion: Student Voices

Elder's Closing Prayer

## MONDAY, JUNE 20

Elder's Opening Prayer

Greetings:

- Gerry Hurton, Executive Director, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations
- Darren McKee, Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education

Presentation:

- Importance of First Nations and Métis Student Achievement – Darren McKee
- Overview: SSBA First Nations and Métis Education Action Plan 2010-2012 – Duane Favel

Presentation:

- *Strengthening Our Voice: A Guide for Engaging First Nations and Métis Peoples in Public Schools* – Karon Shmon, Gabriel Dumont Institute, and Sheila Pocha, Saskatoon Public Schools

Roundtable Discussion – Parent and Community Engagement

Cross-Canada Presentations – Alberta and Manitoba

Entertainment – John Arcand

Presentations:

- Student Achievement Programs – Loree MacPherson, Director of Funding Services, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Saskatchewan Region
- *CMEC Educators' Forum on Aboriginal Education* – Christy Bressette, Aboriginal Education Coordinator, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
- Supporting Student Success – Michael Gatin, Acting Director, First Nations, Métis and Community Education, Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education

Roundtable Discussion – Student Achievement

Cross-Canada Presentations – Ontario, Nova Scotia and Northwest Territories

Elder's Closing Prayer

## TUESDAY, JUNE 21

Keynote Presenter:

- Morning Drum Song – Winston Wuttunee

Presentation:

- Aboriginal Education in Saskatchewan – Gordon Martell, Superintendent of Learning Services, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools

Elder's Reflection and Closing Prayer

Participation in National Aboriginal Day Celebrations





## STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### STUDENT VOICES

*Student panel discussion facilitated by Colin Sutherland, Sakewew High School*

As part of the way to eliminate the achievement gap with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students it is important to consider the voices of students within the education system.

We wanted to hear from Aboriginal students and a respected educator regarding their perceptions of student engagement and success as they discussed the importance of education, parent and community support. Through this panel discussion two key questions were considered:

- What did you do to achieve academic success?
- What helped keep you engaged in school?

A number of significant points were raised during this student panel discussion. The first was having a support system in place, which includes parents, community members, and schools environments. The second was having role models and teachers with high expectations. The third was having access to programs outside of the school to connect them to peers and keep them engaged.

The students spoke about dedicated parents and community members who pushed them to attend school and complete their schoolwork. They responded to welcoming school environments that had a priority on Aboriginal programming as well as motivational programs built into the structure of the school to reward academic efforts and graduation.

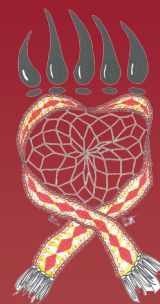
The use of technology and hands on learning was also mentioned as a way to engage and maintain Aboriginal student interest. Having teachers who want to see success, who care about student progress and well-being, and who take the time to build connections and relationships with their students was a recurring theme in the panel. Within this, access to role models as a source of motivation is important. High expectations and having the opportunity for mentorship and inspiration are essential to success. They spoke of teachers who pushed for more than achieving a high school diploma and assisted them in finding and applying for scholarships and post-secondary programs.

Becoming involved in extra-curricular activities can also help maintain engagement within school. Furthermore, students spoke fondly of the opportunity to meet other students with big dreams for the future through programs beyond school.



*Facilitator Colin Sutherland (right) led an inspiring student panel discussion that focused parent, community and school supports.*

## STRENGTHENING OUR VOICE: A GUIDE FOR ENGAGING FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS PEOPLES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS



*Presented by authors Karon Shmon, Gabriel Dumont Institute, and Sheila Pocha, Saskatoon Public Schools*

At the National Gathering, a new resource commissioned by the SSBA was presented entitled *Strengthening Our Voice: A Guide for Engaging First Nations and Métis Peoples in Public Schools (Strengthening Our Voice)*.

This resource outlines ways to strengthen engagement of First Nations and Métis parents and communities in support of their children's education, their school, and their board of education. Research, as discussed with this document, points out some seemingly simple strategies to increase engagement:

- Create a welcoming environment;
- Strive for a shared goal of achieving student success and well-being (interact without judging);
- Seek to continuously adapt and improve through reflection and assessment;
- Create an authentic relationship with parents; and,
- Acknowledge assets and build from strengths (build capacity).

Interact without judging involves identifying our biases and to know the history of it and how it was formed; to be able to suspend it is the challenge. It should be the duty of school personnel to grow professionally in this area. Knowledge of other worldviews is essential to being inclusive.

One challenge that arises in striving for authentic engagement is to keep the Saskatchewan context in focus as attempts are made to follow the researchers' suggestions. There can be no one solution fits all approach as factors that prevent Aboriginal families from participating need to be given distinct consideration. We need to be aware of patronization when including parents within school events, and this needs to be taken seriously; participation and relationship building needs to be meaningful and not just cultural "window dressing."

The document includes information about *A Time for Significant Leadership*, *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement*, the *National Standards for Family-School Partnerships* and *The Circle of Courage*. Each of these considers how to strengthen the school and parent relationship, and there is overlap between them. Two factors that are the most successful in engaging First Nations and Métis parents are authentic communication and authentic relationship building.

This document was included in the registration package given to all participants who attended the gathering, and is available online at the SSBA's website ([www.saskschoolboards.ca](http://www.saskschoolboards.ca)).



## WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID

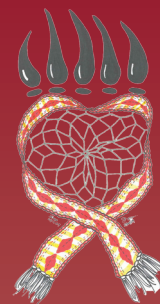
Through the successes shared by participants a couple of key themes emerged such as the necessity of establishing welcoming environments, effective language and cultural programming, and inviting parental involvement. Relationship building, partnerships and offering ongoing encouragement are central in this work.

Trust and relationship building are important in order to successfully engage parents and community members, so ways to make the school environment more welcoming are significant. Strategies which can assist in creating welcoming environments for parents include hosting kokum and mushom nights, having cultural references and visuals in the entrances to schools, offering parent nights where parents can share their expertise and learn from others. To strengthen the parent/teacher relationship and to increase participation in events such as parent/teacher interviews it was highlighted that home visits by teachers can be helpful if done appropriately. The Latch Key program after hours with parents and a breakfast program with parents were also discussed.

Effective language and cultural programming include making the curriculum content and school programs more relevant, utilizing literacy carnivals, hosting pow wows to encourage involvement from families in school events, feasts and cultural camps, supporting the presence of Elders in the schools and bridging the gap between Elders and youth. In language programming the use of technology such as iPod's can strengthen learning as well as inviting the expertise and knowledge skills of parents. Incorporating the concept of a Healing Year can also assist in removing negative feelings for teachers, parents, and students.







To have designated members in School Community Councils can ensure a variety of voices at the table, and works well when members have a common and clear understanding of their roles. The parent voice and participation plays an important role in this area and needs to be encouraged. Other successes shared include having role models in the schools, having a designated staff position for addressing First Nations, Métis and Inuit educational matters and meaningful professional development for teachers.

Some suggestions for the work that needs to be done to move towards the ideal state of engagement include increased focus on building and strengthening relationships, and better pre-service teacher preparation and professional development for existing teachers.

In the area of building relationships, discussions revolved around the ongoing need for Elders to be a part of school activities as well as considering other outreach strategies, and inviting more traditional skills/knowledge to engage parents. However, it is important to note that inviting parental involvement needs to be meaningful and move beyond cultural symbols and celebrations. Consideration was also given to opening the doors of the school for community use after hours, as well as building a better relationship between First Nations and Métis people through working more closely together and recognizing shared concerns.

One of the main areas of concern was the need for a more representative workforce in schools and reducing common myths and misconceptions about Aboriginal people. This includes more cultural orientations for new teachers such as participation in culture camps and increasing knowledge in teacher education programs of the challenges facing Aboriginal students. One way to raise awareness of these issues can be through anti-racist education in teacher education programs and through professional development activities in schools as this will assist in addressing more subtle racism.

School Community Councils need to have a clearer understanding of their role, and need to have improved communication with school boards. Increased use of school/community liaison workers can work to connect with parents. A reoccurring theme was present in all these discussions; that more genuine listening and reciprocal trust is essential to build effective relationships and increase engagement with parents and community members.



## STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

### SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

*Presented by Michael Gatin,  
Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education*

An aspect of the work that is being done at the Ministry of Saskatchewan is helping to indigenize our practice. By indigenizing our practice it means that when we talk about decolonizing education, we consider what we are replacing it with. What does decolonizing mean? It means we begin to indigenize our practice and begin to honour a different worldview, and entertain that there are many worldviews that make up this world we live in.

The four goals as based on the document called *Inspiring Success: Building Towards Student Achievement* are:

- Equitable outcomes for First Nations and Métis learners;
- All learners to have knowledge and appreciation of the unique contributions of First Nations and Métis peoples to Saskatchewan;
- Data collection and reporting on measures outlined in the Ministry's First Nations and Métis Education Policy Framework that demonstrate accountability towards improved educational outcomes; and,
- Shared management of the provincial education system by promoting and sustaining partnerships with First Nations and Métis peoples at the provincial and local levels.

This last goal was the focus of the presentation as it is the least understood and presents the largest challenge that we currently face in meeting our goals of eliminating the achievement gap.

Shared management is about power at its source. Are we willing to share that power or do we allow one to take the best for themselves without sharing with others? Shared management involves working together to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in a shared space, and eliminating the achievement gap is an obligation that should be shared by all. Through the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed by the provincial government, the federal government and the Saskatoon Tribal Council an "Education Bundle" was created, in part as a way to make the process of relationship building more real and meaningful to all involved.



*With the help of entertainer Winston Wuttunee (right), Michael Gatin presented the Education Bundle at the National Aboriginal Trustees Gathering.*



As there are many teachings associated with the objects in the Education Bundle, only some aspects of the bundle were shared with participants as an example of what it means when we are indigenizing our practice, and how to create an ethical space that allows for the exploration of different worldviews within one society. Participants were asked to consider their own ideas of how to make relationships real, and to think about the nexus that connects us; to think about what it is that we can be doing together while still honouring our distinct and unique ways.



*The Education Bundle.*



## WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID

Student achievement is improved when parents are deeply involved; through caring and nurturing relationships with teachers; when education is attentive and responsive to the voices of the students; and, when teachers hold high expectations of their students and communicate this message often.

The structure of the school system was listed as a way to increase attendance, engagement, and ultimately student success. Several programs mentioned included Storefront, alternative education, and the Block system or quad system. Other useful programs focus on meeting the nutritional needs of students, such as “Breakfast For Learning” or having a lunch program in place.

The teaching methods used within the school and curricular choices can both assist in improving achievement. There was an appreciation and noted interest from many participants about the mandatory treaty education in Saskatchewan and the TliCho Trades and Technology Certificate Program: Northwest Territory Mining as a way to increase student achievement. The inclusion of Traditional teachings, ceremonies and their meanings, the rediscovery of sacred places, strong language programming, and continuing to have Elders involved in schools can also increase a sense of belonging and identity, which can assist in strengthening academic achievement. Reward systems that reflect the needs and desires of students, increased hands on learning opportunities, and using technology in the classroom were also cited by many participants.

Celebrating Aboriginal student success and having the presence of positive role models within schools can also maintain and encourage a strength based approach that focuses on positives. Teachers with high expectations, who care about student success and work to build connections with students, have a monumental impact on the educational experiences of many students, which echoes what the students spoke about during the student panel discussion.

Some suggestions for work that needs to occur to move to the ideal state of student achievement include spreading the efforts undertaken in Saskatchewan with mandatory treaty education and the mandatory language programming in Manitoba. More inclusion of Traditional teachings is also needed as this can help







in building self-esteem, positive self images, and belonging. Other ideas included continuing to document Elders stories, experiences, and teachings so that this does not become lost for future generations. More Aboriginal role models, a more representative workforce, more culture camps for teachers, and teachers who care, understand, and who can relate to students is essential. In this area, more effective teacher education programs are required and the need to address systemic racism in the school system.

Continuing to develop effective partnerships, having more funding support to sustain and expand successful programs and initiatives, and working on developing better data collection and analysis regarding target goals can also be beneficial. Participants spoke passionately about the need to be part of more sharing opportunities like this National Gathering provided to network and learn from each other.

In considering what student achievement means, many spoke about considering different ways of thinking about school assessments and success. To recognize diverse learning models and differences, we should begin to consider a more holistic approach to success; how we can measure and celebrate all facets of growth in students beyond the more conventional or Western way of perceiving academic success. As one table reiterated ideas discussed throughout the conference, we need to remember the 4 R's in this work to eliminate the achievement gap: **recognition** of differences, **respect** each other, **responsibility** by all and **real** partnerships.



## PROVINCIAL PERSPECTIVES

### SASKATCHEWAN PERSPECTIVE



***Importance of First Nations and Métis Student Achievement*** presented by Darren McKee, Assistant Deputy Minister of Education, Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education

The importance of First Nations and Métis education and student achievement in the province of Saskatchewan is based on a context of relationships. We need to understand the past in order to move forward in the future and it is only through relationships that success can be actualized. One of the most important aspects about the theme *Powered By Engagement, Creating Success* is considering success and how it is defined. Posing the question, what is the foundation of education? Participants were asked to consider the role of leadership in accomplishing extraordinary change, and how relationships are central in making this happen.

There are many different understandings of what success means. Therefore, the focus should not be on defining success but rather being able to identify when you experience success; how will you know when you get there? It is about understanding the journey and the process. It is difficult to lead, and there are many challenges that arise.

In order to help facilitate improved community engagement several factors are essential, and some of the steps to success are; patient and deliberate building of allies, engage others with current experience, understand the hopes and dreams and the tension, enable leadership development for both you and the parents. These are foundational and a necessary part of the success that is needed.

Eliminating the achievement gap is a systemic issue as Aboriginal students fall significantly lower on all assessment tests across the subject areas. In Saskatchewan, an understanding has evolved that the government alone cannot hold complete responsibility for moving forward and eliminating the gap. Building relationships and partnerships are necessary and there needs to be relevance and a contextual understanding of the issues; only through working together can success be achieved. Within this, it is important to note that there are many times when Aboriginal leadership is an absolute necessity, and we need to be working together, in partnership, with non-Aboriginal people. Strategic alliances need to have relevance in their goals and plans and there needs to be community engagement to make this work.

Significant Leadership is the need to get extraordinary things done. Participants were challenged to consider the role they play in their organizations to support First Nations and Métis achievement and how to better align and coordinate efforts. It is necessary that leaders are provided with an opportunity to reflect on the work that has been going on, and to consider how it is working. Recognizing that there are difficulties that arise in leadership positions and with the uniqueness of different contexts and different communities, the question was posed: How are you going to make an extraordinary change in the field of education, for First Nations and Métis students, for parents, and for our communities?



***Overview of the SSBA First Nations and Métis Education Action Plan 2010-2012 presented by Duane Favel, Aboriginal Constituency Representative, SSBA Provincial Executive***

The Aboriginal Council and the Saskatchewan School Boards Association has set eliminating the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students as a priority. To accomplish this goal they have developed four strategic priorities:

- To ensure that Saskatchewan school boards are supported in establishing a representative workforce;
- To ensure that Saskatchewan school boards are succeeding in eliminating the achievement gap for children of Aboriginal ancestry;
- To ensure that Saskatchewan school boards are establishing effective practices for engaging First Nations and Métis peoples in the publicly funded education system; and,
- To ensure that the Aboriginal Council is advancing work within the Saskatchewan School Boards Association to support engagement of First Nations and Métis peoples and to strengthen student achievement.

***Aboriginal Education in Saskatchewan presented by Gordon Martell, Superintendent of Learning Services, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools***

Hope for change can be found within political solutions through voice and representation. The impediment to our success is not about us but rather came to us through colonization and policies meant to limit our numbers and success. When we are promoting success for our Aboriginal students there are two areas that need to be considered and that are correlated: educational success and liberation. As we teach, we have to liberate and make sure there is voice and that we are changing the narrative in our communities to one of success rather than limitations.

Reform within education moves from individual action to collective action. There needs to be a synergy and a connection with others, as a unified whole, in order to be truly effective in creating fundamental change. Knowing and understanding the role you hold in this work is important. Now there is a duty to consult with Indigenous peoples, so our roles then become even more significant. There are two parts in defining what our rights are; 1) Honour of the Crown – a duty to consult with Indigenous peoples, and; 2) Capacity of community – the need to answer back from within our communities. Shared responsibility is essential, and this extends to our schools.



Balanced accountability is about using evidence and data to problem solve a way forward to promote academic success. Educational outcomes with a social and democratic purpose is part of effective balanced accountability, so our youth are learning, participating, giving back to society, and can continue to define their culture and roles and speak their language. Networks and collaboration, intelligent accountability/purpose, putting autonomy back in the hands of the professionals/teachers and personalized learning through engagement are good strategies to promote success and are based on a systems leadership approach, as discussed in the book *Every School a Great School* by David Hopkins.

For a variety of reasons, Oskayak High School in Saskatoon recently underwent a dramatic change based on this systems leadership approach which has improved outcomes. The factors that helped initiate this change were; 1) Accountability. The students held the system accountable by having their voices heard. For effective educational leadership then, we needed to hold our administration and teachers accountable to make the school fit the youth rather than the other way around. 2) The students told their story through a documentary series with assistance from Doug Cuthand, which will be coming up on APTN. 3) They went to problem based learning in order to improve engagement with learning. 4) They found effective transition pathways from school to work.

We are in an era of unfettered opportunity and the design is ours. We can choose now to help design the future and we need to find ways to motivate our peers to throw off that cloak of complacency that has been handed down to us through the residential school era and all the other policies that the government has imparted upon us. We need to assume responsibility in this new era as trustees and elected representatives by asking some important questions.

These questions were posed to participants to consider in their roles as trustees: 1) Who has the priority in your division?; 2) Where are the dollars going, and it is representative?; 3) How are we making the system inclusive?; 4) How do we invite people to tell their stories, and who is listening?; 5) In terms of engagement, whose pedagogy are we using? Western? Indigenous? Is there inclusive content with Aboriginal perspectives?; 6) Are we teaching for yesterday or for tomorrow? Do Indigenous skills include liberation, voice, relational pedagogy, etc?; How are we establishing pathways for our youth?



*Presented by Ted Blondin, Chair of the TliCho Community Services Agency*

The TliCho Community Services Agency delivers education, health, and social services programs. Using the motto “Strong Like Two People”, the goal of education is to learn the southern ways while also maintaining their cultural identity in the north. To this end, cultural aspects of learning have become embedded in their five schools.

There are five schools in the TliCho community with elementary delivering Northwest Territory curriculum and secondary based on the Alberta curriculum. However, there are a number of locally developed courses available which include language and culture credits and the TliCho Trades and Technology Certificate Program: Northwest Territory Mining.

In order to increase understanding and build connections to the community, teachers are exposed to their lands to show them how the TliCho live so they can understand their language and culture, with some remarkable results. Language programming in the schools have recently made use of iPod’s with recordings that become accessible to students. As learning is a lifelong process future work involves strengthening the area of early childhood education. To increase exposure to other cultures, students raise money towards a travelling group and have visited places like New York and New Orleans to Africa.

In the area of social services, there is a move towards a more culturally based delivery approach to reduce child apprehensions into the system. Furthermore, The Community Action Research Team (CART) involves students who work with a professor from the University of Alberta to assist communities through finding areas of concern and improvement, creating surveys and ultimately building research in a solution based approach.

Some successful initiatives include scholarships that were negotiated with the diamond mines to assist students in their education. The Mine Training Society hosts courses in the trades to increase skill levels in these specialities. As well, simulators help people to learn how to use heavy machinery used in the mines. Simulators are also available in Yellowknife to learn how to drive heavy equipment underground. A trade mobile unit moves from site to site so there is access to a variety of trade classes.





Building partnerships with mine companies, the department of education, the mine training society, the college, and the TliCho government is important to get all stakeholders to invest in placing adult educators at the mine sites so that upgrading into the trades is more accessible.

The settling of land claims has opened up new opportunities to graduates as they can see that the TliCho government is hard at work and that they need educated people working for them. Any emerging government heavily depends on its economic development and control over business and partnership building is essential. Students need to be exposed to this work and see something tangible to motivate them and see the value in education.

As such, there is a focus on mentorship for the youth as they will someday be replacing the leaders in politics.





The First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit, within the Department of Education, have created a Handbook 2010/2011 of Yukon First Nations Education Resources for Public Schools. It provides introductory information about Yukon First Nations and some of the Yukon First Nations education programs, services, and resources that are available. There are a variety of curriculum resources and links available for all grade levels and these are available on their resource services website at [www.resourceservices.gov.yk.ca](http://www.resourceservices.gov.yk.ca).

The Yukon First Nations Education Advisory Committee (YFNEAC) released a document in 2008 called *Helping Students Succeed: Vision, goals, and priorities for Yukon First Nations education*.

Within the Yukon there is a required unit of study for all grade 5 students called Yukon First Nations 5 that focuses on four themes; Yukon First Nations Language; Yukon First Nations Clans; Yukon First Nations Citizenship; and Yukon First Nations Traditional Governance. They also feature the Community Heritage Adventure Outdoors and Skills program (CHAOS 9) which was highlighted in the Annotated Bibliography of this National Gathering resource package. This is an experiential program for grade 9 students in Whitehorse. It was piloted in the winter of 2011 at Porter Creek Secondary School.

In 2007/2008 the Yukon Department of Education and the Champagne & Aishihik First Nations Government, along with the St. Elias School Council in Haines Junction, initiated a partnership to develop, deliver, and evaluate a pilot project to increase and revitalize the Southern Tutchone language and culture. This project is called the Champagne & Aishihik First Nations' Southern Tutchone Bicultural Program at the St. Elias Community School. The Kindergarten project was piloted in 2009/2010, grade one in 2010/2011, and grade two will be this upcoming year in 2011/2012. It is being delivered through a team teaching approach by language and cultural specialists, and has the potential to be a relevant model for other language programs in the Yukon. This initiative strives to improve student success; increase parental involvement and increase Southern Tutchone language and cultural competencies.



Other programs offered include the Elder in the School Program (EIS), the Cultural Inclusion Program which makes funding available for First Nations activities, the Home Tutor Program, Community Orientations which assists schools with community-based orientations to provide a better understanding of Yukon First Nations culture, history, and language. There is also the Orientation for New Teachers to the Yukon which is an annual three day event. The Community Education Liaison Coordinator (CELC) and Education Support Worker (ESW) are often a teacher's first contact with the First Nations community and they provide a link between the school and the community.

In language programming there is the Yukon First Nations Language Proficiency Certificate Program (YFNLPCP) which is a partnership between Simon Fraser University, the Yukon Department of Education's First Nations Program and Partnerships Unit. It is intended for First Nations language teacher trainees and students who wish to improve their conversational and literacy skills. The government of Yukon has made First Nations language programming in schools mandatory.

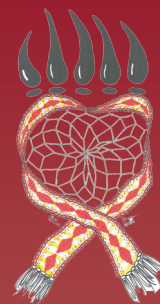
#### **BRITISH COLUMBIA PERSPECTIVE**



In order to improve school success, the Ministry of Education has an Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch. Their objectives, as taken from the website, are: "To increase Aboriginal voice in the public education system; to increase knowledge of Aboriginal language, culture, and history within the public school system; and to increase Aboriginal communities' involvement and satisfaction with the public school system."

In 2006, they released a 192 page document called *Shared Learnings: Integrating BC Aboriginal Content K-10*. This guide was created as a tool for integrating Aboriginal content in all subject areas from Kindergarten to grade 10 and includes instructional strategies to help bring the content alive in the classroom. It includes sample lesson plans which include "Stereotyping of Aboriginal People in Media", "An Aboriginal View of Science", "Circle Lesson: The Interrelatedness of Everything in the Natural World".

One of their projects is a First Nations Language Preservation Project which translates the work of author Robert Munsch into interactive Hul'q'umi'num audio books. There is also an Aboriginal educator's list serve (Abnet) which is an open discussion forum for people interested in Aboriginal education in British Columbia. Successful practices are also shared through the Aboriginal Enhancement School Network (AESN) which is a specific group within the Network of Performance Based Schools (NPBS). There are case studies on this website that feature successful practices in Aboriginal education.



*Presented by Sharilyn Anderson, Trustee for Peace Wapiti School Division, and Dianne Arcand Lavoie, Chair of Holy Family Catholic Schools*

One new initiative in Alberta is the Alberta School Board Association's task force on improved success for Aboriginal students made up of representatives of trustees across the province, Alberta Education, Alberta Teacher's Association, and the School Councils.

There is a new Board of trustees document called Ensuring First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Student Success - Focus on Leadership through Governance. This report will be approved by the Board of Directors and be circulated to all school divisions in Alberta in the fall, and will also be available on the Alberta School Board's website.

Alberta Education has inserted a new goal in the last few years within the three year education plans that all school boards have to supply. This goal is very specific to Aboriginal student success and all school boards now have to specifically report on the results of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

The First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education policy framework through Alberta Education was developed under the advice of the Native Education Policy Review Advisory Committee and it was one of the largest consultation processes on Aboriginal education that was undertaken in Canada. It is designed to be a living document with changes evolving over time and it is intended to assist policy stakeholders identify their roles in helping First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners achieve their educational goals.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the federal government, provincial government, and the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs of Alberta on February 23, 2010. It provides a framework for collaboration to support a range of education related issues, including parental and community engagement, treaty and cultural awareness, and on-going work on tuition and education service agreements. It is considered to be a nation building document. Many wonderful things are resulting from this document including a proposed knowledge centre.

The First Nations, Métis Educational Partnership Council was launched on October 13, 2009. It is a formal partnership between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit organizations and the Government of Alberta.



Alberta Education co-hosts an annual conference called Learning Together for Success, which is devoted to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education. It provides opportunity for leaders in the field to network and share successful practices and to share current research in this area.

In January 2010 the Minister dissolved the Northland School Division which had been servicing 24 Aboriginal communities in the North. Instead one official trustee was appointed and an inquiry team was formed. The report was released in January 2011 with 41 recommendations that focus on student learning and achievement, instructional and administrative leadership, budget processes, and board and administrative oversight.

#### MANITOBA PERSPECTIVE



*Presented by Carolyn Duhamel, Executive Director, Manitoba Association of School Trustees*

Within the Ministry of Education there is an Aboriginal Education Directorate and over the last number of years a couple of priorities include a student self-identification strategy and a teacher self-identification strategy. The purpose of these strategies is to be able to improve the delivery of programming and to use the data to know where and what the needs are in Aboriginal education.

In the provincial school boards association there is currently no self-identification strategies for trustees of Aboriginal ancestry. All trustees are elected at large and it is up to the general electorate, except in those school districts that have a signed agreement with First Nations communities. In this case, a designated seat or seats are held for members of that First Nation community. One of the challenges in the area of governance is that there are no accommodations for those school divisions that may have a significant number of Aboriginal students but do not have signed agreements with First Nations or Métis communities and therefore no designated seats. There needs to be consideration given to these school districts so that there can be movement towards equalized representation.

The membership of the provincial association passed a bylaw amendment this year to create an associate membership category for local First Nations education entities. Many of the First Nations communities in Manitoba do not have educational authorities or school boards as such. Through funding cuts of the 1990's a lot of communities disbanded their educational authorities or school boards so now there is only the Director of the school who reports directly to band chief and council. So this bylaw is relatively open ended so the membership is open to the local education entity, so it could be the school, the band, the director of the school. Upcoming discussions with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs will assist in sorting out how this can work effectively and build linkages. One of the concerns, and something that has been echoed in this National Gathering, is how do we balance the need for patience in relationship building with the urgency and need to make these extraordinary changes?



Other efforts are focused on requesting information from school boards about what is currently happening in their school divisions in terms of Aboriginal education, so that they can get a handle on what is currently offered. The association is also working with the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba in piloting a Grades 5 and 6 Treaty curriculum in the 2011/2012 school year.

The trend that is happening now with service agreements is that in the past these agreements with First Nations were more of a purchase of services, but now they are moving towards reciprocal partnership agreements with First Nations as equal partners in the dialogue and in the decision making.

#### ONTARIO PERSPECTIVE



*Presented by Peter Garrow, Upper Canada District School Board*

A tuition agreement is going to be signed with the Upper Canada District School Board and the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education, a seven year agreement which is the first in Canada. One of the goals for the Upper Canada District School Board is to have a 90% graduation rate for 2020, but they are hoping to achieve it by 2013 or 2014. Right now they are up to about 67%. In Ahkewsahsne last year, 72% of the cohort that started grade nine graduated grade 12 and 65% of those were already accepted into various universities so the success is clear.

They took over education starting in 1993, have a strong school board, and looked at education as something highly important that needed to be done to suit the needs of the community. In each of their three schools there is a Head Start program, a Mohawk immersion program that runs up to grade 4, and a Freedom school that is full Mohawk immersion up to grade 12. There is an alternative program within the community for previous high school drop outs to come back and get the credits they need to graduate. Language programs and technology have joined forces and Robert Munsch books and classic Disney movies are translated into Mohawk. The Early Years Committee is engaged in professional development each year as they work so closely with the young pre-kindergarten students on a full day basis, and it has been remarkably successful. For parent/teacher interviews the teachers come into the community so that the parents can meet them.

They have been able to prevent the historical loss of students to the United States, based on a belief that the Americans had a better education system, through putting in place a five year program that all their teachers had to obtain a Masters degree. In order to make this achievable, there is a teacher's incentive program that allows for a paid leave to complete the graduate program under the condition that the teacher stays for two years. Partnerships help to highlight the importance of this Masters requirement, and building effective partnerships with community business makes programs like this one possible.





Although they are mandated to follow the Ontario curriculum, they are working on challenging the curriculum to accept what their community has; lifelong learning. Another project is coordinating the Upper Canada District School Board calendar with the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education calendar so that there is raised awareness of ceremonial days.

#### **NOVA SCOTIA PERSPECTIVE**



*Presented by Andrea Paul, Elected School Board Representative for Chignecto Central Regional School Board*

There are seven boards in Nova Scotia, and a First Nations school board. Information shared is about the Chignecto Central Regional School Board, one of the largest boards in Nova Scotia.

Some of the programs offered for First Nations students include a Mi'Kmaq language pilot program at the Truro elementary school. Approximately 57 students from primary to grade five are enrolled in this program. There is also three First Nations support groups that meet quarterly and include the board's Race Relations Officer, the family of schools supervisors, and principals of schools with First Nations students.

Mi'Kmaq Heritage Month is celebrated in October and Treaty Day is celebrated in the province on October 1. All schools in the board jurisdiction assist in these celebrations through Mawio'mi (pow wow) and teaching dance and drumming. There is also a partnership with the Glooscap Heritage Centre to host an annual two day Mi'Kmaq in-service with an extraordinary agenda complete with dancers, drummers, traditional meals, and a sweat lodge ceremony. This is open to educators, students, and to the general public.

CCRSB First Nations students attended the Nova Scotia Community College Mawio'mi where they had the opportunity to dance, dress, and drum. CCRSB has also purchased an online module training program, so technology is helping to raise Aboriginal awareness for 3000 employees. Cultural sensitivity training should also be considered for coaches and volunteers.

CCRSB employs a home/school liaison worker for Hants East rural high school to help bridge the gap between the school and Indian Brook due to past racial incidents at the school.

## COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION, CANADA



*Presented by Christy Bressette, Aboriginal Education Coordinator, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.*

The Council of Ministers of Education Canada is an intergovernmental body that works together on a variety of educational initiatives in Canada. They assess the skills and competencies of Canadian students, develop and report on education indicators, sponsor research in education related statistics, administer Canada's national official languages program, consult and act on a variety of issues relating to elementary, secondary, and post secondary education. CMEC focuses on all areas of education, including Aboriginal education.

Learn Canada 2020, a policy document that was released in 2008, underscores provincial and territorial responsibility for the four pillars of learning. These are comprised of early childhood learning and development, elementary and secondary schooling, post secondary and adult learning and skills development. Learn Canada 2020 is a framework for provincial and territorial Ministers of Education that they use to enhance Canada's education system, learning opportunities and overall education outcomes. The vision is quality lifelong learning opportunities for all Canadians. A key activity area with this framework is to eliminate the achievement gap and graduation rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

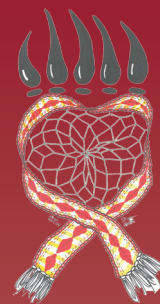
There are three action areas; 1) Best Practices - to share information in a best practices approach and leadership for this objective is provided by Nunavut. On the CMEC website under Aboriginal Education there is a database of best practices from across the country. 2) Evidence based decision making – led by Manitoba, seeks to strengthen the capacity for evidence based decision making in part by establishing an approach to encourage Aboriginal students to self-identify, to coordinate common data and indicator definitions, and initiating parallel data collection procedures; 3) Teacher Education – co-led by Saskatchewan and the Yukon, is to strengthen and share measures in teacher education to help new teachers understand the needs and the challenges facing Aboriginal students, and to establish mechanisms to better recruit and train Aboriginal teachers.

CMEC hosted a summit on Aboriginal Education in 2009 in Saskatoon which focused on ways to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students. Eight themes that need to be given priority emerged from that meeting; 1) Strengthening Aboriginal language and culture; 2) Enhancing equity in funding; 3) Increasing access, retention, and graduation (post secondary and adult learning); 4) Sharing responsibility and accountability; 5) Planning for transitions: seamless systems for learners; 6) Reporting and benchmarking success: work on data; 7) Providing programs and services, and; 8) Engaging all partners in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education.



CMEC is hosting a forum on December 1-3, 2011 in Winnipeg called ‘Sharing Evidences and Experiences in Aboriginal Early Childhood Education and K-12’ which will be based on the above eight themes that emerged from the summit. The goal is to bring together a whole range of stakeholders to talk about what works for Aboriginal learners in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and from K-12 using a case study format. There is a hope that people will also want to focus on some subthemes which include how to improve academic outcomes, how to increase community wellness, how to increase student wellbeing, self-confidence, identity, values, pride, personal development or competence, how to make positive links to employment for students, and how to increase participation in the education system.





***Student Achievement Programs*** presented by Loree MacPherson, Director of Funding Services, Saskatchewan Region

In December 2010 the Joint National Panel on Education was announced with the Assembly of First Nations. Issues of engagement and success are two of the key factors within this panel. The focus is to improve outcomes for First Nations students by addressing the challenges they face, and to ensure they have access to quality education. This panel is leading a national engagement process that consults with various groups such as First Nations leaders, parents, and teachers with the goal of developing options to improve governance frameworks, improve student outcomes, and to clarify accountability for First Nations elementary and secondary education. The panel will report to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) and to the National Chief by the end of 2011.

In October 2010 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with AANDC, the Saskatoon Tribal Council, and with the province. The goal was to enhance the capacity of both the First Nations schools in the Tribal Council region and the neighbouring school divisions to ensure the needs of First Nations students are met.

Educational programming includes the First Nations Student Success Program. The goal of this program is to improve levels of achievement for First Nations students by focusing on literacy and numeracy development and student retention. Through the Education Partnerships Program the department is working with First Nations, provinces, and key stakeholders towards improving success for First Nations elementary and secondary students through supporting the establishment and advancement of formal partnerships arrangements. New Paths for Education is another program and the focus is on strengthening First Nations education and the four areas are 1) Strengthening First Nations education management and governance capacity through local capacity and educational institutional development 2) Improving the effectiveness of classroom instruction through curricular and language development, school activities, and enhancement of technological knowledge in the school 3) Supporting community and parental involvement in the education of children and 4) School to work transition.



The Active Measures Program in Saskatchewan, with its focus on the labour market, was also included as it has connections to education. It was a Memorandum of Understanding signed by Canada, the government of Saskatchewan, and five tribal councils representing more than half of Saskatchewan's 70 First Nations. These tribal councils are File Hills Qu'Appelle, Saskatoon, Agency Chiefs, Meadow Lake, and Yorkton. There are five ways Active Measures will help people get meaningful employment and transition off social assistance 1) Providing greater access to career planning and skills development; 2) Ensuring access to literacy, adult education and essential skills in the workplace training; 3) Transitional supports to access short term training opportunities (eg. training allowances); 4) Providing transitional supports for individuals to secure and sustain employment (eg. transportation, child care); and 5) Working with employers and industry to align skills training with the demands of the labour market and economy.

# APPENDIX A

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

### ALBERTA



- Sharilyn Anderson

### MANITOBA



- Florence Beaudry
- Carole Black
- Bryan Cloud
- Carolyn Duhamel

### NORTHWEST TERRITORIES



- Ted Blondin
- Joseph Dryneck

### NOVA SCOTIA



- Andrea Paul

### ONTARIO



- Christy Bressette
- Ruth Ann Furgala

### SASKATCHEWAN



- Larry Ahenakew
- Yvette Arcand
- Barry Bashutski
- Nathan Bitternose
- Lorna Black
- Vicky Bonnell
- Andrew Bouvier
- Mike Bouvier
- Pat Campbell
- Joanne Cunningham
- Ernie Cychmistruk
- Joe Daigneault
- Lionel Diederichs
- Jimmy Durocher
- Peter Durocher
- Roy Erasmus
- Hermiline Fagnan
- Duane Favel
- Barb Flett
- Carol Flynn

- Dianne Arcand-Lavoie

- Marie Gregory
- Newell Johnston
- Vince Nowlin
- Willard Schur

- Joseph MacKenzie
- Ted Nitsiza

- Peter Garrow
- Marion Macdonald

- Michael Gatin
- Duane Hawk
- Ray Horney
- Gerry Hurton
- Harold Laich
- Raymond Laliberte
- Claire LaRoque
- Jamie Lerat
- Loree MacPherson
- Darren McKee
- Doug Murray
- Jessica Piche
- Albert Pinacie
- Clifford Ray
- Scott Sibbald
- Lois Smandych
- Robert St. Pierre
- Bryan Wilson
- Jason Young



## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY



*Research for this bibliography was conducted by Cheryl Hoftyzer, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan.*

What is provided here are practical guidelines and strategies that can be locally modified and put to use in school divisions across the country. The hope is that this information will be shared among your school divisions as you work towards improving Aboriginal education in your province. Although in the past, there has been a focus on deficit thinking when it comes to understanding the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, it is our intention to share research and promising practices that utilize a strength based approach.

Research practices include studies that have been conducted that identify emerging themes in strengthening Aboriginal student achievement as well as key issues and recommendations that need to be considered. They include pilot projects within different school boards across the country, case studies of successful schools, culturally responsive school systems, and information about Aboriginal cultures and perspectives.

Successful practices include schools and school programs that excel in Aboriginal education, through enriching the curriculum by incorporating Aboriginal perspectives, cultures and languages. Programs that foster parental and community engagement in education, as well as professional development activities are also presented.

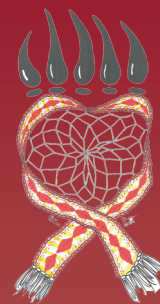
### RESEARCH PRACTICES

*Canadian Council on Learning*

<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/ccl/>

The Canadian Council on Learning offers a variety of useful resources to support divisions and schools in strengthening achievement for Aboriginal students. A unique feature of this website is the 3 interactive online holistic lifelong learning models. These online portals help explain the models and how they can be used and applied to measure outcomes in successful Aboriginal education practices. These models contain an in-depth understanding of Aboriginal people's perspective on learning and how to measure success and are the first comprehensive framework in Canada that is applied to education.

It provides a method for redefining how success is measured in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learning and developing tools to more accurately measure learning progress. Each part includes a set of indicators that can be used to develop a more complete assessment of Aboriginal learning. By applying these models to your district, you can develop a more comprehensive picture of strengths and weaknesses in regards to Aboriginal education. The Canadian Council on Learning website also contains a variety of additional information concerning Aboriginal Education and is an extremely valuable resource to consult as you establish programming in your school divisions.



Canadian Council on Learning (2009) *State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success*.

[http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/StateAboriginalLearning/SAL-FINALReport\\_EN.PDF](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/StateAboriginalLearning/SAL-FINALReport_EN.PDF)

This report is grounded in an Aboriginal vision of learning and presents a balanced and holistic state of Aboriginal learning in Canada. The focus on strengths gives a unique approach that can be used in future improvements and the value in this report lies in it using the holistic learning models to assess the state of Aboriginal learning in Canada. It has allowed for a more comprehensive and complete picture and showcases multiple strengths. The data included contains new information on how Aboriginal people learn which come from new data sources such as Elders, cultural activities, use of traditional skills, etc. If your interests lie in wanting or needing more background information of the state of Aboriginal learning before beginning the process of designing programs within your division then this report is an essential place to start.

*Council of Ministers of Education, Canada*

<http://www.cmec.ca>

- CMEC Summit on Aboriginal Education. Strengthening Aboriginal Success: Moving Towards Learn Canada 2020, Summary Report 2010. This summary report highlights the key findings at the education summit that was held on February 24-25, 2009 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This was a historic first ever national dialogue that focused on eliminating the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
- Aboriginal Education Action Plan – Best Practices

As part of this plan, the CMEC gathered a list of best practices supporting Aboriginal Education based on a set of criteria that is explained on the website. These practices were submitted in 2007, approved in 2008, and include every province and territory. In making these decisions, each jurisdiction collaborated with local Aboriginal groups and organizations. It is an extensive list of 109 best practices. Some updating may be required, but all the contact information for each practice is included.



Dion, Susan D.; Johnston, Krista; Rice, Carla, M (2010). *Decolonizing Our Schools Aboriginal Education in the Toronto District School Board*.

[http://www.tdsb.on.ca/\\_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=185&menuid=781&pageid=603](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=185&menuid=781&pageid=603)

This report synthesizes the data taken from examining the urban Aboriginal pilot project and describes the work of this project. The research findings are based on the Talking Stick Project: Aboriginal Education in the TDSB Gathering Stories of Teaching and Learning. It shares the successes and challenges this pilot project faced. Some of the specific recommendations include supporting Aboriginal student well-being (shifting focus from 'student success'), Decolonizing and Indigenizing: Teacher roles and responsibilities, Decolonizing and Indigenizing: School Responsibilities (identify successes and ongoing challenges to transforming school environments), Decolonizing and Indigenizing: School Board Roles and Responsibilities (identify roles and responsibilities in supporting and advancing Aboriginal Education).

Haig-Brown Research and Consulting (2010). *Opening Many Doors: A Final Report on Creating Conditions for Success of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students in the Simcoe County District School Board*.

<http://scdsb.on.ca/programs-services/aboriginal-education/urban/>

This report offers an evaluation of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project (UAEPP) in Ontario which began in March 2008 and concluded in June 2010. The vision, which was overall very successful, was to enhance Aboriginal student success and to develop an appreciation in all students for Aboriginal perspectives, cultures, and traditions. The goal of this pilot project was to develop a model of best practices that could be used by other school boards and concludes with a series of recommendations for those wanting to create other such models and employ similar strategies. The report includes an outline of the components of the project and investigates the effectiveness of each.



Kovacs, Patricia (2009). *Synthesis Report of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre's Literature Reviews: Responsive Educational Systems*. 978-1-926612-33-1. University of Saskatchewan, Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, Saskatoon, SK and First Nations and Adult Higher Education Consortium, Calgary, AB. Retrieved May 1st, 2011 from <http://aerc.usask.ca>

[http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/ablkc/ResponsiveEduSys\\_en.pdf](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/ablkc/ResponsiveEduSys_en.pdf)

This report is part of a much larger project undertaken by the Canadian Council on Learning and the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre. It is one of three commissioned synthesis reports. The other two are called *Naturalizing Aboriginal Knowledge* and *Reclaiming the Learning Spirit*.

Through a three year period, 2006-2009, The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre created six animation bundles: *Learning from Place*, *Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, *Aboriginal Languages and Learning*, *Diverse Educational Systems and Learning*, *Pedagogy of Professionals and Practitioners*, *Information Technology and Learning*. Each of these bundles involves literature reviews and bases its focus on the holistic learning models as found on the Canadian Council on Learning website.

This synthesis report focuses on responsive learning systems and includes what some responsive educational systems have contributed to Aboriginal learning. It provides recommendations for actions to effect change. It presents key emerging principles and values, promising practices, models and programs within the educational systems across the country, which support Aboriginal lifelong learning.

*LE,NONET* – University of Victoria

<http://web.uvic.ca/lenonet/index.html>

Supporting Aboriginal Student Success: Report of the *LE,NONET* Research Project, 2010. This was a four year project piloted between 2005 and 2009 with a variety of student focused programs and one staff and faculty training program (SFACT). Chapter 7 of the report reviews the SFACT program and includes its areas of strengths and weaknesses and provides recommendations for future programming. Although the focus of this project is to improve Aboriginal learning in post secondary education, the staff and faculty training program could be adapted towards professional development for K-12 teachers. For a full and detailed look at the SFACT curriculum refer to: <http://web.uvic.ca/lenonet/sfact/sfact-about.html>





### *Promising Practices in Aboriginal Education*

<http://www.maei-ppw.ca>

This website is sponsored by the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative. It contains a wide variety of strategies that have been found to be successful in improving educational success of Aboriginal students. Resources include exemplary classroom practices, community engagement, multi-media, professional development, relevant research, and promising initiatives. The submissions are brought to an advisory group that was established to assist in monitoring these initiatives. The purpose is to provide a place to exchange promising practices, both in the classroom and in research. The site is intended to be a good resource to learn from, and also to share learning experiences in Aboriginal education.

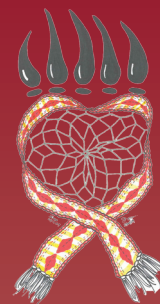
Robb, Marnie (2005). *Our Words, Our Ways: Teaching First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Learners*. Alberta Education.

<http://education.alberta.ca/media/307199/words.pdf>

This lengthy resource offers information about Aboriginal cultures and perspectives, practical ideas, and sample strategies that will help teachers meet the needs and recognize the gifts of Aboriginal students. The contributors include Aboriginal elders, teachers, psychologists as well as other members of Alberta's Aboriginal communities. It is organized into seven chapters with each chapter containing information, sample strategies, shared wisdom from Aboriginal scholars and Elders as well as related stories by Aboriginal teachers and liaisons.

The seven chapters include: Worldviews and Aboriginal cultures: Where hearts are rooted; Aboriginal Students: Who are they? How do they learn?; The Classroom: A community of learners; School, Family, and Community: Sharing the responsibility; Learning strategies for Aboriginal students: Opportunities to make learning meaningful; Assessment: Authentic reflections of important learnings; Teaching Aboriginal students with Learning Disabilities: Recognizing gifts and strengths.





Saskatchewan Learning (2005). *Building Partnerships: Educational Services Agreements Resource Guide*.

<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/building-partnerships-esarg>

This guide provides information on strengthening partnerships between First Nations, Aboriginal organizations, education stakeholders and government. The information and ideas in the guide can be used as an information resource during board of education and First Nations discussions as they negotiate services agreements. The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee recommends establishing effective and supportive partnerships in order to enhance educational experiences of all Saskatchewan students (Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee Action Plan 2000-2005, September 2000).

Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2008). *Developing a Culturally Responsive School Division*.

<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/FNM-Publications>

The goal of this report is to become a guide to follow in the aim to become a more culturally responsive school division. It is based on the following two questions: What is cultural responsiveness? What are the processes that will help move Saskatoon Public Schools to become more culturally responsive school division? This document is a valuable resource to refer to when considering how to make your school divisions more culturally responsive as a way to improve Aboriginal student success.

Part A considers the background and intent of the research. Part B highlights the key understandings gained from international, provincial, and local site visits. Part C summarizes what the community advisory committee identifies as key actions that will provide direction in becoming more culturally responsive. Part D includes two local school reports and Part E summarizes the key understandings learned in the project.



Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2009). *Inspiring Success: Building Towards Student Achievement*.

<http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/FNM-Publications>

This First Nation and Métis Education policy framework sets out four major goals, along with indicators and strategies to assess progress, that seeks to promote significant student achievement for all learners in Saskatchewan. Transformational change is the focus, with First Nations and Métis ways of knowing given a meaningful place in the education system for the benefit of all students.

These goals include:

- Equitable outcomes for First Nations and Métis learners;
- All learners to have knowledge and appreciation of the unique contributions of First Nations and Métis peoples to Saskatchewan;
- Data collection and reporting on measures outlined in the Ministry's First Nations and Métis Education Policy Framework that demonstrate accountability towards improved educational outcomes; and,
- Shared management of the provincial education system by promoting and sustaining partnerships with First Nations and Métis peoples at the provincial and local level.

Saskatchewan School Boards Association Research Report (2008). *An Advisory for School Boards: First Nations and Métis Education*. Saskatchewan School Boards Association, Module 11.

<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/old/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchReports/IndianAndMetisEducation/IndianAndMetisEducation.htm>

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association offers numerous useful resources to support boards of education in strengthening achievement for First Nations and Métis students. Module 11 is a comprehensive resource providing an analytic summary of key ideas including the importance of building relationships, recommendations for school boards, an overview of the cultural and historic world view, and strategies for schools to strengthen student achievement. This resource suggests change is necessary to include an Aboriginal world view and restructure how schooling is organized.



*Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education*

<http://www.sae.ca>

- Bell, D (2004). *Sharing Our Success: Ten Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling*.

This 332 page report highlights ten schools in Western and Northern Canada that reveal success factors and experiences that make these schools exemplary in Aboriginal education. The studies were conducted between June 2003 and April 2004. Included is important contextual information as well as detailed descriptions of the school programs. It ends with a discussion of interrelated factors that the schools share in common, critical issues, and recommendations for the future.

- Fulford, G (2007). *Sharing Our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling*.

This work was a follow up to the 2004 study mentioned above and focuses on ten schools in the North, Central, and Eastern Canada. This second study, conducted in 2006, resulted due to the overwhelming demand for successful practices and was completed in 2007. Both reports are available at the SAE website.

- Fulford, G (2007). *Sharing Our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band Operated Schools*.

This is a companion report to Fulford (2007) which focuses specifically on band operated schools.



Toulouse, Dr. Pamela Rose (2006). *Supporting Aboriginal Student Success: Self-Esteem and Identity, A Living Teachings Approach*.

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/research/toulouse.pdf>

This article examines the connection between Aboriginal student success and self-esteem (identity). The structure of this paper follows the seven good life teachings of the Ojibwe people. Each teaching has a companion principle/teaching which is the implication for educational practice and each section is supported with research and offers strategies for student success. The question of ‘What Works?’ is central to this discussion. There is particular emphasis on practical meanings for the classroom. Key discussion questions that frame the article are:

- What strategies currently work for Aboriginal students in schools? And, why is this so important to create meaningful change?
- What are the day to day implications for educators? And, how can we ensure Aboriginal student needs are met?
- What don’t we know about Aboriginal student success? And, how can future research directions reflect those unknown variables?

## SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES



### *Aboriginal Employment Development Program Myths and Misconceptions Training*

<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/aedp/MythsandMisconceptionsFactSheet.pdf>

This program is geared towards professional development for staff and investigates several different areas in Aboriginal education. As indicated in the title, the goal is to dispel myth and common misconceptions regarding Aboriginal people. In addition, there is a focus on sensitizing employees to Federal legislation, land rights, traditions and culture of the Métis people. The training is designed for about 30-40 people and takes about 3 to 5 hours to complete.

*Aboriginal Hub, Abbotsford, British Columbia*

<http://www.sd34.bc.ca/cms/One.aspx?portalId=944111&pageId=4020908>

This initiative was in response to much needed accessibility and services that would be better aligned for families so that they could have access to many services in one building. It is a joint effort of the Abbotsford Early Childhood Community Partners Table, the Ministry for Children and Family Development, the Ministry of Education, the Fraser Valley Child Development Centre, and the Fraser Valley Regional Library and the United Way. The grand opening was held on May 1, 2009. It contains a wide variety of resources and supports available to schools, classrooms, and students.

Archibald, Jo-Ann (2011). *Reporting on the Vancouver School District*, January 2011 Aboriginal Education Forums

[http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/11April18\\_sp\\_op\\_commIII\\_item1.pdf](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/11April18_sp_op_commIII_item1.pdf)

This report highlights the community consultation work that was undertaken with students, parents, community members, and school staff stakeholders in order to examine the implications of a proposed mini school with an Aboriginal lens or other model for students in the Vancouver School District. Although it looks specifically at this district, the information contained in this report could assist other provincial and school districts that may be considering the establishment of an Aboriginal school as it outlines the procedures taken to gather the data, and some key themes that emerged from the data collection. It provides clear directions of how to move ahead with this proposed school.



*Children of the Earth School, Manitoba.*

<http://www.wsd1.org/cote/welcome.html>

In 2005 this school was ranked in MacLean's magazine top ten high schools. This unique high school strives to incorporate Aboriginal values and perspectives into their everyday lives. The structure of the education provided is holistic, integrating the physical, academic, social, and spiritual well being of all students. There are mandatory Cree and Ojibwe language classes as part of their commitment to the preservation of these languages. The pedagogy is culturally-based and flexible and there is a focus on enriching the Manitoba curriculum to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives. Emphasis is placed on culture, with Aboriginal Traditional Advisors responsible for traditional teachings and ceremonies. Some of the school programs include a career advisor, counselling services, Kamahmobeyot Ikwezanzsuk (Girls Sitting Together), and heritage languages. For a complete description of these programs and other information about the school please visit their website.

*First Nations Parent Club, British Columbia.*

<http://fnsa.ca/parentsclub/index.html>

This club was created to acknowledge and support the role of parents in ensuring educational success for their children, and is sponsored by the First Nations Schools Association. With the support of FNSA, the club provides support materials, such as newsletters, incentive gifts, and parenting materials. There are approximately 118 parent clubs in BC involving 2700 members. Some of their initiatives have included a parents calendar which includes ideas for family educational activities. This is a great promising practice that encourages the active participation of parents in their children's education.

*(FNMI) Language and Culture Twelve-Year (Kindergarten to Grade 12) Template (2010). Alberta Education.*

<http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program/fnmi.aspx>

This is a language and culture template intended to assist school authorities in the development of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit language and culture twelve year course outlines. Keeping in mind the needs and requirements associated with the focus language and culture in the community, this template should be used and adapted as necessary so that a locally developed course is relevant to local communities. As knowledge about language and culture opens up learning into a worldview of spiritual and natural dimensions, there is enormous value to both FNMI and non-FNMI students.





*Forests and Oceans for the Future*, British Columbia.

<http://www.ecoknow.ca/activities.html>

This is a social studies and science curriculum that is part of a project called *Forests and Oceans for the Future* that is centered within the Tsimshian territory of British Columbia. It is curriculum designed for British Columbia's K-12 system emphasizing the immense value of traditional ecological knowledge. There are seven unit plans that incorporate Indigenous and Western scientific knowledge to meet the ecological needs of the local community. It is geared to make learning relevant and 'hands on'. This curriculum is focused towards more acceptance of alternative ways of knowing which is often absent from a more multi-cultural approach to education. It is an excellent model of how to fuse Indigenous and Western ways of knowing in social studies and science.

*Four Directions Teachings* (2006-2007).

<http://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com/>

This is an incredibly visually stunning audio-narrated website. It is based on interactive *Four Directions Teaching* which features Blackfoot, Cree, Ojibwe, Mohawk, and M'ikmaq. There are teachings and teacher resources for each and the teacher resources include downloadable and printable free curriculum lesson plans and packages organized at the junior, intermediate, and senior level. As well, there are links that provide an extensive list of additional teacher resources. The audio recorded teachings are accompanied with beautifully animated visuals.

The traditional teachers who share a teaching were approached through a National Advisory Committee of Indigenous people concerned with the protection and promotion of Indigenous knowledge. This committee was established solely for the purposes of this website to ensure a community based approach.



*Mother Earth's Charter School, Alberta.*

<http://www.meccs.org/>

This elementary school is Alberta's first Aboriginal Charter School and Canada's only Indigenous Charter School. It is a place that brings together mainstream education and traditional Indigenous teachings based on the Medicine Wheel. Offering a culturally enriched curriculum, it seeks to find ways to connect with students and connect children to their roots. Some important aspects of their cultural program include; Elders, Smudging, Language, Feasts, and Land-Based learning. There is also an excellent Outdoor Education program where students learn outdoor survival skills. As directed by the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, and as described on their website, "this year's AISI project groups all of our MECCS staff and students into cross-grade family groupings. Each Family Group participates in a range of activities each month that build a sense of community and sharing within our school environment."

O'Connor, Kevin. (2010) *Experiential Learning in an Indigenous Context: Integration of place, experience, and criticality in educational practice.*

[http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/FundedResearch/OConnor\\_FullReport.pdf](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/FundedResearch/OConnor_FullReport.pdf)

This research report investigates the successes of two experiential learning programs in both the public school system in the Yukon and in two Cree Nation reserve schools in northern Alberta. The questions that frame the general focus of the study are:

- How do students, educators and community members interpret the field of experiential and place-based education?
- In what ways can educators and community members share values and practices to create more purposeful classroom praxis?
- How can current educational systems redefine its practices to address Indigenous needs, as well as improve student engagement and success?

Specific suggestions are made for building on current experiential and place based educational research and practice.



It is the intent of the findings of this action research study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of educational approaches that successfully engage Aboriginal students. The primary objective of this research is to discover which elements of experiential and place based education lead to a greater engagement of Aboriginal students and improve educational outcomes. The themes that emerged are: The importance of Partnerships within the community; the application of alternative forms of Evaluation; the use of Field Studies to deliver curriculum and engage students; an incorporation of Indigenous Culture and Knowledge; and the issues of Sustainability that include alternative structures and scheduling of the experiential programs.

*Sakewew High School, Saskatchewan.*

<http://www.sakewew.ca/>

The establishment of this high school is truly unique and is often referred to as a “Co-Governance Model”. It is the only high school in Saskatchewan that has made agreements between the Light of Christ Church Roman Catholic and Living Sky Public School Division with the Battlefords First Nations Joint Board of Education. This Joint Board of Education for Sakewew consists of 4 members, one from each school division and two members appointed by the Battlefords Tribal Council. More information can be found on their website.

In addition to this unique governance model, the school also has a strong culture program which has up to 3 Culture Credits (Culture 10, 20, and 30) by providing opportunities for cultural activities in and out of school hours. Elders are also available for student counselling and as a resource for teachers. As well, the academic structure of the school consists of quads consisting of two classes per day where a successful student may earn 8 credits a year.



*The Gift of Language and Culture Project, Lac La Ronge Indian Band Curriculum Resource Unit, Saskatchewan.*

<http://www.giftoflanguageandculture.ca/index.html>

This project was undertaken to revive and preserve language and reinforce values, beliefs, culture and traditions thereby increasing Indigenous knowledge. This project began in 2003 when Lac La Ronge Indian Band, Onion Lake Education, Prince Albert Grand Council and Peter Ballanyne Cree Nation partnered together. The overarching goal of this valuable project is to improve school effectiveness through language and culture programming. There is an instructional language curriculum geared for Nursery to Grade 12, as well as an immersion program for Nursery through to Grade 9. They have developed student and teacher resources and have outlined foundational, curricular, and unit objectives.

On this website, there are numerous materials and resources that can be accessed to improve and enhance language programming, which include vocabulary exercises, audible resources, Native stories and songs, videos, and syllabic matching quizzes. All these resources are geared towards helping classroom teachers, or anyone who would like to learn the language. There are so many organizations and people who have all had a part in actualizing this goal. Please consult this website to find out more information about these partnerships and to learn more about the resources.

*Yukon First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit, Yukon.*

<http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/firstnations/curriculum.html>

This unit was created in 2006 by the Public Schools Branch of the Department of Education. It is dedicated to four goals, as found on their website: “Building productive relationships with First Nations communities; Increasing the amount of First Nations perspectives in Yukon schools; Improving the academic results of First Nations students in the K-12 system; Providing support and enhancing First Nations’ efforts to revitalize their languages.”

An interesting program is called CHAOS 9 – Community Heritage Adventure Outdoors and Skills, grade 9 which was piloted in the winter of 2011 at Porter Creek Secondary School in Whitehorse. As part of CHAOS 9, the students earn credits in English 9, Socials 9, Fine Arts 9 and Yukon Activity and Outdoor Education 9. The focus throughout this program is an integration of Yukon First Nations and Western knowledge. On this website, under Programs and Funding, there is additional information about the launch of their new Bicultural program which is currently being piloted. There is also information about the roles of the Community Education Liaison Coordinator and the Education Support Worker, the Elder in the Schools Program, as well as the community orientations initiative and a look at their language programming.