

First Nations and Métis Education: An Advisory for School Boards

Module 11

Participate in this seminar to learn more about First Nations and Métis education. Module 11 workshop and resource materials include these important topics.

- Enhancing awareness of First Nations and Métis cultures;
- Policy leadership for First Nations and Métis education; and,
- Challenges and success stories for educational equity and educational governance.

STEWARDSHIP

RELATIONSHIP

LEADERSHIP

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Purpose.....	3
Context of First Nations and Métis Education.....	4
Definitions.....	5
Organization of This Document.....	6
For More Information	6
Evaluating Achievement.....	7
Success for All Students.....	7
The Value of First Nations and Métis Ways.....	9
The Importance of Relationships.....	9
School Boards Can.....	11
Role of the School Board.....	13
The School Board’s Responsibilities	13
The Legal Role of the School Board.....	13
Strategic Governance.....	14
Data Collection	15
School Boards Can.....	16
First Nations and Métis People in Sask.....	18
The First Nations and Métis Population	18
The Student Population.....	18
Educational Achievement	19
The Employment Picture	23
School Boards Can.....	24
Historical Context.....	25
Pre-Contact	25
Early Contact	26
Later Contact.....	26
Important Legislation.....	27
Treaties.....	28
The Reserve System.....	29
First Nations Self-Government.....	30
The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.....	30
Métis History	31
The Early Years	31
The Nineteenth Century.....	31
The Métis Today	33
School Boards Can.....	33

Education – Past and Present	35
Pre-Contact	35
First Nations Students	36
Residential Schools.....	36
The Present Day.....	37
Métis Students.....	39
First Nations and Métis Student Experiences of Schooling.....	40
Home/School Differences	40
Racism.....	40
School Boards Can.....	42
Governance	44
School Board	45
School Community Council.....	50
School Boards Can.....	51
Promoting Student Success	53
Success.....	53
First Nations and Métis Content in the Educational Program	55
Curriculum	55
Learning Resources.....	56
The School Board and the Education Program.....	56
Role of the School Board.....	56
Supporting Students	58
Classroom Teachers	60
Effective Teachers.....	60
First Nations and Métis Role Models	61
Early Childhood Education.....	62
Parent and Community Engagement	63
First Nations and Métis Elders and Traditional Ceremonies	66
School Boards Can.....	71
References	73

Introduction

Purpose

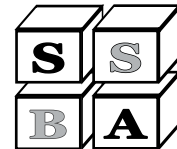
First Nations and Métis Education: An Advisory for School Boards was written for Saskatchewan school boards and senior administrators as they seek to answer questions such as those above and to strengthen education for First Nations and Métis students.

It speaks directly to school board members and provides information and ideas that will help school boards develop policies to promote success for First Nations and Métis students and ensure that First Nations and Métis students have positive experiences of schooling.

This document is called an “advisory” because it raises issues, asks questions and presents options for school boards to consider. It is not intended to provide definitive answers or solutions, because in many cases there are no definitive answers. Rather, there is a range of approaches, each of which may work best within particular communities, situations or contexts.

Building Board Knowledge

1. *What questions do you have about the education of First Nations and Métis students?*
2. *What opportunities do you see for you school board to enhance education for these students?*
3. *What complexities are you dealing with regarding education of First Nations and Métis students?*



Context of First Nations and Métis Education

A variety of situations may exist within school divisions.

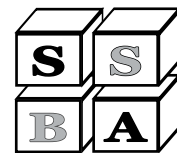
- Métis, non-status, and off-reserve First Nations students are living in the community and attending provincial schools. The home reserves of First Nations students may or may not be located within school division boundaries. This situation is typical of some Saskatchewan cities and large towns.
- There are one or more First Nation reserves within the boundaries of the school division and the parents of some students living on-reserve choose to send their youngsters to provincial schools.
- There are one or more First Nation reserves within the boundaries of the school division. The First Nation enters into a service agreement with the school board which specifies that the school division, for a fee, will provide educational services to the students that fall under the First Nation's jurisdiction.

The three situations described above are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes two or all three of these situations occur at the same time within a school division.

This advisory on First Nations and Métis education is designed to support school divisions in all three of the situations described previously. It presents background information and general principles. For advice and assistance with a particular situation, consult with the First Nations and Métis governments and organizations in your area, and/or with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association.

Building Board Knowledge

1. In your school division which of the situations above predominate?



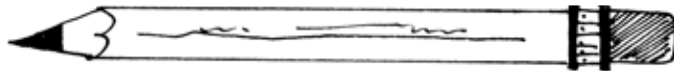
2. How does the situation vary from school to school, community to community?

Definitions

Below are definitions of key terms used throughout this document.

- **Aboriginal Peoples** – The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people: Indians (now known as First Nations people), Métis and Inuit. These are three distinct peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2005).
- **First Nations** – Refers to Indian bands and their peoples. This term acknowledges that Indian people were the First Nations in North America and had developed complex economic, political and social systems before contact with Europeans (Saskatchewan Learning, 2003).
- **Inuit** – An Aboriginal people in northern Canada, who live above the tree line in the Northwest Territories, and in Northern Quebec and Labrador. The word means “people” in the Inuit language – Inuktitut. The singular of Inuit is Inuk (Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis Relations, n.d.).
- **Métis** – Refers to Aboriginal people of mixed First Nation and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis people, as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit or non-Aboriginal people. The Métis have a unique culture that draws on their diverse ancestral origins, such as Scottish, French, Ojibway and Cree (Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis Relations, n.d.).

Notes



Organization of This Document

This introduction is followed by a description of basic principles that provide a foundation for school boards as they address First Nations and Métis education.

Next comes a section on the role of the school board which emphasizes that school boards are responsible for making the system-wide changes needed to ensure equitable success for First Nations and Métis students. This section also emphasizes the importance of a strategic approach to governance. With strategic governance, school boards focus on the “ends” they want to accomplish and the results they want to achieve.

Three sections describe the context of First Nations and Métis education in Saskatchewan. These sections provide demographic and statistical information about Saskatchewan’s First Nations and Métis population, a short historical overview, and a description of First Nations and Métis education, past and present.

A section on governance stresses that school boards and School Community Councils should be representative of the people they serve.

The final section on promoting student success describes actions that school boards can take to foster success for all students.

Each section ends with School Boards Can ... which offers suggestions for school board action and To Think About/Talk About which includes questions to stimulate thought and discussion.

This document concludes with a list of references that gives full bibliographic information for the studies and reports cited in the body of the document.

For More Information

This advisory was designed to support face-to-face workshops for school board members on the topic of First Nations and Métis education. Workshop participants are invited to write in this document, to jot down questions and points of information, and to take the document home with them.

An expanded version of this document is available on the website of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (Go to www.saskschoolboards.ca and follow the links.) The expanded version provides links to websites and online publications that provide more information on the topics addressed in this advisory. The expanded version also lists books and other print materials that may be useful for school board members who want more information about First Nations and Métis education.

Evaluating Achievement

This section describes three basic principles that provide a foundation for school boards as they address First Nations and Métis education. These principles are:

- Success for all students;
- The value of First Nations and Métis culture; and,
- The importance of relationships.

Success for All Students

First Nations and Métis students are a high priority for school boards because Saskatchewan school boards are committed to quality education for all students – to success for all students. School boards want all students to attend school regularly, to benefit from their schooling, to achieve at high levels, and to graduate from Grade 12 with the knowledge and skills needed to enter post-secondary education or to participate successfully in the labour force.

Presently, these goals are not being achieved in many school divisions in Saskatchewan. Only a proportion of students are achieving at high levels and graduating from Grade 12, and all too often it is First Nations and Métis students who are not receiving maximum benefit from their education.

First Nations and Métis students will be receiving maximum benefit from their education when their school attendance rates, school marks, high school graduation rates, and rate of participation in post-secondary education are comparable to those of non-Aboriginal students. School boards can measure their progress toward these indicators of success by collecting data regularly and systematically, and by asking themselves “How are we doing?”

School boards should be concerned about First Nations and Métis education because higher

levels of education usually mean a better quality of life for individuals and families. Education opens many doors. It improves the quality of everyday life. It gives people the literacy and numeracy skills needed for everyday tasks such as managing a household budget, reading instruction manuals, filling out income tax forms, and reading maps.

Education gives people choices and a greater sense of control over their lives. Higher levels of education often mean more income and a greater range of job and lifestyle choices.

School boards should be concerned about First Nations and Métis education

because education better equips people to participate in democratic processes in their town, city, rural municipality or First Nation. It helps voters ask sharp questions, understand the issues and make informed decisions. It gives candidates the skills necessary to mount an effective campaign.

School boards should be concerned about First Nations and Métis education because education is the key to employment and job success. Today most jobs require computer skills and Grade 12 graduation, and many jobs require post-secondary education or skills training. You need an education to get a job. Most unskilled jobs are in the hospitality industry and retail sector where the pay is low and the hours irregular. The number of high-paying unskilled and manual labour jobs is rapidly declining. Higher levels of education mean more potential for employment in a satisfying, well-paying job.

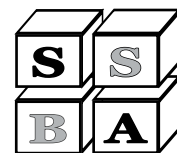
School boards should be concerned about First Nations and Métis education because full employment is essential to create a strong and prosperous province. Saskatchewan is now facing a labour shortage. This shortage is evident now in the skilled trades and will expand to many areas of the economy in the next 10 to 15 years as the baby boomers retire. A general labour shortage in the years ahead will have disastrous consequences for Saskatchewan. It will stunt the province's economic growth, limit its prosperity and hinder its ability to compete with the rest of Canada and the world. It will mean that Saskatchewan citizens cannot get the goods and services they want and need to maintain quality of life.

The best way to address Saskatchewan's upcoming labour shortage is to increase the educational levels of First Nations and Métis citizens and thus better equip them to participate in the labour market.

School boards should be concerned about First Nations and Métis education because it is the right thing to do. School boards are committed to public education which means quality education and success for all students, not just a select few.

Building Board Knowledge

- 1. Why should Saskatchewan school boards care about First Nations and Métis education? Why should these students be a focus of attention for school boards?*



The Value of First Nations and Métis Ways

For thousands of years before the Europeans arrived in North America, First Nations people had social and educational systems that equipped young people with the skills and values they needed to be productive, contributing members of society. However, when Europeans arrived they imposed their social systems, educational systems and values on First Nations people, usually with disastrous results.

The time has come to ask, “What can we learn from traditional First Nations and Métis ways of doing things?” Although traditional First Nations and Métis approaches to education and to life may be different from European approaches, they are no less valuable or effective. Since European approaches, for the most part, have not worked for First Nations people, it is appropriate to learn from and adopt traditional ways that have potential to promote both school and life success for children and youth.

The Importance of Relationships

In our society we are all interdependent and rely on each other for everything that makes life worthwhile. Strong relationships are central to a strong society. It is important that school boards establish and nurture relationships with local First Nations and Métis governments and organizations.

Strong relationships which endure over time help build trust between school boards and local First Nations governments and organizations. Trust enables the partners to work out problems that may arise in a spirit of collaboration and good will. It facilitates new initiatives where the goals may be clear, but the road to achieving the goals unknown. Trust fosters open and honest communications.

It is also important that school boards encourage school principals and other staff to do the same. As well as forming relationships with First Nations and Métis governments and organizations, it is vital that school principals and teachers form relationships with their students’ families and find ways to engage parents and other family members in children’s schooling. Strong, ongoing relationships provide a focus for consultation, joint decision making, and shared responsibility for the education of children and youth.

School boards should be making decisions in concert with First Nations and Métis people, not making decisions or taking action on their behalf.

Relationships can be both formal and informal. A formal relationship involves defined processes to ensure that First Nations and Métis perspectives are reflected in school board deliberations and decision making (see the Governance section of this document). Informal relationships mean being able to call each other spontaneously on the phone or go for coffee to share ideas and talk about possibilities.

Both formal and informal relationships are facilitated by:

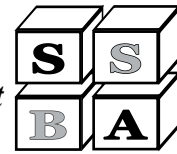
- **Open, honest communication** – No closed-door discussions, no hidden agendas, no secret deals – truly listening to each other with understanding rather than judgement.
- **Honesty** – Trust grows when the partners do what they say they will and communicate openly and honestly.
- **Sharing** – Sharing of goals and dreams for the future – sharing of ideas for achieving a bright tomorrow for all children.
- **Teamwork** – Creating situations where the school board and its First Nations and Métis partners work together as equals on a team for the benefit of children.
- **Finding common ground** – Physical common ground means meeting in places that are neutral, for example, a school or restaurant rather than the school board or band council office; intellectual common ground means identifying shared beliefs, values, goals and dreams and using these as a basis for discussion, decision making and action.
- **Appreciation of cultural differences** – First Nations, Métis and European people have different views of the world and different ways of doing things. Respecting that each approach has value is central to a strong relationship.
- **Appreciation of linguistic differences** – Translation services when needed – recognition that pacing of speech, acceptability of interruptions, and the meaning of silence may differ among people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

School Boards Can

In order to create a strong foundation for Indian and Métis education, school boards can:

- Learn more about traditional First Nations and Métis ways of doing things, particularly traditional approaches to interpersonal relationships and education.
- Develop processes to learn about the hopes and dreams that First Nations and Métis people have for their children and their future. These processes will always start with listening and understanding, rather than telling.
- Organize inservice sessions to help board members increase their understanding of and appreciation for local First Nations and Métis history, culture, governance, and perspectives. These sessions can be led or facilitated by local First Nations and Métis people.
- Model the approaches they expect of the director of education, principals and other school staff. School boards can establish relationships and create partnerships with First Nations and Métis governments and organizations in their area. They can consult on relevant matters and organize joint projects or programs. When school boards undertake actions such as these they serve as role models for school principals, teachers and others in the education system.
- Provide recognition for schools whose actions and activities are consistent with the board's philosophy. For example, if the board expects schools to establish relationships and create partnerships with local First Nations and Métis organizations, the board can monitor this aspect of school operations and provide recognition for appropriate relationships and partnerships.
- Organize ceremonies to celebrate significant events or achievements such as a highly successful school project, the signing of a partnership or governance agreement, or the beginning of a new program.
- Attend First Nations and Métis community events. For example, most powwows are open to the public and everyone is welcome.
- Learn more about all the topics addressed in this advisory by reviewing the expanded version that is available on the website of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (www.saskschoolboards.ca). The expanded version provides links to relevant websites and online publications and lists books for additional reading.

Building Board Knowledge



1. *How can your school board learn more about traditional First Nations and Métis education?*
2. *What relationships and partnerships has your board created with First Nations and Métis governments and other organizations?*
3. *What relationships and partnerships has your board created with First Nations and Métis governments and other organizations?*
 - *What can you do to strengthen and enhance the relationships you already have?*
 - *What can you do to create new relationships?*
4. *What can your board as a whole and individual members do to talk less and listen more when working with the community in general and First Nations and Métis people in particular?*
5. *How many First Nations and Métis community events have school board members attended in the last year? What can you do to increase the number and types of First Nations and Métis community events that board members attend?*

Role of the School Board

This section addresses four topics:

- The school board's responsibilities;
- The legal role of the school board;
- Strategic governance; and,
- Data collection.

The School Board's Responsibilities

School boards are responsible for education in the school divisions they govern. School boards serve the citizens of the division and are accountable to those same citizens. First Nations and Métis people are among the citizens served in every school division in Saskatchewan. School boards are responsible and accountable to these citizens just as they are to other groups of citizens in the division. It is up to school boards to make the system-wide changes needed so that First Nations and Métis students are well served by the school system.

The goal for every school board is equity of outcomes for all students. Equity means that the school attendance rates of First Nations and Métis students, their school marks, high school graduation rates, and rates of participation in post-secondary education are comparable to those of non-Aboriginal students.

The extent to which school boards are able to facilitate success for First Nations and Métis students and involve First Nations and Métis families will be the measure of their success in the years ahead.

The Legal Role of the School Board

The school board's role is to provide direction and supervision for the education program of the school division it oversees.

School boards are responsible for specific aspects of the education program as defined in *The Education Act, 1995* (see the box on the right).

School boards have a responsibility to create an environment within the division that facilitates teaching and learning. They have a responsibility to “administer and manage the educational affairs of the school division” in a manner that promotes success for all students and makes schooling a productive and positive experience for all students.

The Education Act, 1995

Duties of the board of education

85(1) ... a board of education shall:

- (a) administer and manage the educational affairs of the school division in accordance with the intent of this Act and the regulations;
- (b) exercise general supervision and control over the schools in the school division and make any bylaws with respect to school management that may be considered necessary for effective and efficient operation of the schools;

Strategic Governance

Throughout this document ideas are presented for actions that school boards can undertake to promote the success of First Nations and Métis students. These ideas are presented within the context of strategic governance.

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association encourages and supports school boards to pursue a strategic approach to governance.

With strategic governance, the school board focuses on the “ends” it wants to achieve, the goals it wants to attain and the results it wants to see. The “means” to achieve these ends are the responsibility of the director of education and other staff. Within the policy framework created by the board, the director of education has broad freedom to determine the means for achieving the ends identified by the board. The board monitors and holds the director of education accountable for compliance with board policy (McDonough, 2002).

In a strategic governance approach, the board directs its efforts to turning its

values and vision into reality. It engages the community to ensure the board's work reflects the community's values. An effective strategic governance board:

- Develops and articulates vision and goals;
- Aligns resources to attain the goals;
- Adopts policies to support achievement of the goals;
- Establishes an accountability framework that measures progress toward goal achievement; and,
- Builds an effective governance team (McDonough, 2002).

The strategic governance approach contrasts with the traditional approach in which school boards govern with a high degree of hands-on involvement in the day-to-day management of the school division.

School boards are moving to a strategic approach to governance because the traditional hands-on approach has many limitations. It can result in unclear channels of communication, ambiguous decisions, inconsistent treatment of staff and students, and governance by intuition rather than in accordance with established, clearly defined principles and policies (Renihan, 1991). Moreover, the traditional hands-on approach is simply not practical or possible with today's large school divisions.

Data Collection

School boards will know that they have facilitated success for First Nations and Métis students when the school attendance rates of First Nations students, along with their school marks, high school graduation rates, and rates of participation are comparable to those of non-Aboriginal students.

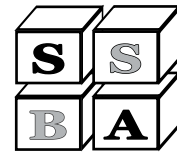
In order to assess progress, it is important that school boards set up systems to regularly collect data on each of these important indicators. Regular data collection also allows school boards to make decisions about budget allocations and programming on the basis of evidence rather than intuition or hearsay. In short, regular data collection tells the board whether existing programs are effective in moving the school division toward the goal of success for all students, or whether new directions are needed.

School Boards Can

In order to promote success for First Nations and Métis students within a strategic governance framework, school boards can:

- Identify success for all students as a strongly held value and a goal of the board.
- Develop policies that describe, support and reinforce the board's vision of success for all students.
- Identify and implement system-wide changes that will enhance education for First Nations and Métis students and strengthen outcomes for these students.
- Allocate resources to support the board's policies. Resources often mean dollars and staff, but can also include use of facilities, transportation, access to inservice training and the like.
- Monitor progress to ensure that policies which describe, support and reinforce the board's vision of success for all students are being implemented. It is the director of education's responsibility to implement these policies, therefore, boards will need to request specific types of information from the director to ensure that policies are being implemented as intended.

Building Board Knowledge



- 1. How can your board identify system-wide changes that are needed to promote success for all students?*
- 2. What values statements, goals statements and policies has your board created to support success for all students?*
- 3. What is your board doing to monitor the actualization of values and goals statements and the implementation of policies relating to student success?*
- 4. What is your board doing to recognize schools that have been effective in promoting success for all students?*
- 5. What data do you collect now about key indicators of student success? What data do you need to collect?*

First Nations and Métis People in Sask.

This section on First Nations and Métis People in Saskatchewan provides a statistical portrait. It addresses four topics:

- The First Nations and Métis population;
- The Student Population;
- Educational Achievement; and,
- The Employment Picture.

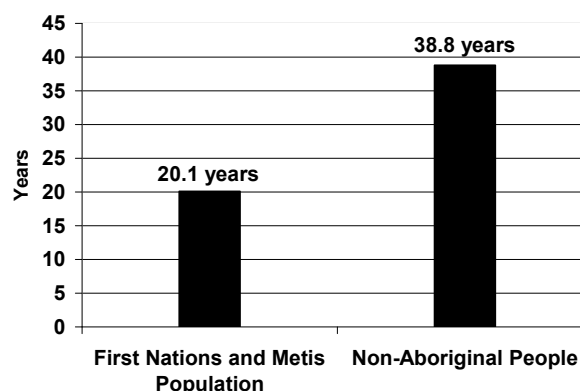
The First Nations and Métis Population

First Nation and Métis people make up an increasingly large proportion of the Saskatchewan population. Saskatchewan's First Nations and Métis population has been increasing for at least the last 25 years. The First Nations population is younger than the general population and has a higher birthrate. The Métis population is increasing also, but at a slower rate. It is projected that by 2025, First Nations and Métis people will make up 20.5 percent of the total Saskatchewan population (Elliott, 2004).

Saskatchewan's First Nation and Métis population is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population. In 2001, the median age of Saskatchewan's First Nations and Métis population was 20.1 years. The median age of the non-Aboriginal population was 38.8 years. When considered separately, First Nations population has an even lower median age of 18.4 years (Statistics Canada, 2003). The median age is the point at which exactly one-half of the population is older and the other half is younger.

Figure 1: Median Age of Saskatchewan's First Nations and Métis, and Non-Aboriginal Population, 2001

Source: Aboriginal Peoples of Canada ... , 2003.



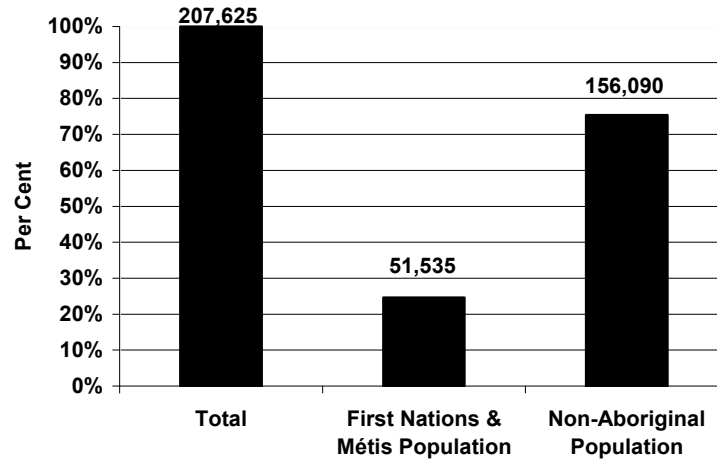
The Student Population

A significant and increasing percentage of children in Saskatchewan schools are of First Nations and Métis ancestry.

- Slightly less than one-quarter of Saskatchewan youngsters aged 0-14 are First Nations and Métis. In 2001, 207,625 Saskatchewan citizens were aged 0-14. Slightly less than one-quarter of these youth (51,535) were First Nations and Métis.
- Among children aged 0-4, the proportion of First Nations and Métis youngsters was higher at 27.4 percent of the total population of 0-4 year old children (Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

Figure 2: Saskatchewan Youth Aged 0-14, First Nations and Métis, Non-Aboriginal, and Total, 2001

Source: Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 2006.



- First Nations and Métis children are not evenly distributed across the province or evenly distributed within school divisions. Some schools and school divisions have a high First Nations and Métis population, and some a low First Nations and Métis population.
- The percentage of school children who are First Nations and Métis is projected to increase in the years ahead as today's youngsters grow up and start their own families.

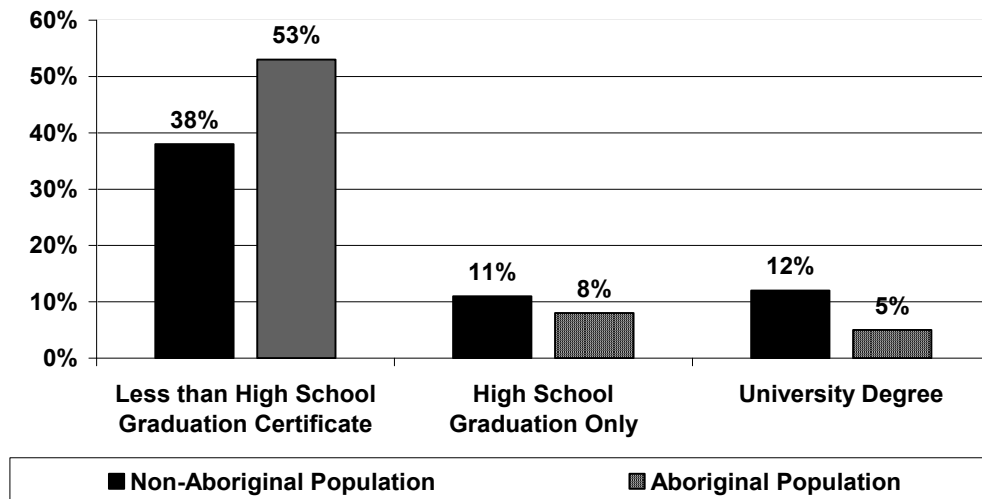
Educational Achievement

First Nations and Métis students have not been well served by public education in the past. Dropout rates are higher, and achievement levels are lower among First Nations and Métis students than among the non-Aboriginal student population.

- In 2001, 53 percent of Saskatchewan’s Aboriginal population aged 15 and over had less than Grade 12 graduation compared to 38 percent of the non-Aboriginal population.
- The proportion of First Nations people with less than Grade 12 was 57 percent.
- The proportion of Métis people with less than Grade 12 was 50 percent.
- In 2001, the percentage of Aboriginal people aged 15 and over with Grade 12 graduation only or a university degree was lower than the percentage of the non-Aboriginal population.
- Five percent of Aboriginal people had a university degree in 2001 compared to 12 percent of the non-Aboriginal population (Selected educational characteristics ..., 2005).

Figure 3: Saskatchewan Population, 15 Years and Over, by Highest Level of Schooling, 2001.

Source: *Selected educational characteristics ...*, 2005.



Note: The Aboriginal population includes First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and people who say they belong to two or more of these groups.

The causes of lower levels of educational achievement among First Nations and Métis people are complex. The poverty, discrimination and general socioeconomic disadvantage experienced by many First Nations and Métis people are significant factors. However, some of the responsibility rests with the school system. In the past, most schools were excessively Eurocentric and unwelcoming to First Nations and Métis students. Many First Nations and Métis students experienced rejection and failure at school and so were turned off at an early age.

The statistics in Figure 3 apply to all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over, and includes middle-aged and elderly people who attended school many years ago.

Educational achievement is beginning to increase among younger Aboriginal people.

- In Regina, the school attendance rate for Aboriginal people aged 15 to 24 increased by about 10 percent between 1981 and 2001. In Saskatoon, the school attendance rate for Aboriginal people aged 15 to 24 increased by about 14 percent during the same time period (Figure 4).

Figure 4: School Attendance Rates of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Persons Aged 15-24, in Selected Cities, 1981 and 2001.

	Percent of Aboriginals		Percent of Non-Aboriginals	
	1981	2001	1981	2001
Regina	40.5%	51.4%	44.8%	61.7%
Saskatoon	39.9%	56.0%	44.8%	60.3%

Source: Siggner & Costa, 2005.

- The proportion of Aboriginal females aged 25 to 34 who have completed post-secondary education increased significantly in both Regina and Saskatoon between 1981 and 2001. The proportion of Aboriginal males in the same age group who have completed post-secondary education increased in Saskatoon, but declined in Regina (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Proportion of the Total Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Population Aged 25-34 Who Are Not Attending School and Who Have Completed Post-Secondary Education, by Gender, in Selected Cities, 1981 and 2001.

	Aboriginal Population				Non-Aboriginal Population			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	1981	2001	1981	2001	1981	2001	1981	2001
Regina	31.7%	20.8%	14.7%	23.5%	38.5%	43.3%	34.3%	49.8%
Saskatoon	11.1%	27.4%	19.1%	27.8%	37.3%	41.7%	40.6%	55.0%

Source: Siggner & Costa, 2005.

Aboriginal youth who participation in the 2001 Census were asked about their reasons for dropping out of school. The main reason given by male youth was boredom. Among female youth, the main reason for dropping out of school was pregnancy or looking after children.

The Employment Picture

The employment picture is much bleaker for First Nations and Métis people than for non-Aboriginal people.

- In 2001, 46.9 percent of Saskatchewan's First Nations population and 67.4 percent of Saskatchewan's Métis population participated in the labour force. This compares to a labour force participation rate of 69.3 percent for the non-Aboriginal population.
- In the same year (2001), the unemployment rate for the First Nations population was 29.4 percent compared to 15.5 percent for the Métis population and 4.8 percent for the non-Aboriginal population (Selected labour force characteristics ..., 2005).

Figure 6: Saskatchewan Population, 15 Years and Over, Employment Characteristics, 2001.

	Total Population	First Nations Population	Métis Population	Total Aboriginal Population	Non-Aboriginal Population
Labour Force Participation Rate	67.8%	46.9%	67.4%	54.5%	69.3%
Employment Rate	63.5%	33.1%	56.9%	42.0%	66.0%
Unemployment Rate	6.3%	29.4%	15.5%	23.0%	4.8%

Source: Selected labour force characteristics ..., 2005.

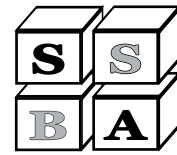
Note: Total Aboriginal population includes First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and people who say they belong to two or more of these groups.

School Boards Can

In order to create policies and set goals appropriate for the entire student population, school boards can:

- Collect accurate information about the First Nations and Métis people in the school division. Boards will be interested in the proportion of First Nations and Métis students in the division and in comprehensive demographic information about the total population living within the school division's boundaries.
- Develop policies and programs to address the educational inequities experienced by First Nations and Métis students.

Building Board Knowledge



1. *Consider the demographic information in this section. What implications do these demographics have for Saskatchewan's education system? What implications do they have for your school division?*
2. *Consider your school division. What is the proportion of First Nations and Métis students in each of the schools in your division?*
3. *What do you know about the First Nations and Métis students in your division? For example, what is their graduation rate compared to students in general? How many First Nations students live on-reserve and off-reserve?*
4. *During the 2001 Census, male Aboriginal youth said their main reason for dropping out of school was boredom. Female youth said their main reason for dropping out was pregnancy or looking after children. How can your school division respond to these issues?*

Historical Context

This section addresses seven topics:

- Pre-Contact;
- Early Contact;
- Later Contact;
- Important Legislation;
- Treaties;
- The Reserve System;
- Self-Government;
- The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations; and,
- Métis History.

Pre-Contact

Before contact with Europeans, Saskatchewan's First Nations were autonomous societies, each with their own political, social and economic systems.

Saskatchewan's First Nations varied in their beliefs, political and social systems and economies. For example, First Nations living in the northern part of the province hunted large animals such as moose and elk, and trapped the furbearing animals common in the area. The Plains Cree in the southern part of the province had an economy that was based primarily on the buffalo.

Early Contact

During the early years of European contact, the Europeans and the First Nations peoples approached each other as equals and both benefited. The newcomers depended on the First Nations knowledge of the land and waterways and on their ability to obtain furs. The First Nations obtained manufactured goods from the newcomers including clothing, guns, metal knives and tools, and household implements.

It was during this period of early contact that the Métis Nation came into being. The children of First Nations mothers and European fathers, the Métis are a distinct nation of people with their own culture, traditions and language (Michif). Many Métis spoke both First Nations and European languages, were familiar with both cultures, and became intermediaries in the fur trade.

Some First Nations, such as the Cree around Hudson Bay, also played the role of middleman, purchasing furs from local trappers and selling them to European traders.

The missionaries arrived close behind the fur traders and tried to impose their beliefs upon the First Nations peoples through both persuasion and coercion.

Later Contact

The growing fur trade brought many changes. Traditional economies changed as First Nations peoples became more dependent on manufactured goods. Traditional political systems changed too, because the English and French were often in conflict over territory and access to furs and First Nations were sometimes caught up in these conflicts.

The Europeans brought diseases such as smallpox, tuberculosis and measles which wiped out whole communities. As the fur trade became an increasingly significant force, some First Nations people were faced with starvation due to over-hunting and over-trapping.

Important Legislation

Three key pieces of legislation defined the relationship between the First Nations peoples and the British government and, later, the relationship between the First Nations peoples and the Canadian government.

- ***Royal Proclamation of 1763*** – The *Royal Proclamation of 1763* was the defining document in the relationship between First Nations and Non-Aboriginal people in North America. It was issued in the name of the King of England and set out the rules that were to govern British dealings with First Nations people – particularly in regard to land.
 - ... the central messages of the proclamation are clear in its preamble. Aboriginal people were not to be “molested or disturbed” on their lands. Transactions involving Aboriginal land were to be negotiated properly between the Crown and “assemblies of Indians”. Aboriginal lands were to be acquired only by fair dealing: treaty or purchase by the Crown.
 - The proclamation portrays Indian nations as autonomous political entities, living under the protection of the Crown but retaining their own internal political authority. (Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996a)
 - The *Royal Proclamation of 1763* used the term “Nations or Tribes of Indians”, which is sometimes interpreted as British recognition of the existence of Indian Nations as sovereign states (Nestor, n.d.).
- ***British North America (BNA) Act*** – The *British North America (BNA) Act* created the country of Canada in 1867 and is Canada’s original constitution. Section 91(24) established federal jurisdiction over “Indians and lands reserved for Indians”.
- ***Indian Act*** – The first *Indian Act* was passed in 1876. Initially it defined those who had “status” as an Indian and thus were entitled to live on Indian reserves. Over the years, the Indian Act and its numerous amendments have been used to control many aspects of life for First Nations peoples. For example, at various times, it was used to ban the Sun Dance and Potlatch, to legislate the abduction of First Nations children, to prevent First Nations people from loitering in pool rooms, and to make it an offence for a First Nations person or group to retain a lawyer for purposes of advancing a land claim (Henderson ..., n.d.).

Treaties

Between 1871 and 1906 seven numbered Treaties were signed in Saskatchewan. The Treaties are formal agreements between the government of Canada and the First Nations. Each party has certain objectives, expectations, and obligations. The Treaties provided First Nations with annuities, education, health care, reserve lands, and protection of their traditional economies. The government of Canada acquired the means to open up territories including modern-day Saskatchewan, for settlement and agricultural and resource development. (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, n.d.)

First Nations people believe the Treaties are binding agreements that are to last forever. In most of Canada, interpretation of Treaties in a modern-day context has largely been defined by the courts. In Saskatchewan, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner has a mandate to facilitate discussions concerning the Treaties, in order to resolve issues in a cooperative rather than a confrontational manner.

The Treaties that affect Saskatchewan are:

- Treaty No. 2 – 1871;
- Treaty No. 4 – 1874;
- Treaty No. 5 – 1875;
- Treaty No. 6 – 1876;
- Treaty No. 7 – 1877;
- Treaty No. 8 – 1899; and,
- Treaty No. 10 – 1906.

Treaties Number 2 and 7 are sometimes omitted during discussion of Saskatchewan Treaties, as these affect very small land areas in which no First Nations are located.

The Reserve System

By the late 1800s, large numbers of European immigrants began arriving on the prairies. Indeed, the Canadian government conducted a very aggressive advertising campaign in Russia, Ukraine, Poland and other parts of Europe to attract immigrants. The Canadian government pressured First Nations to settle on reserves, in order to provide land for the immigrants. Many of the First Nations had few options because the buffalo had disappeared and they faced starvation.

The federal government sent Indian agents to the reserves, who controlled most aspects of life on the reserve. For example, the pass system required First Nations people to get a pass from the Indian agent to leave the reserve. First Nations people absent from the reserve without a pass were considered to be criminals. The pass system was enforced until the mid 1930s and was not removed from the Indian Act until 1951.

The Indian agent also controlled the financial transactions of First Nations people. They needed a permit from the Indian agent to sell cattle, grain, hay, firewood, berries and other products and to purchase groceries and clothes. The permit system remained in the Indian Act until 1995.

In the 1950s and 60s, First Nations began to gain control over their own affairs and gradually the position of Indian agent was eliminated (Saskatchewan First Nation and Métis Relations, 2006a; Nestor, n.d.).

It was difficult for First Nations people to make a living on reserves. The pass and permit systems severely limited their economic opportunities. For example, if the Indian Agent denied them a pass to leave the reserve, they could not work for local farmers or businesses and the potential to earn cash through employment was lost. If the Indian Agent denied them a permit, they could not sell products they had grown, gathered or created, nor could they purchase food, clothing and other goods that would contribute to quality of life.

Some reserves were on marginal land not suited for farming. When the land was suitable for farming, farming activity was controlled by the Indian Agent, who sometimes prohibited the purchase of tools and equipment needed for farming.

Some reserves were small and did not support enough wild animals to feed the people living on the reserve. Thus, many First Nations people came to depend on funds provided by the government.

Today First Nations people live both on- and off-reserve. Many of those who live off-reserve have retained their ties to the reserve community and see it as home.

First Nations Self-Government

Before the arrival of Europeans, the First Nations of Saskatchewan were independent

self-governing nations. Each First Nation had political systems that defined how they selected their leaders, laws that governed the ways people treated each other, processes for dealing with people who violated the laws, and protocols for interacting with other First Nations.

When the Europeans arrived they imposed their political systems on the First Nations and ignored traditional systems that had worked so well for hundreds of years.

Today, many First Nations see self-government as a way to preserve their cultures, their languages, and their economic well-being. Their right to self-government flows from their inherent rights bestowed by the Creator and from the Treaties which were nation to nation agreements.

Self-government means that First Nations people have control over their lives and over the institutions that affect their lives, rather than being governed by the European institutions forced upon them. Self-government means that, within the context of the Canadian Constitution, First Nations people design and control their own justice systems, schools, health clinics, employment services and businesses. It also means that First Nations governments are increasingly responsible and accountable to the people they represent, rather than to the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations

Today, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations represents 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan. It is committed to honouring the spirit and intent of the Treaties signed more than a century ago, as well as to promoting, protecting and implementing the Treaties. It also fosters economic, educational and social progress for First Nations people.

The FSIN is governed by a Legislative Assembly comprised of representatives of the member First Nations. The Chief and several Vice-Chiefs are elected. Secretariats have been established to address major areas such as economic development, education and training, and lands and resources (FSIN, n.d.).

Métis History

The Early Years

“The Métis are one of Saskatchewan’s founding people and have contributed to Saskatchewan’s social, cultural, economic and political fabric” (Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan, p. 603). The Métis were created by intermarriage between European fur traders and First Nations women. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, the Métis were involved in the fur trade, primarily in Northern Saskatchewan. They were trappers, middlemen, and traders, and they played an important role in the establishment of communities in Northern Saskatchewan. The two oldest continuously inhabited communities in Saskatchewan – Cumberland House (1774) and Ile-à-la-Crosse (1778) – are Métis communities, and Prince Albert was founded in 1866 by James Isbister, a Métis.

The Nineteenth Century

By the early 19th century the Métis had become involved in the buffalo hunt in Southern Saskatchewan and carried out orderly, well-organized hunts.

Between the consolidation of the fur trade in 1821 and the construction of the railway in the late 1880s, the Métis played a major role in transportation. Métis traders crisscrossed the prairies in vast caravans of two-wheeled Red River carts. Their cargo consisted primarily of buffalo hides and furs, but they occasionally transported other goods as well.

As the fur trade started dying out in the 19th century, more and more of the prairie Métis settled in the Red River region of what is today Manitoba. The Red River region centred on the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, where Winnipeg is now located.

This area was controlled by the Hudson’s Bay Company, but in 1869 the HBC sold its rights to this region to the new Dominion of Canada, without discussing it with the people of the region. Essentially, the Métis people’s land was sold out from under them. The result was the Red River Resistance of 1869 led by Louis Riel.

Manitoba became a province in July, 1870, with the passing of the Manitoba Act. Under the terms of this Act, the Métis retained existing land holdings in Red River and were guaranteed a 1.4 million acre land grant to be reserved for Métis children. This guarantee proved to be short-lived, however. An 1874 amendment to the Manitoba Act called for the distribution of scrip to Métis adults in an effort to extinguish their title to the land in the Red River area. Scrip was a certificate redeemable for land or money. With the decline of the fur trade and buffalo hunt, many Métis were in a desperate need of money and sold their scrip to banks and land speculators to keep their families from starving.

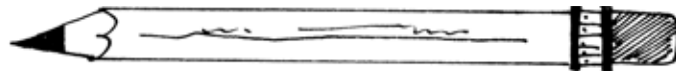
By 1884, two-thirds of the Métis people had moved out of the province of Manitoba. Some relocated to the north and the U.S.A., but the majority moved to Saskatchewan and Alberta. Batoche became a main Métis settlement in Saskatchewan. The Métis settled in other Saskatchewan communities as well including Willow Bunch, Crooked Lake, and Lebret.

The Métis resumed their demands for a land base – demands that were ignored by the federal government. The Métis were expected to apply for land individually as homesteaders. The federal government wanted to prevent large concentrations of Métis people in one area to keep land available for settlement by European immigrants. As well, the expansionist policies of the Canadian government were again pushing the Métis off their land.

In 1885, the Métis of the Batoche area, under the leadership of Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont, took up arms against the Dominion of Canada. In what has become known as the NorthWest Resistance, they were defeated, and Louis Riel was hanged for treason. The Métis dispersed throughout what is today Saskatchewan and became known as “Road Allowance People,” because they lived on road allowances – land set aside for future development of roads and not available for settlement. Their life on the road allowances was precarious – the Métis people were sometimes forcibly removed and in a few instances their homes were burned.

Between 1876 and 1921, scrip was again provided to Métis people, through the provisions of the Dominion Lands Act. However, most of this scrip again fell into the hands of land speculators and banks, who took it through dishonest means.

Notes



The Métis Today

Although the Métis lost their land base, they did not lose their sense of identity as a separate, distinct people, nor did they lose their culture and traditions.

Today the Métis people of Saskatchewan are represented by the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan – a province-wide political organization. A democratically elected Provincial Métis Council provides overall direction for the organization. There are 12 Regions, each with an elected representative, and within the 12 Regions there are about 130 Métis Locals. The mandate of the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan is to pursue the rights of the Métis within Saskatchewan and to work towards development of the social, cultural, economic, civil, political and legal rights of the Métis (Métis Nation—Saskatchewan, n.d.).

The Métis Act, which was passed by the Government of Saskatchewan in 2002, recognizes the Métis as a separate and distinct people, acknowledges their contribution to the province of Saskatchewan, commits the province and the Métis Nation to collaborate on some practical issues and establishes the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan Secretariat Inc. (Archer, 1981; Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan, 2005; Saskatchewan First Nation and Métis Relations, 2006b; Nester, n.d.)

In order to better understand the communities they represent, school boards can:

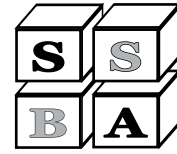
- Learn more about the history of the First Nations and Métis people in the school division; and,
- Learn more about the past and present culture and traditions of the First Nations and Métis people in the school division.

School Boards Can

In order to better understand the communities they represent, school boards can:

- Learn more about the history of the First Nations and Métis people in the school division.
- Learn more about the past and present culture and traditions of the First Nations and Métis people in the school division.

Building Board Knowledge



1. *What do you know about the First Nations in your school division?*

- *Which First Nations are located in your area? What treaties affect these First Nations?*
- *What are the geographic boundaries of the land base of each First Nation?*
- *What is the history of each First Nation in your area?*

2. *What do you know about the Métis people in your area?*

- *In what European and First Nations cultures do the Métis of your area have their roots?*
- *What Métis traditions are alive in your area?*

3. *What can your school board do to enhance its members' knowledge about the history of the First Nations and Métis people in your area?*

Education – Past and Present

This section on Education – Past and Present is organized into four topics:

- Pre-Contact;
- First Nations Students;
- Métis Students; and,
- First Nations and Métis Student Experiences of Schooling.

Pre-Contact

In traditional First Nations society children were valued as gifts of the Creator. They were not seen as belonging to their parents, but rather as on loan from the Creator. Children and youth were nurtured by the extended family. Parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunts, and other family members all shared the responsibility of caring for children and passing on the knowledge and skills needed to function in society. Elders played a particularly important role in the education of children. (Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996b; Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan, 2005)

“It was an education in which the community and the natural environment were the classroom. ... Members of the family were the teachers, and each adult was responsible for ensuring that each child learned how to live a good life. Traditional education was largely an informal process that provided the young people with specific skills, attitudes, and knowledge they needed to function in everyday life within the context of a spiritual worldview” (Kirkness, 1999, pp. 22-23).

Traditional child-rearing practices permitted children to exert their will with little interference from adults. Children were encouraged to explore the world around them and were rarely told what to do or punished. Children were taught through modeling rather than through direct instruction. Children were expected to observe and imitate other members of the community. Social control was exercised through indirect means such as teasing rather than through direct reprimands or instructions on how to behave.

These childrearing and educational practices served to foster cooperation and suppress conflict in societies where a high degree of cooperation was needed for survival (Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996b).

First Nations Students

Residential Schools

Imagine the following situation:

A society from a far-away planet arrives in Saskatchewan and by virtue of their advanced technology imposes their social, economic and political systems on the province.

Every fall, the invaders gather up all the children aged six to 16, stuff them into a spaceship, and take them to the far-away planet until the next June.

When the children are at home during the summer, they rarely talk about their experiences away, but they are thin and starving when they first arrive home. Many of them are covered with scars and bruises. The younger children have forgotten English; they speak only the invaders' language which few adults understand. Some of the older boys have become angry and violent.

- What effect does this situation have on your community?
- What effect does it have on your family?
- What effect does it have on you personally?
- What effect does it have on the children who are taken away?

Since the earliest days of contact, education was seen as a tool for assimilating First Nations and Métis people into European society. Assimilation through education became the dominant government policy after the signing of the numbered Treaties, and residential schools were established throughout the prairies. The operation of most residential schools was turned over to the churches, chiefly the Roman Catholic Church, but a few were also run by the Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, and by the United Church.

The residential schools were used deliberately to break down the transmission of culture and language from one generation to the next. They were seen as a bridge from the First Nations world to the European world. That passage was marked out in clear stages: separation from First Nation culture, socialization into European culture, and enfranchisement which allowed males to avail themselves of the enfranchisement provisions of the Indian Act and leave their Indian status behind. (Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996b)

For nearly a century, parents and grandparents were legally obligated to turn their children over to residential school authorities. When families did not comply, the children were taken by force.

In the residential schools, English was the only language allowed in or out of class. Children were often beaten for speaking a First Nations language (Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996b).

Beatings and sexual abuse were commonplace. Food was often lacking in both quality and quantity and many children were malnourished. Infectious diseases, particularly tuberculosis, were rampant and some children died of disease. Children were taught to reject their culture, language, families and communities, and by extension to reject themselves. These conditions were systemic, widespread and deliberate.

The disastrous results of the residential schools are still being felt today. The residential schools weakened the family and community bonds that formed the foundation of traditional First Nations society. They imbued a sense of self-hatred and powerlessness in young people, who lacked the skills and knowledge to function effectively in either First Nations or European society, and sometimes turned to alcohol to cope.

The residential schools destroyed young people's ability to be good parents and to create healthy families, because children who attended residential schools had no nurturing, and no positive experiences of parenting or of family and community life. They experienced only pain and shame. People parent as they are parented, and so students of residential schools went forth into the world ill-equipped to be parents.

The Present Day

Education of First Nation children is defined as a federal government responsibility under the *Indian Act*. The process of phasing out residential schools started about 1930-1940, although some stayed in operation much longer than that event into the 1970s.

For several decades during the middle of the 20th century, many First Nations children were educated in on-reserve schools controlled and operated by the federal government. These schools allowed First Nations students to live at home and to retain ties to their community, but parents and other family members played no role in their children's education. The federal government made all curriculum and financial decisions, hired and fired teachers and set policy concerning treatment of students. The government did not create any mechanisms for family or community involvement.

In 1972, the Assembly of First Nations (formerly the National Indian Brotherhood) published a document entitled Indian Control of Indian Education which asserted the rights of First Nations parents to determine the kind of education they wanted for their children.

Two principles of education were proposed in this document:

- Parental responsibility; and
- Local control of education.

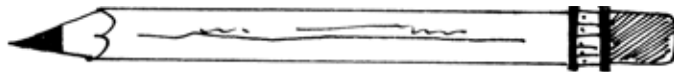
The Federal government accepted the document as policy in 1973 (Nestor, n.d., p. 16).

After 1973, First Nations gradually assumed responsibility for the education of their children. The funds that the federal government previously used to operate schools on reserves were provided to First Nations to operate and control their own schools.

Today, most First Nations operate their own schools. There are very few federally-operated schools.

Some First Nations purchase education services from a local school division instead of operating their own schools. The First Nations contract with the school division might cover educational services for all students attending school or it might cover only certain categories of students such as high school students or special needs students.

Notes



Métis Students

Métis children born during the fur trade era were educated in one of two ways:

- Those who lived within the Indian community were raised and educated in the traditional Indian manner.
- Those who lived within the fur trade community were raised and educated in a Christian and European manner. Schooling was provided in mission schools which were established near trading posts.

The quality of education for Métis and non-status Indian children deteriorated after the signing of the numbered Treaties and the Resistance of 1885. Neither the federal or provincial government would assume responsibility for the education of these children. Some were allowed to attend day or mission schools if there was space. Education in southern Saskatchewan was haphazard, and very limited in northern Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan First Nation and Métis Relations, 2006b; Nestor, n.d.).

However, there was a residential school for Métis students in Ile-a-la-Crosse which operated from the 1920s until about 1974.

In 1944, the Piercy report documented the grave educational conditions of the Métis people and shortly thereafter the provincial government assumed responsibility for the education of Métis and non-status Indian children (Saskatchewan First Nation and Métis Relations, 2006b; Nestor, n.d.).

For much of the 20th century, Saskatchewan's K-12 education system paid little attention to Métis culture and heritage. This situation began to change in 1980 with the formation of the Gabriel Dumont Institute which (among other things) conducts research relating to Métis history and operates SUNTEP (Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program).

First Nations and Métis Student Experiences of Schooling

First Nations and Métis students, like all students, vary a great deal. They vary in their innate abilities and interests, their life experiences, and their experiences of schooling.

The sections below describe some factors that may influence First Nations and Métis students' experiences of schooling.

Home/School Differences

The values and expectations that some First Nations and Métis children experience at home may conflict with those of the school. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996d) explains this conflict thusly:

Values and traditions of [First Nations] peoples and nations are diverse, but there are common elements that often conflict with those dominant in the conventional classroom. For example, [First Nations] children may be raised in a home environment where cooperation and non-competitiveness are emphasized. They may be taught that intellectual and other gifts are meant to be shared for the benefit of others rather than for personal gain. In some [First Nations] cultures, the principle of non-interference predominates; the child's will is respected, and adults do not interfere in the choices made by the child. The imposition of the adult's will on the child is considered inappropriate except, of course, in instances where the child may encounter harm. By contrast, the regimentation of the classroom experience, the emphasis on individual achievement, and the exertion of the teacher's authority constitute a rupture with the child's home environment.

Racism

Complete each of the partial sentences below.

Racism looks like _____.

Racism sounds like _____.

Racism feels like _____.

Did you feel uncomfortable completing these sentences? Did you find yourself squirming a bit?

Dr. Verna St. Denis and Dr. Eber Hampton (2002), two well known Saskatchewan academics, point out that people are uncomfortable talking about racism – for many it is a taboo topic. When the issue of racism is raised, denial is a common response, occasionally even by First Nations and Métis people themselves. Suggesting that racism is something that took place only in the past or is limited to special situations such as the Holocaust is also common. Yet racism is something that many First Nations and Métis students have experienced.

Overt forms of racism include verbal and physical abuse and prohibiting First Nations and Métis youngsters from participating in certain programs.

More subtle forms of racism include:

- Psychological abuse such as assuming that First Nations and Métis people are second class citizens, that First Nations and Métis cultures are inferior to other cultures, and that First Nations and Métis achievements are inferior to that of the majority culture (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002).
- Low expectations for First Nations and Métis students which create a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you expect a child to fail, she probably will. This is probably the most pervasive form of racism that many students encounter (Minister's National Working Group ..., 2002).
- Denial of professional support and attention such as ignoring a child's request for help in the classroom, or ignoring situations where a First Nations and Métis child is being bothered or bullied by non-Aboriginal students (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002).
- Rules and procedures that facilitate failure, for example, punishing First Nations and Métis students more harshly than non-Aboriginal students for the same offence, and rigidly enforcing attendance policies when First Nations and Métis students may lack transportation to get to school (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002).

The more subtle forms of racism are all the more problematic because they can be unintentional and because observation over time is needed in order to identify them.

Racism has profound effects on those who experience it. Racism:

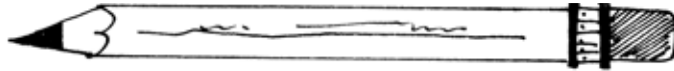
- Limits opportunities for the victim;
- Blames the victim for his or her circumstances;
- Leads to internalization of low self-worth;
- Produces First Nations and Métis people as hostile; and,
- Leads to early school exit (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002).

School Boards Can

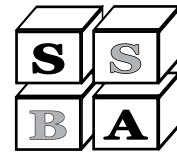
In order to better serve all students in the school division, school boards can:

- Learn more about the education of previous generations of First Nations and Métis students in the school division.
- Reflect on how the educational experiences of the parents, grandparents and great-grandparents of today's students affect the education of today's students.

Notes



Building Board Knowledge



1. *What is the history of First Nations education in your area?*

- *Were there residential schools in your area? If so, when were they phased out? What accounts do Elders give of their experiences in residential schools?*

- *Did the federal government operate schools on the First Nation reserves in your area? If so, when did the First Nations assume control of their own schools? What accounts do adults give of their experiences in on-reserve federal schools?*

2. *What is the history of Métis education in your area?*

- *Did you find question #2 above difficult to answer? If so, why has information about Métis schooling faded away?*

Governance

Every school board should be representative of the people it serves. Today, most Saskatchewan school boards serve First Nations and Métis students, who may range in numbers from a small percentage of the student population, to the majority of the student population. Thus, it is appropriate that Saskatchewan school boards ensure that First Nations and Métis voices are heard during their deliberations.

This section on Governance addresses two levels of educational governance:

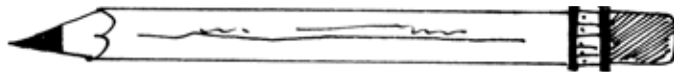
- The school board; and,
- School community councils.

Governance

Every school board should be representative of the people it serves. Today most school boards serve First Nations and Métis students, so First Nations and Métis voices should be heard during the board's deliberations. There is no single "right" or "best" approach to ensuring First Nations and Métis representation during school board deliberations, but rather a number of possible approaches that may be appropriate for different situations.

School boards are required to establish a School Community Council for each school in the division. Membership on these Councils should be representative of the students in the school. For example, if half the students in the school are of First Nations and Métis ancestry, then so should half the members of the School Community Council.

Notes



School Board

The approach that is used to ensure First Nations and Métis representation during school board deliberations will vary depending on the situation, the nature of the community, and the wishes of the school board and local First Nations and Métis community.

Some possible approaches are described on the pages that follow. Each of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages. There is no single “right” or “best” approach. Choose the approach that works best for your school division. In some situations, two or more of these approaches may be operating at the same time. For example, a school board may informally seek advice from a tribal council and at the same time create a joint board to operate a particular high school. A school board may have a formal written partnership agreement with a First Nations and/or Métis organization and at the same time have service agreements with one or more First Nations to provide educational services to the children of the First Nation.

Approach:	No special provisions. It is assumed that when a school division includes a significant number of First Nations and Métis people, some of the school board members who are elected will be First Nations or Métis.
Considerations:	<p>The assumption upon which this approach is based may or may not be valid. There are systemic barriers which make it difficult for many First Nations and Métis people to participate in elections, both as candidates and as voters. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elections are a European concept and not part of traditional First Nations culture. Thus, some First Nations and Métis people feel alienated by the whole election process. • Practical considerations such as lack of transportation may make participation difficult.

Approach:	Informally seeking advice from a band council, tribal council, or First Nations and Métis organization on school board plans and/or issues.
Considerations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control rests with the board, as the board decides which issues it will consult on, who it will consult with, and the extent to which it will accept the advice given. This may or may not be a problem. • The success of this approach depends, in part, on the way it is handled. The potential for success is increased if the school board establishes an ongoing relationship with First Nations and Métis organizations, creates an ongoing pattern of consultation, and acts on the advice it is given. The potential for success is reduced if the board asks for advice in isolated situations and/or fails to act on the advice it is given.

Approach:	Creating a formal written partnership with a local band council, tribal council, or First Nations or Métis organization and developing a formal mechanism that allows the First Nations and Métis partner to participate in decision making.
Considerations:	<p>This approach is sometimes used by city school boards, when the school division has numerous Métis, non-status and off-reserve First Nations students, who come from a variety of backgrounds.</p> <p>The school board may have more than one such partnership – one with a tribal council and one with a local of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, for example.</p> <p>There may be more than two parties to such a partnership. For example, a school board and several First Nations and Métis organizations may form a partnership.</p> <p>The written agreement between the partners typically defines how the parties will work together, the matters or issues they will address, and the decision-making and financial responsibilities of each.</p> <p>The success of this approach depends on the nature of the relationship (in both the written agreement and the working relationship that evolves over time) and on whether the First Nations and Métis partners have opportunities to make real and significant decisions that are implemented by the board.</p>

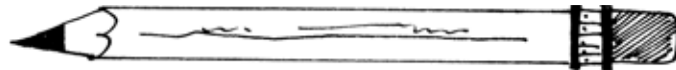
Approach:	Specifying that one seat on the school board is reserved for a person of First Nations or Métis ancestry, to be elected by voters who are also of First Nations and Métis ancestry.
Considerations:	<p>This approach could be problematic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you define “First Nations and Métis ancestry?” How do candidates or voters prove they are of First Nations or Métis ancestry? • Can a First Nations or Métis voter vote for non-Aboriginal candidates in addition to, or instead of, a First Nations or Métis candidate. • How do you manage the logistics of what is essentially an election within an election?

Approach:	Creating a ward system or subdivisions within the school division. Candidates run in a particular ward or subdivision and are elected by people who live within the ward or subdivision.
Considerations:	<p>Since First Nations and Métis people sometimes live in specific areas of the school division, this approach has potential for election of a First Nations or Métis board member by First Nations and Métis people.</p>

Approach:	Creating a joint board to operate a particular school or program.
Considerations:	<p>Sections 92 to 96 of <i>The Education Act, 1995</i> provide for establishment of joint boards comprised of a school board and a variety of other bodies including an Indian band. Joint boards are sometimes established to operate specific schools or programs. The purpose of the joint board and the roles of the partners in the joint board are spelled out in a formal agreement and are subject to the requirements of <i>The Education Act, 1995</i>.</p>

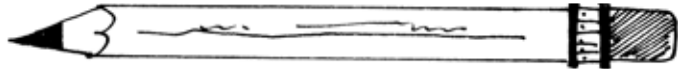
Approach:	Development of a formal service agreement between a First Nation and the school division, in which the school division, for a fee, agrees to provide educational services to students who fall under the First Nation’s jurisdiction.
Considerations:	<p>A service agreement can cover all K-12 students who fall under a First Nation’s jurisdiction or only certain categories of students, such as high school students or special needs students. It can cover all components of the education program or only some. For example, First Nations students might be bussed to the provincial school once a week for industrial arts or some other specialized subject.</p> <p>The nature of the services to be provided, and the terms and conditions under which these services are provided are spelled out in the service agreement. Within the framework provided by <i>The Education Act, 1995</i>, all aspects of the educational program are negotiable. For example, the First Nation might have requirements concerning First Nations content in the education program.</p> <p>While a formal contract is essential to define the parties’ expectations of each other and their legal obligations, the key to a successful service agreement is the relationship that develops between the school board and the First Nation and the extent to which the parties trust each other and are able to talk to each other.</p>

Notes



Approach:	Providing that a representative of each First Nation within the school division’s boundaries has a seat on the school board. Each First Nation is treated as a subdivision as per Section 40 of <i>The Education Act, 1995</i>.
Considerations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Nation representatives are sometimes appointed by the Chief and Council of their First Nation, rather than being elected. The Education Act, 1995 requires that board members be elected. Is this a problem? • The board will be voting on financial matters that affect the off-reserve mill rate. Can the tuition fee that First Nations pay to the board under educational service agreements be tied to the school division budget or the mill rate? • The Ministry of Education policy presently provides for up to five subdivisions. What happens if there are more than five First Nations within a school division’s boundaries? The First Nation subdivisions may contain fewer people than the subdivisions in the rest of the school board. Is this a problem? • Each First Nation is separate and distinct, with its own history, culture, and traditions. This approach acknowledges the uniqueness of each First Nation.

Notes



School Community Council

As of summer 2006, School Community Councils provide a formal mechanism for public engagement at the school level.

Sections 140.1 to 140.5 of *The Education Act, 1995* require that school boards establish a School Community Council for each school in the division. The responsibilities of the School Community Council as defined by legislation appear in the box on the right. Most of these duties are advisory. However, school boards may choose to delegate specific decision-making responsibilities to School Community Councils.

The Regulations to *The Education Act, 1995* specify that if a pupil at a school lives on reserve, the school board shall appoint to the School Community Council representatives identified by the First Nation to which the reserve belongs.

Membership on a School Community Council should be representative of the students in the school. For example, if half the students in the school are First Nations and Métis, then half the members of the School Community Council should also be First Nations and Métis.

The Education Act, 1995 provides for both elected and appointed members. When First Nations and Métis people are under-represented on the School Community Council, the school board may use its authority to appoint members to help create a representative School Community Council.

The Education Act, 1995

Duties and powers

- 140.5 Every school community council shall:
- (a) facilitate parent and community participation in school planning;
 - (b) provide advice to its board of education;
 - (c) provide advice to its school's staff;
 - (d) provide advice to other agencies involved in the learning and development of pupils; and
 - (e) comply with the regulations and the policies of its board of education.

Saskatchewan Regulations 102/2006

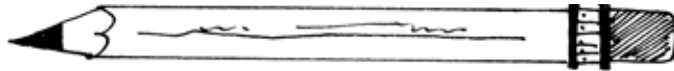
- (4) If a pupil at a school resides on reserve, the board of education shall, for the school community council for that school:
- (a) request that the Indian band, for whose use and benefit the reserve where the student resides has been set aside, identify individuals willing to represent that Indian band on the school community council; and
 - (b) if practicable, appoint at least one of those individuals to the school community council.

School Boards Can

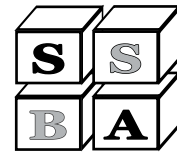
In order to ensure that First Nations and Métis voices are heard during their deliberations, school boards can:

- Identify and implement appropriate processes to involve First Nations and Métis individuals and organizations in their decision making.
- Ensure that membership on a School Community Council is representative of the students in the school. For example, if one-third of the students in the school are of First Nations and Métis ancestry, then one-third of the members of the School Community Council should also be of First Nations and Métis ancestry.

Notes



Building Board Knowledge



1. *What arrangements does your school board presently have to ensure that First Nations and Métis voices are heard during your deliberations?*

- *How well are these arrangements working?*

- *What can you do to enhance First Nations and Métis representation during your deliberations?*

2. *To what extent is membership on the School Community Councils in your division representative of the students in each school?*

Promoting Student Success

Many of the elements that influence the success of First Nations and Métis students are within the control of the school board.

This section on Promoting Student Success addresses seven topics:

- Success;
- First Nations and Métis Content in the Education Program;
- The School Board and the Education Program;
- Classroom Teachers;
- Early Childhood Education;
- Parent and Community Engagement; and,
- First Nations and Métis Elders and Traditional Ceremonies.

Success

What is success? The answer to this question can vary from one culture to another. Success is defined differently by different cultures. First Nations, Métis and European cultures may each have different understandings of what success means.

Within an educational context success means graduating from Grade 12 with the skills and knowledge required to successfully participate in post-secondary education and/or the labour force. But beyond this basic foundation success can mean many different things.

What does success mean to you? Your idea of success might be quite different from that of a First Nations parent or grandparent. Don't assume that everyone has the same definition of success.

Promoting Student Success

Success is defined differently by different cultures, and First Nations, Métis and European cultures may have different understandings of what success means. Many of the elements that influence the success of First Nations and Métis students are within the control of the school board. For example:

- A curriculum that features the integration of First Nations and Métis content contributes to the success of First Nations and Métis students.
- Personal and academic supports can promote learning and facilitate attendance for all students.
- First Nations and Métis teachers provide positive role models for all students.
- Early childhood education provides a foundation for positive learning experiences.
- Students do better when families are engaged in their children's education.
- Elders can make a positive contribution to the school program.

A few meanings of success are listed below. Check the ones that describe your idea of success. Find out what success means to other school board members. Find out what success means to First Nations and Métis people in your community. How are your ideas of success the same? How are they different?

Success can be:

- Competing with other students;
- Cooperating with other students;
- Helping other students who have personal/family problems;
- Helping at home;
- Standing out from the other students in the class;
- Fitting in with the other students in the class;
- Getting extremely high marks;
- Showing that you know more than other students during class discussions;
- Achieving at the same level as other students in the class;
- Showing obedience and respect to teachers and other school staff;
- Talking back to teachers and being sassy to show that you are an individual and to stand out;
- Retaining your cultural heritage and showing pride in your cultural heritage;
- Staying out of trouble;
- Following the rules of the school to show obedience and to create harmony;
- Ignoring the rules of the school to show that you are an individual and to stand out;
- Getting all your work done;
- Doing only enough work to pass the course;
- Participating in extra curricular activities; or,
- Only participating in activities that count for marks.

First Nations and Métis Content in the Educational Program

Integrating First Nations and Métis ways of knowing, content, and perspectives into the education program is an important way of making schools more inclusive for all students. The two sections below discuss integrating First Nations and Métis content into the curriculum and into learning resources.

Curriculum

Many studies have shown that a curriculum that features the integration of First Nations and Métis content is one of the factors that contributes to the success of First Nations and Métis students. (Bell et al., 2004; Canada Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Kanu, 2005; Lofthouse, 1995; Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998a, 1998b; Morin, 2004; Robillard, 1993; Wotherspoon and Schissel, 1998)

First Nations and Métis Ways of Knowing, Content and Perspectives are a key element of Saskatchewan's curriculum. The Saskatchewan curriculum is designed so there is centralized infusion of these elements. This means that First Nations and Métis Ways of Knowing, Content and Perspectives are to be an integral part of all curricula, in all classrooms, at all grade levels. They are not an add-on or intended just for classrooms with significant numbers of First Nations and Métis students. This approach to curriculum is based on the belief that incorporation of First Nations and Métis Ways of Knowing, Content and Perspectives promotes in all students understanding and positive attitudes toward First Nations and Métis peoples.

As well as infusing First Nations and Métis Ways of Knowing, Content and Perspectives into the entire curriculum, the Saskatchewan program of studies includes some courses that specifically address First Nations and Métis topics. For example, there are high school courses in Aboriginal Languages and Native Studies that can be taken for credit.

The Saskatchewan curriculum makes provision for Locally-Determined Options which allows school divisions to develop and teach (subject to the Ministry of Education regulations) topics or courses that are of particular relevance to the community. School divisions may use this provision to develop and teach courses or units of study specific to the First Nations and Métis in their area.

Learning Resources

Learning resources include the books, videos, computer programs, online databases, and other educational materials used in the instructional program. Learning resources also include materials in the school library and online resources that students use for research, enrichment and personal reading. It is important that a proportion of the learning resources in every school feature First Nations and Métis Ways of Knowing, Content, and Perspectives. This allows First Nations and Métis students to see themselves, their families and their communities reflected in the resources they use in school. It enables all students to learn more about First Nations History, traditions and culture and to see historic and contemporary events from a First Nations and/or Métis perspective.

The School Board and the Education Program

Role of the School Board

The school board is responsible for ensuring an appropriate program of studies for every child. The broad goals of education and the curriculum are provincially determined, but school boards are responsible for making choices and organizing appropriate learning opportunities for the students in their division.

Although the basic curriculum is prescribed by the Ministry of Education, *The Education Act, 1995*, gives school boards considerable control over the school program.

The Education Act, 1995

85 (1) ... a board of education shall:

(j) subject to the Regulations, authorize and approve the courses of instruction that constitute the instructional program for each school in the school division.

87 (1) ... a board of education may:

(f) subject to the Regulations, approve textbooks and other learning resource material and teacher reference.

176 (1) With the approval of the Minister, a board of education or a conseil scolaire may authorize the implementation of a course of study that has been developed within the school division or the francophone education area for use in any of the schools in the school division or the francophone education area, and that a course may be recognized for credit purposes in accordance with the Regulations.

179 A board of education or a conseil scolaire may authorize the organization of cultural and athletic activities, youth travel, outdoor education and similar activities as features of the educational program of the schools.

School boards are responsible for:

- Approving the educational program in each school;
- Approving textbooks and other resource materials. This is usually done by development of a materials selection policy; the *Regulations to The Education Act, 1995* require that every school board have such a policy;
- Approving courses of study that are developed locally (Locally-Determined Options). This is usually done by creating a policy which specifies procedures for development and approval of Locally-Determined Options; and,
- Authorizing cultural and athletic activities.

In order to shape the education program in their school division, school boards can:

- Establish goals for student outcomes. School division goals for student outcomes will be influenced by provincial priorities, but boards are certainly not limited by provincial goals. Boards may want to refine provincial goals for student outcomes or set additional goals. The provincial and local student outcome goals will be one of the elements that determine what is taught in the schools.

It is appropriate for a board to set goals concerning outcomes for First Nations and Métis students. For example, one goal might be that the graduation rate for First Nations and Métis students will be the same as the graduation rate for the student population in general. Another goal might be that achievement scores for First Nations and Métis students are comparable to those of the student population in general.

- Make decisions about those aspects of the education program that are under the board's control. In some cases this will involve developing a policy, in other cases it will involve reviewing and accepting (or not) recommendations put forward by school staff.
- Align resources to reflect priorities. Resources usually include money and staff, but may also include inservice training, facilities and transportation.
- Establish monitoring systems to assess progress toward achieving goals for student outcomes. Effective monitoring tells board and staff whether existing programs are supporting progress toward improved student achievement. Monitoring systems should be designed so the school board will know whether the goals it has set concerning outcomes for First Nations and Métis students are being achieved.

Supporting Students

In situations where outcomes for First Nations and Métis students, such as the school attendance rate and the high school graduation rate, do not reflect goals set by the school board, an appropriate board response is not to lower expectations for First Nations and Métis students, but rather to ensure that First Nations and Métis students see themselves, and their culture and heritage reflected in the school program and to provide appropriate supports for students.

Information about the education program appears throughout this section. Since school boards are responsible for approving the educational program in each school, the board can ensure that First Nations and Métis Ways of Knowing, Content and Perspectives are appropriately integrated into the curriculum, school activities and the school environment.

Other supports that promote learning and facilitate regular attendance for all students include:

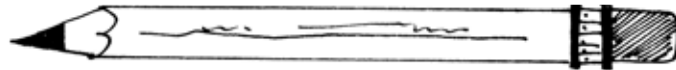
- Academic supports such as tutoring or enrichment programs, a quiet place to study after school, or consistent access to a computer;
- Personal supports such as addictions counselling, personal counselling or anger management programs;
- Practical supports such as meal programs, clothing depots/exchanges, transportation or child care for teen moms;
- Family supports in situations where the student's family is experiencing dysfunction that interferes with learning; and,
- Supports that enable participation in extracurricular activities such as transportation to and from the extracurricular event and financial assistance to purchase sports equipment, musical instruments, art supplies, and other items needed for extracurricular activities.

School boards alone are not responsible for providing the supports that students require for effective learning. School boards can form partnerships with First Nations governments, First Nations and Métis organizations, and government agencies that serve children and youth (such as health, justice and social services) to provide supports in a consistent and coordinated manner.

Two provincial government initiatives focus on supports and partnerships to foster student learning.

- The Community Schools Program aims to establish schools as centres of learning and hope for children, families and communities. The four key components of the Community Schools Program are: the learning program, family and community partnerships, integrated services, and community development. About 12 percent of the schools in Saskatchewan have been designated as Community Schools (Saskatchewan Learning, n.d.a). These schools receive enhanced funding in order to provide the supports that students need for learning. However, implementing the community school philosophy doesn't depend on enhanced funding. Creating family school partnerships, establishing policies and procedures that foster shared decision making and shared leadership, and collaborating with other agencies in the community are ways of doing business and depend more on attitude and approach than on money for success.
- School^{PLUS} is a concept rather than a program. In the School^{PLUS} model, schools improve student learning by delivering a strong learning program and serving as centres for social, health and other services for children and their families. "Achieving School^{PLUS} is a shared responsibility. It engages families, students, educators and community members in actively working together with human service systems to give Saskatchewan children and youth what they need to succeed" (Saskatchewan Learning, n.d.b.).

Notes



Classroom Teachers

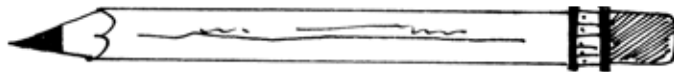
Effective Teachers

The influence of teachers on students' learning and their enjoyment of schooling is well documented. Teachers do make a difference.

Effective teachers of First Nations and Métis students have the following characteristics (Bell, 2004; Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998a):

- The ability to build warm relationships with students and earn students' trust. They are friendly, understanding and less critical than other teachers. They can empathize with students, understand their world and listen to students.
- The ability to reach out to the First Nations and Métis community, develop relationships within the First Nations and Métis community, and become involved in community life.
- A teaching style that builds a family-like atmosphere in the classroom, recognizes cultural diversity, and relies on the use of cooperative and group learning rather than direct instruction and classroom competition.
- An ability to give students considerable freedom within predetermined limits. They "set standards and maintain control while allowing students responsibility and freedom to learn" (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998a, p. 12).
- Expectations for First Nations and Métis students that are consistent with those for other students in the system. Effective teachers do not expect less of First Nations and Métis students.

Notes



First Nations and Métis Role Models

Children learn by observing and interacting with people in the world around them. They model their behaviour on the behaviour of other people in their immediate environment and develop a vision for their future that reflects the possibilities they see for themselves.

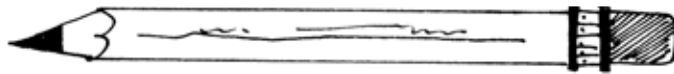
For these reasons, First Nations and Métis teachers, educational associates and other school staff are important. They provide models of success for students.

However, full responsibility for teaching students about First Nations and Métis culture and heritage should not be placed on the shoulders of First Nations and Métis teachers. These teachers will have varying degrees of knowledge about First Nations and Métis traditions depending on their personal experiences and academic studies. Responsibility for teaching about First Nations and Métis culture and heritage can be shared by all teachers in the school.

Aboriginal teachers may find themselves in a particularly awkward predicament, both professionally and personally.

They are often burdened with an expectation on the part of many administrators and teaching colleagues that they are the de facto experts regarding First Nations and Métis cultures and histories and that they should take a leadership role in all aspects of Aboriginal education (St. Denis et al., 1998: 4-6; Bouvier, 2004: 39). To resist these inappropriate and often overwhelming expectations takes considerable courage. At the same time, however, Aboriginal teachers are given the message (sometimes none too subtly) that if they do not show leadership on Aboriginal education initiatives, no one else will. This dilemma is compounded by an accountability environment where what is “really important” are certain subjects (mathematics, the sciences, and language arts/literacy), not Aboriginal education (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006, pp. 25-26).

Notes



Early Childhood Education

Much of the research done on First Nations and Métis education points to the importance of early childhood education programs as the foundation for positive learning experiences and school success. Early childhood development, including the prenatal stage, is the most important stage in lifelong learning, as it provides the developmental foundation for all later learning and increases the likelihood of success (Battiste & McLean, 2005):

In education, as in health, childhood is the foundational stage. Traditional family life provided a firm foundation of security and encouragement for Aboriginal children. Aboriginal families of today are not always able to provide this. Parents may be hampered by the effects of poverty, alienation, residential school experience, and dysfunctional family or other relationships. Many Aboriginal children arrive at school with special needs for understanding and support to liberate their in-born capacity for learning.

Like all children, Aboriginal children need to master the intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual tasks of early childhood. Equally, they need grounding in their identity as Aboriginal people (Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996a, p. 18).

Effective early childhood education programs provide children with a positive self-concept, a desire for learning, and an opportunity to develop broad social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills that will serve them well in many different situations and contexts (Battiste & McLean, 2005). For example, effective early childhood education programs aim to develop a curiosity about books and an enjoyment in being read to rather than memorization of the alphabet. They aim to develop a love of music (both First Nations and Métis and contemporary) and a sense of rhythm rather than memorization of any particular song.

In Saskatchewan, the provincial government funds a Prekindergarten program for three- and four-year old children who can benefit from additional supports such as speech, language and social development programming. The program gives young children extra attention so they will be prepared for Kindergarten and Grade 1. Most of the Prekindergarten programs are located in Community Schools.

The provincial government also funds KidsFirst, a community-based program for vulnerable children up to the age of five and their families.

In addition, the federal government funds various programs for young children and their families. Aboriginal HeadStart is a community-based program currently being offered through Health Canada. It targets Aboriginal children from birth to the age of six years, with an emphasis on three- to five-year-old children.

Parent and Community Engagement

There is a huge body of research showing that when families are engaged in their children's education, students achieve higher grades, are more likely to stay in school, have better attendance and more positive attitudes toward school (Kavanagh, n.d.). This is true of all students, regardless of where they live, their cultural backgrounds, or their socioeconomic status.

Strong involvement of First Nations and Métis families and communities in their children's development and education is entirely consistent with First Nations educational traditions. "Traditional First Nations education was largely an extended family nurturing system in which the young developed vital character and life skills attributes" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1988).

Even though engagement of family and community in children's learning promotes student success and is a key element of traditional First Nations and Métis culture, many obstacles inhibit that engagement. These include:

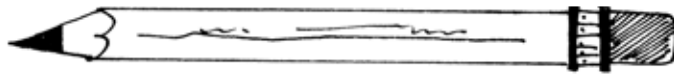
- Many adults have had bad personal experiences at school – Many First Nations and Métis adults have experienced failure, humiliation, and pain at school. Some Elders – the grandparents and great-grandparents of today's students – perceive schools in terms of the residential school.
- Family members don't feel welcome at school – School staff members may, intentionally or unintentionally, patronize family members, talk down to them, devalue their contribution or ignore them. Family members may feel that their values are not respected by the school staff and become disillusioned if their attempts to become involved make no difference. Alienation of parents is increased when teachers do not contact parents unless there is trouble with their children. Even when none of these things occurs, a school that does not reflect First Nations and Métis cultures and values can seem unwelcoming.
- Schools and teachers may not know how to increase parent and community involvement – Teacher education programs may not provide specific training in parent and community involvement and many teachers and principals are uncertain about how to establish positive relationships with families and communities. In addition, conventional power relationships between teachers and parents can block effective communication.
- Parents and families may not know how to help their children – Parents may feel they do not have the knowledge and skills to help their children. This is particularly true of parents with low literacy levels. They may be willing to assist, but don't know how.

- Fitting learning activities in at home can be difficult – Some parents experience poverty and providing for food, clothing and shelter takes priority over schooling. Working parents may be juggling job and home responsibilities and may have limited time to become involved in their child’s education (Kavanagh, n.d.).

There’s a lot that schools can do to encourage family engagement. Research shows that three key factors appear to explain parents’ decision to become engaged in their children’s education:

- Their belief that it is important, necessary and permissible for them to do so;
- How comfortable they are in helping their children with schoolwork; and,
- Whether they feel they have been invited through meaningful opportunities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Notes



Six different types of family engagement activities are possible (Kavanagh, n.d.):

- Assisting with the creation of safe and supportive home environments – This includes supporting positive parenting, helping families meet their basic needs, and encouraging parents to emphasize the value of learning.
- Designing effective two-way communication strategies – Parents have a right to be informed about school programs and students’ progress using parent-friendly language. They also have a right to express to the school their concerns about their child and their hopes and dreams for their child.
- Creating caring welcoming environments for parents’ involvement in the school – Warm, welcoming, respectful staff members are important in creating an environment that fosters family involvement. So is a physical and educational environment that reflects First Nations and Métis culture, history and traditions.
- Helping parents to assist with home learning activities – Research shows that parents want schools and teachers to advise them about how to help their child at home at the various grade levels. Parents can be encouraged to establish a daily routine and to schedule daily homework times. Family literacy programs and similar activities where people of all ages learn together can be helpful when parents feel they lack the skills to help their children.
- Involving parents as key partners in educational decision-making – Parental participation in school and school board decision-making makes that decision-making more effective for students and schools. It also gives parents more of a sense of ownership and commitment. In order to ensure maximum participation it may be appropriate to provide family members with information about opportunities for involvement and with training relating to responsibilities, meeting procedures and the like.
- Integrating school and community agencies to support students and families – Schools can work with cultural and recreational groups, and health, social service and justice agencies to provide access to and coordinate support services for children and families. Schools can also work with community agencies to ensure that the educational, social and health needs of parents are met, so that parents are better able to support their children’s education (Kavanagh, n.d.).

First Nations and Métis Elders and Traditional Ceremonies

“The over-arching benefit of involving Aboriginal Elders, community workers, cultural advisors and other resource people in the school is that Aboriginal students see themselves and their cultural heritage reflected and respected within the school. This helps students develop positive self-esteem, which in turn helps them achieve their potential in school and in life” (Saskatchewan Education, 2001, p. 3).

Other benefits include:

- Building relationships with the community – First Nations and Métis resource people can enhance communication and relationships between the school and the First Nations and Métis communities and help parents feel welcome in the school (Saskatchewan Learning, 2001).
- Providing support for students and teachers – Students may be more willing to share concerns with an Elder than with a peer or a teacher. Teachers may seek out Elders for practical information about First Nations and Métis culture and traditions or for personal advice (Saskatchewan Learning, 2001).
- Enhancing awareness and knowledge of First Nations and Métis ways of knowing, perspectives, culture and traditions – First Nations and Métis resource people can help students and teachers better understand First Nations and Métis perspectives and help schools staff integrate First Nations and Métis content in the education program (Saskatchewan Learning, 2001).

A series of questions about the involvement of Elders and other First Nations and Métis resource people in the school program follow. There is no single “correct” or “best” answer to any of these questions. First Nations and Métis traditions and protocols are quite different. As well, traditions and protocols vary from one First Nation to another. There can be significant differences between the northern and southern parts of the province. School boards and communities, also, will vary in their perspectives and in the types of relationships that have been established between the board and First Nations and Métis groups.

School boards should work in collaboration with local Métis and First Nations organizations, tribal councils and/or band councils when addressing the questions below. The procedures used should be those that are accepted by the school board and the local First Nations and Métis community.

Question:	Who is an elder?
Response:	Elders are people who are respected by their community for their knowledge, wisdom and/or personal characteristics. Elders are usually older people. Their knowledge and wisdom comes from their own life experience and because they are keepers of the knowledge that has been passed from one generation to another through the oral tradition.

Question:	How do we identify an Elder?
Response:	Elders are identified by the community. School boards may want to consult local First Nations and Métis organizations when identifying Elders, as these organizations know who is respected in the community and whose knowledge and wisdom qualifies them to be an Elder. People who aggressively promote themselves as Elders to the school board may not be true Elders. True Elders are humble and kind. They receive respect because of their personal qualities and knowledge, and do not promote themselves.
Considerations:	Most school boards have human resources policies that prescribe a competitive process for employee selection. This process typically involves advertising, application with resume, interview, reference checks, and selection by an administrator or panel. The process for identifying an Elder is quite different and school board human resources departments may have to develop policies specifically for this situation.

Question:	How do we approach an Elder?
Response:	Seek the assistance of a knowledgeable intermediary to ensure that the appropriate protocols are followed. The protocols vary from community to community and may involve presenting the Elder with a gift. The gift is a token of respect, not a payment, and it may or may not have monetary value.
Considerations:	A gift of tobacco is often traditional for an Elder. However, this may not be appropriate in an educational situation because schools are smoke-free environments and because schools do everything they can to prevent students from smoking. Ask a knowledgeable intermediary for suggestions concerning an appropriate gift. This aspect of an Elder's program should be addressed before the Elders program is initiated (Saskatchewan Education, 2001).

Question:	Must Elders provide a criminal record check?
Response:	Most school divisions have a policy that anyone who is in contact with children must provide a criminal records check. To do otherwise is to risk exposing children to harm and to risk a lawsuit for the school board.
Considerations:	This process can be made easier if you pay the cost of the criminal records check and assist the Elder with the paperwork involved.

Question:	What are the expectations of Elders who work in schools?
Response:	<p>Elders can play a wide variety of roles in schools including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a positive role model • Assisting with curriculum adaptations; • Advising students, teachers, administrators, and school board members on cultural matters; • Direct teaching of students; • Counselling students, teachers, administrators, and school board members; and, • Working with students and their families
Considerations:	<p>Expectations of Elders and other community resource people should be defined in order to prevent confusion. This can be done through a job description or through an outline of the role of the Elder. Elders' responsibilities will vary from one school to another depending on the nature of the school community and the Elder's area of expertise. Therefore, job/role descriptions are best developed at the school level rather than the school division level.</p> <p>Elders each have their own areas of expertise. A single Elder may not have the expertise or desire to play all the roles listed above. Thus, it may be appropriate to employ more than one Elder with different areas of expertise or to adjust the job description to reflect the expectations of a particular Elder (Saskatchewan Education, 2001).</p>

Question:	How do we pay Elders?
Response:	<p>Elders' knowledge, expertise and time have value. Elders should be fairly reimbursed for their contribution to the school. At the same time, however, some Elders may be uncomfortable talking about money matters. Elders' pay will depend on whether they work full- or part-time. It is a good idea to ask local First Nations organizations about appropriate payment for Elders and to check with other school boards regarding their practices in this regard (Saskatchewan Education, 2001).</p>
Considerations:	<p>In the interests of fairness and consistency, school boards may decide to tie Elders' payments to the salary schedule for teachers, educational assistants or other school personnel.</p>

Question:	What supports do Elders need?
Response:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elders who are in the school frequently will probably want a desk or other personal space. Some Elders may need an office or seminar room where they can meet with individuals or small groups. • The Elders who work in various schools across the division may want to get together occasionally to share information, discuss issues, or enrich their knowledge. The content of such sessions should be determined by the Elders themselves, not laid out by the school division. These sessions might feature formal or informal discussions among the participants, guest speakers, visits to each other’s schools, and the like.

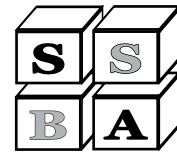
Question:	What role do traditional ceremonies play in the school program?
Response:	The Ministry of Education recommends that, in most situations, traditional ceremonies are the responsibility of the home and the community, not the school. However, there may be unique factors which make these ceremonies appropriate in some schools and some situations. Seek the advice of the school’s Elder in this regard and accept the wisdom of the Elder.
Considerations:	If a school or situation in your division is one where traditional ceremonies are appropriate, be sure to make provision for both First Nations and non-First Nations students who do not wish to participate. There is diversity within the First Nations community and different people express their spirituality in different ways. Some school boards require a signed consent form from the student’s legal guardian as a condition of participation. Alternative activities that are just as interesting and engaging should be provided for students and teachers who choose not to participate.

School Boards Can

In order to promote success for all students, school boards can:

- Develop policies that define the board’s expectations regarding:
 - Desired outcomes for all students;
 - Parent and community involvement in education;
 - First Nations Elders and resource people in the schools; and,
 - Traditional ceremonies in the schools.
- Align resources to reflect the board’s expectations. For example, if the board develops policy supporting an Elders program in the schools, that program will need to be supported with resources, such a money and transportation. If the board sets goals for student outcomes, those goals will need to be supported with resources for the education program.
- Establish monitoring systems to ensure that the board’s policies are being implemented as intended. The board must identify the information it needs to obtain through the monitoring system and request that information from the director of education.
- Celebrate the successes of students, families, teachers and the school division as a whole. Improved student outcomes, increased parent and family involvement, and strong relationships with First Nations governments, First Nations and Métis organizations and community agencies are all things to celebrate.
- Learn more about all the topics addressed in this advisory by reviewing the expanded version that is available on the website of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (www.saskschoolboards.ca). The expanded version provides links to relevant websites and online publications, and lists books for additional reading.

Building Board Knowledge



1. *How do you define student success?*

2. *What policies and procedures does your board use to approve the education program in each school?*

- *How do you ensure that First Nations and Métis students see themselves and their culture reflected in the education program of the school they attend?*

3. *What policies have you developed concerning:*

- *Desired outcomes for all students?*
- *Parent and community involvement in education?*
- *First Nations Elders and resource people in the schools?*
- *Traditional ceremonies in the schools?*

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