



Policy Paper

Aboriginal Students

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Disclaimer about the Authors

Neither of the authors of this policy paper is of Aboriginal descent. The paper was prepared in consultation with stakeholders in Aboriginal post-secondary education, including focus groups, meeting with the Aboriginal Education Office, and participation at the 2011 Aboriginal Postsecondary Education Gathering.

Executive Summary

This policy addresses the need for a strategy to address the significant and widening post-secondary attainment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Ontario. The lower participation rate of Aboriginal people in Ontario stems from a complex interaction of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Students believe that all willing and qualified students should be able to access a post-secondary education. In recognition of the historical barriers Aboriginal students face in accessing university, in consultation with Aboriginal communities, the federal and provincial governments must adopt a proactive strategy to raise Aboriginal participation in higher education. A comprehensive strategy must include multiple strategies which can be grouped into five categories:

Early Outreach

- Aboriginal youth must have access to high quality, culturally relevant primary and secondary education, which requires enhanced funding by the provincial and federal government. Aboriginal nations and communities should have control over the content, design and delivery in reserve settings.
- Early outreach initiatives are important in improving access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students. These programs and partnerships between post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal communities should be supported by the provincial and federal governments, be managed in appropriate consultation with Aboriginal communities, and tailored to each community's specific needs.

Financial Support

- Both the provincial and federal governments have a responsibility to ensure that all Aboriginal students are able to access adequate funding for the pursuit of post-secondary education.
- The federal government must uncap and annually increase Post-Secondary Student Support Program funding to levels that will provide full support to all Aboriginal students in financial need, and the provincial government must expand the Aboriginal Bursary program to meet unmet financial need.

Student Support Services

- Aboriginal students should be able to access specific on-campus student support services that adequately address their needs, including Aboriginal student centres, housing support, cultural supports, and childcare.
- The provincial government should work with local Aboriginal Education Councils to assess and improve the student support service needs of Aboriginal students.

Institutional Transformation

- Both universities and the government must work with Aboriginal communities to ensure that post-secondary institutions in Ontario provide students with instruction that includes Aboriginal knowledge, values, and languages. Initiatives undertaken should recognize the importance of Aboriginal program control and delivery, with support from the federal and provincial government.
- The provincial government must review the current partnership model of funding for Aboriginal-managed institutions to ensure that students studying at Aboriginal post-secondary institutions are adequately funded. This should include collaboration with the First Nations Accreditation Board in investigating the feasibility of independent accreditation for qualified Aboriginal institutes.

Evaluation

- Evaluation is an essential element of measuring the success of programs designed to raise post-secondary attainment rates for Aboriginal learners, yet there is very little data available on the enrolment and attainment rates of Aboriginal students
- Increased resources must be made available to facilitate information-gathering on Aboriginal students within the post-secondary education system. The provincial government must begin to annually audit Aboriginal student enrolment and attainment rates in all post-secondary education institutions in Ontario.

Introduction

While socio-economic factors such as poverty and unemployment put them at an obvious disadvantage, Aboriginal students also face more subtle barriers such as discrimination, low self-concept and institutional insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures. Many Aboriginal students arrive in post-secondary institutions without adequate high school preparation; others struggle to balance education with family responsibilities. Combined with a history of forced assimilation through educational institutions, the barriers to Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education are formidable.¹

In 1952 only two Aboriginal students were attending university in all of Canada. By 1969 this number had risen to 100 Aboriginal students. Today it is estimated that there are nearly 30,000 Aboriginal students in university in Canada, with almost half studying in Ontario.² Despite this dramatic increase in university enrolment, Aboriginal people are still far less likely to enrol in post-secondary education (PSE) than non-Aboriginal individuals. In Ontario, recent data suggests the university attainment gap among 24 to 26 year olds is 28 per cent.³ The ramifications of this gap are considerable. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples estimated that Aboriginal poverty will cost Canada \$11 billion per year by 2016, which is double the cost of services and programs reaching First Nations communities.⁴ Compared to non-Aboriginal Ontarians, Aboriginal individuals have lower life expectancies, higher incarceration rates, are more likely to live in poverty, and are more likely to be unemployed.

The low participation rate of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education stems from a complex interaction of historical, cultural and socio-economic factors. For a number of years, any Aboriginal person earning a post-secondary credential faced automatic enfranchisement and loss of their status as Aboriginal under Canadian law.⁵ Moreover, primary and secondary education was long used as an aggressive assimilative tool through the residential school system, whereby Aboriginal children were removed from their families and communities, forbidden from speaking their native language, and often subject to emotional, physical and sexual violence.⁶ The purpose of these schools was described as “killing the Indian in the child”.⁷ Attendance at residential schools was compulsory for all Aboriginal children between the ages of 4 and 15 until 1948.⁸ The destructive legacy of residential schools, and the mistrust it fostered between Aboriginal people and the Canadian education system, has been well documented elsewhere. The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples described residential schools as causing a loss of cultural identity and pride, leading to community breakdown and violence.⁹ The residential school system has been recognized as having such a detrimental impact on the well-being and development of Aboriginal youth, that in 2008 the Prime Minister offered a full apology for the system to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.¹⁰

¹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

² The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

³ Finnie, R., Childs, S., & Wismer, A. (2011). *Under-Represented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

⁴ Government of Canada. (1996). *Highlights from the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

⁵ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

⁶ Assembly of First Nations. (2007). *Residential Schools - A Chronology*. Accessed at <http://64.26.129.156/article.asp?id=2586>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

⁹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

¹⁰ Harper, Stephen. (June 11th, 2008). *Statement of Apology on Behalf of former students of Indian Residential Schools*. Ottawa: The Government of Canada.

The generations of Aboriginal peoples who were forced to attend the residential school system are the parents and grandparents of the children and youth currently in primary and secondary school. Concerns linger today over the underfunding for Aboriginal primary, secondary and post-secondary schools, the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum, and whether universities can support Aboriginal learners in an anti-discriminatory, identity-affirming manner as they pursue higher education.

To rectify these problems, and increase the post-secondary attainment rate of Aboriginal students, the federal and provincial governments must work to support all willing and qualified Aboriginal students who hope to attend a post-secondary institution. For the purposes of this policy, 'Aboriginal' is defined as any person identifying as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. 'Status' First Nations¹¹ refers to those Aboriginal individuals who are recognized as having First Nations status under Canadian law, and therefore are entitled to treaty rights. This paper focuses on four critical areas that must be addressed to achieve more equitable access to higher education for Aboriginal youth. These areas are: early outreach, financial support, student support services, and the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives at the institutional level. Additionally, the importance of adequate data gathering and program evaluation is discussed. Students believe that increasing the post-secondary attainment rate of Aboriginal peoples is vital to creating an equitable and prosperous society, and that the provincial government has a critical role to play in this pursuit.

Principles

Principle One: All willing and qualified students in Ontario must be able to access and excel within Ontario's post-secondary education system.

All willing and qualified students in Ontario must be able to access and excel within Ontario's post-secondary system, regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, geographic location, or any other external factor. Students recognize the advantage of higher education from both a social and economic perspective. The societal benefits of a highly educated population serve to relieve the poverty cycle, reduce crime rates, and increase civic participation and engagement with social affairs.¹² Aside from the notion that all students should have an equal opportunity to access higher education, the economic need to engage underrepresented groups in PSE is clear. In economic terms, the oft-quoted statistic is that 70 per cent of jobs require some form of post-secondary education or training.¹³

While participation in PSE has been increasing steadily over the last decade, participation rates some groups that have been traditionally underrepresented, including Aboriginal students, have not kept pace. Aboriginal peoples in Ontario tend to occupy a marginalized position in society. Due to a history of injustice, they have lower incomes than non-Aboriginal families, a higher incidence of suicide, are more likely to be incarcerated, and have life expectancies that are eight to ten years lower than those of non-Aboriginal Ontarians.¹⁴ Evidence suggests that successful completion of post-secondary education can help close the earnings gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals because "the gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unemployment rates...declines with education until there is little difference among those with a university degree."¹⁵ That all willing and qualified Aboriginal students can access and excel in Ontario's post-secondary system is particularly important given that many Aboriginal communities face skilled-labour shortages in a number of fields crucial for community development and self-governance, including education, medical fields, and environmental sciences.

Principle Two: Aboriginal students continue to face unique historical and cultural barriers to participation in higher education.

¹¹ Usually referred to in government documents as "Status Indian"; however, in recognition of the discriminatory and colonial connotations of the term "Indian", this document replaces "Indian" with "First Nations".

¹² TD Economics. (2004). *Investing in higher education delivers a stellar rate of return*. Toronto: TD Economics.

¹³ Ontario Ministry of Finance. (2010). "Post-secondary Education," *2010 Ontario Budget*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Finance.

¹⁴ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁵ Hull, Jeremy. (2005). *Postsecondary education and labour market outcomes*, Canada, 2001. Winnipeg: Prologica Research.

While some barriers that Aboriginal students face in accessing post-secondary education are shared with other groups, like low-income and rural and northern students, it is important to recognize that Aboriginal students also face unique historical and cultural barriers to participation in higher education. Education was one of the major means through which European settlers attempted to assimilate Aboriginal peoples. The residential school system was intended to remove students from their parents, and communities, to prevent the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and language from generation to generation. Historically, urban and rural Aboriginal students attending provincially-funded schools have had to contend with Eurocentric curriculum that ignored Aboriginal issues. Similarly, Aboriginal students attending accredited post-secondary institutions have faced a hostile, culturally insensitive curriculum and system, which has not recognized Aboriginal cultural values and contributions to contemporary societies. Even more disturbing, up until 1960, any Aboriginal person who earned a post-secondary credential automatically lost their status as First Nations, a step meant to recognize their integration into Euro-Canadian society.¹⁶ Higher education was then directly associated with assimilation, through the both Eurocentric curriculum content and the loss of Aboriginal status under the law. This legacy has contributed to a multitude of social problems in Aboriginal communities, and created an atmosphere of distrust regarding education between Aboriginal peoples and provincial and federal governments.

Principle Three: Both the provincial and federal governments hold responsibility for providing Aboriginal communities with improved access to post-secondary education.

Both the federal and provincial governments have articulated a responsibility for improving access to post-secondary education for all Aboriginal students. In January 2007, the Ontario government directly acknowledged this responsibility, launching a new Aboriginal Education Strategy stating that it was “committed to providing accessible, high-quality education and training opportunities to Aboriginal peoples at all levels of learning”.¹⁷ Many Aboriginal nations believe that a fair interpretation of treaty rights obliges the federal government to fund post-secondary education in the same way that it funds primary and secondary school for status-First Nations and Inuit students.¹⁸ The federal government disagrees with this view, but at the same time has taken responsibility for some funding of post-secondary education for Aboriginal students, through the creation of the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). While it is beyond the scope of this policy to judge whether a fair treaty interpretation mandates the full federal funding of post-secondary education for Aboriginal students, students believe that all youth in Ontario should have an equitable opportunity to attend post-secondary institutions. In recognition of the historical and contemporary injustices Aboriginal people face in Ontario, both the provincial and federal government have a responsibility to improve access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students.

Concerns

Concern One: While enrolment rates among Aboriginal students have increased, they remain significantly less likely than other Ontarians to enter post-secondary education.

Aboriginal students, including those that self-identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, have particularly low PSE participation rates compared to non-Aboriginal students. In Ontario, Aboriginal individuals have comparable participation in trade certificates, apprenticeships, and college programs as non-Aboriginals. However, only 9 per cent of the Ontario Aboriginal population aged 25 to 64 has a university certificate or degree, as compared with 26

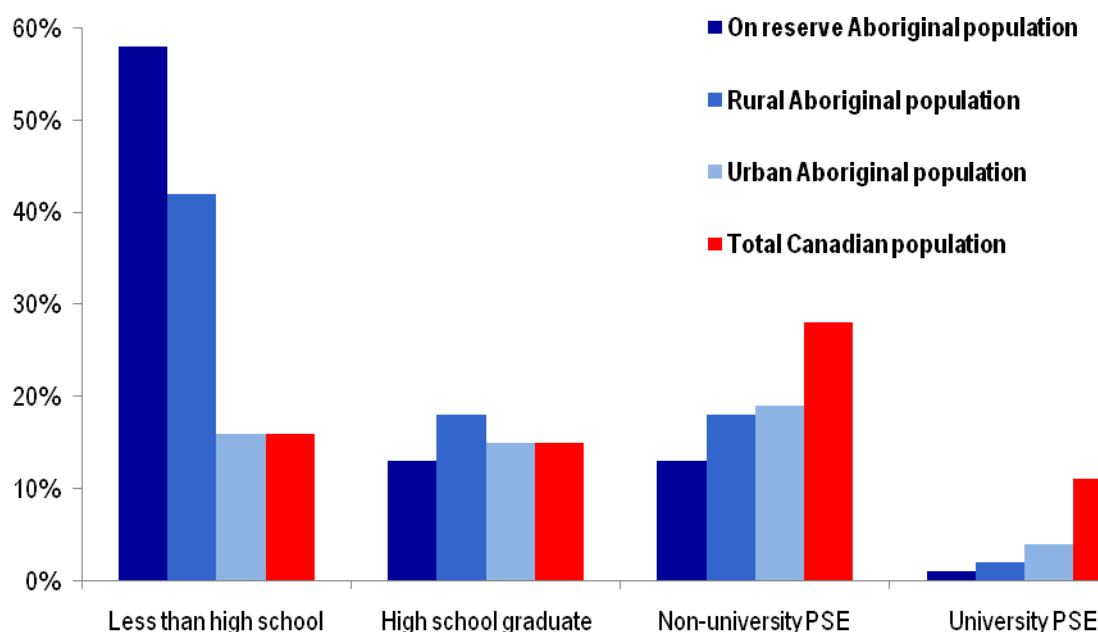
¹⁶ The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

¹⁷ Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009). *Backgrounder: Aboriginal education in Ontario*. Toronto: Government of Ontario.

¹⁸ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). *No higher priority Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada*. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

per cent of the non-Aboriginal population.¹⁹ As PSE participation rates of non-Aboriginal Canadians has increased, the gap in education between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals has widened from 12 per cent in university participation among the 55-64 year old age cohort to 19 per cent among the 25-44 year old age cohort.²⁰ There is also a gap in Aboriginal participation in PSE based upon area of residence, as depicted in Figure 1.²¹

Figure 1: Highest level of attained education, Aboriginal and Canadian population aged 20-24



A significant part of this participation gap is due to the fact that Aboriginal youth have much higher secondary school dropout rates than non-Aboriginal youth.²² Aboriginal youth are more than twice as likely to have dropped out of secondary school as non-Aboriginal youth, with a third of all Aboriginal 25-68 year olds not having completed a secondary school diploma. This number rises as high as half of all youth for on-reserve and Inuit communities.²³ It is worth noting, as Figure 2²⁴ demonstrates, that Aboriginal students who have graduated secondary school have similar, though slightly lower, overall PSE participation rates as the non-Aboriginal population, indicating that increasing the secondary school completion rate is an important step in raising post-secondary participation of Aboriginal youth as a whole. However, this is not the only solution. Aboriginal applicants to post-secondary education in Ontario are twice as likely to decline offers of acceptance as non-Aboriginals.²⁵

¹⁹ R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising practices: Increasing and supporting participation for Aboriginal students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

²⁰ Berger, Joseph, Anne Mott, and Andrew Parkin. (2009). *The price of knowledge: access and student finance in Canada*. 4th edition. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

²¹ Adapted from: Mendelson, Michael. (2006). *Aboriginal peoples and post-secondary education in Canada*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

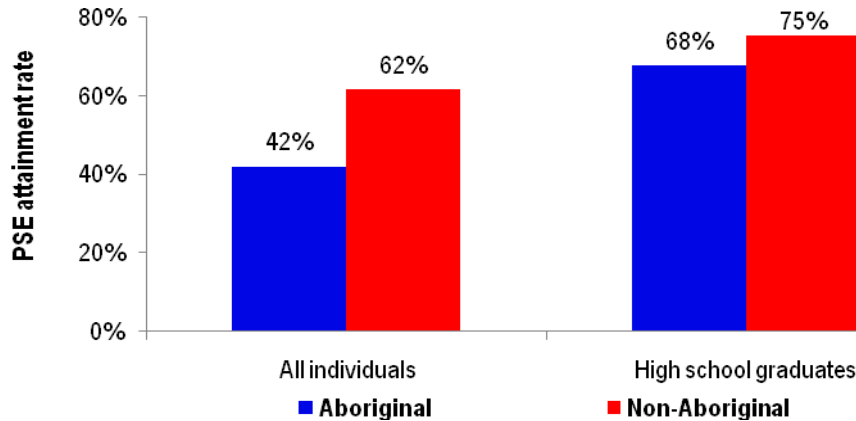
²² Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. (2009). *Post-secondary student access and retention strategies*. Literature review. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

²³ Berger, Joseph, Anne Mott, and Andrew Parkin. (2009). *The price of knowledge: access and student finance in Canada*. 4th edition. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

²⁴ Finnie, R., Childs, S., and Wismer, A. (2011). *Under-Represented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

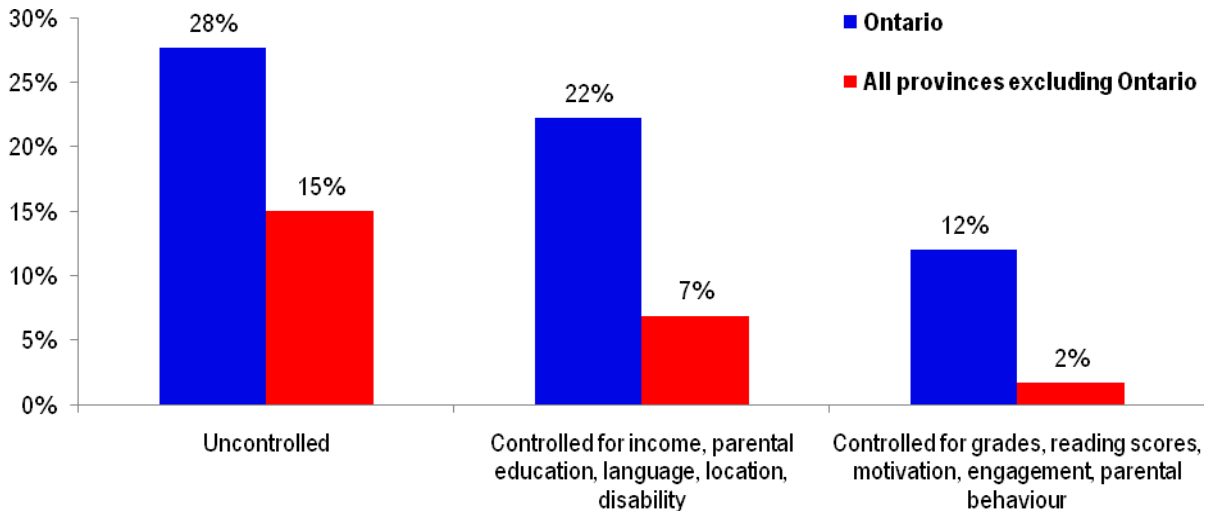
²⁵ McCloy, U., and Sattler, P. (2010). *From Postsecondary Application to the Labour Market: The Pathways of Under-represented Groups*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Figure 2: Impact of Secondary School Completion on Aboriginal PSE Attainment in Canada, Ages 25 to 34



Evidence strongly suggests that the Ontario government is lagging behind in addressing gaps in Aboriginal post-secondary rates. As Figure 3²⁶ shows, a recent study found that the Aboriginal university participation gap in Ontario stands at 28 per cent, compared to 15 per cent in all provinces excluding Ontario. Even after controlling for overlapping characteristics that affect PSE participation, like income, parental educational status, rural location, and disability, in Ontario the gap remains large. What this indicates is that being Aboriginal makes an individual far less likely to access post-secondary education in Ontario than anywhere else in Canada, and a significant portion of this gap cannot be explained by financial, parental, geographic and disability related factors alone. When indicators of academic success, student engagement, student motivation, and parental engagement with the school environment are accounted for, however, the discrepancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Ontario nearly halves from 22 per cent to 12 per cent.²⁷ This supports the contention that a large gap in participation currently exists in Ontario, which could be attributed to programming needs that are not currently being fulfilled in the school environment. In particular, this strongly suggests that the current primary, secondary, and post-secondary school systems are often unsuccessful in engaging Aboriginal learners and supporting their success.

Figure 3: University Participation Gap of Ontario Aboriginal Youth Controlled for Various Factors



²⁶ Finnie, R., Childs, S., and Wismer, A. (2011). *Under-Represented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

²⁷ Ibid.

Concern Two: Inadequate support from the government has created significant barriers for Aboriginal individuals in pursuing post-secondary education.

Inadequate support from the provincial and federal governments has created significant barriers for Aboriginal individuals in pursuing post-secondary education. In 2005, the Prime Minister and Premiers met with Aboriginal leaders, where they collectively concluded that closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners would require an increase of 14,800 Aboriginal post-secondary graduates over the next five years, and 37,000 more by 2015. Leaders agreed that this goal would require an additional \$500 million dollar investment in the immediate future by provincial and federal governments.²⁸ Despite the acknowledgement that raising post-secondary attainment rates for Aboriginal students requires significant investment in funding, the federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) has been arbitrarily capped at increases of 2 per cent per year. Funding through the Ontario government for Aboriginal post-secondary education increased by \$11 million last year, but the government has indicated that any sustainable funding is yet to be determined.²⁹ Funding shortages at the post-secondary level are compounded by the chronic underfunding of education for Aboriginal students at the primary and secondary level. In addition to having implications for financial aid for Aboriginal students, underfunding also affects the other areas of Aboriginal post-secondary education discussed in this paper; inadequate funding has a bearing on the ability of communities to implement early outreach programs, the establishment of Aboriginal student support services, the development of Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogy, and the ability to undertake program evaluation.

Recommendations

Recommendation One: The provincial and federal governments and post-secondary institutions must take action to raise Aboriginal post-secondary participation and attainment rates.

In recognition of the challenges Aboriginal students face in accessing and persisting through post-secondary studies, as well as the fact that Aboriginal students are still significantly underrepresented at Ontario universities, the provincial and federal governments along with post-secondary institutions must take concrete steps to raise Aboriginal post-secondary attainment rates. Students believe that an effective strategy to raise Aboriginal attainment rates is an imperative and must include a wide variety of initiatives designed to holistically address the multiple barriers Aboriginal students face. These include: early outreach at the primary and secondary level, improved financial assistance programs, enhanced student support students on university campuses, institutional transformation initiatives, including the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into post-secondary curricula, and robust evaluation measures.

Early Outreach

Principles

Principle Four: The federal and provincial governments both have a clear obligation to fund high quality, culturally appropriate primary and secondary education for Aboriginal students to adequately prepare them for post-secondary education.

Children and youth require early support to develop the academic and personal skills they need to become strong contributors to their communities. A critical component of this development is the formal education system. All students in Ontario deserve equitable access to a primary and secondary school education system that meets their learning needs, and adequately prepares them to enter the work force, college or university. While education usually

²⁸ Meeting of First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders. (2005). Kelowna, BC. Accessed at: http://www.aicinac.gc.ca/nr/iss/fmm_e.html

²⁹ Frechette, Jean-Guy. (2011). *Ontario's Aboriginal Education Strategy: Presentation to the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*. Toronto: Aboriginal Education Office, Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and Ministry of Education.

falls under provincial jurisdiction, Aboriginal students are in a unique position. By virtue of longstanding treaties between Aboriginal nations and the federal government, Aboriginal education at the primary and secondary level for status First Nations and Inuit is acknowledged as a federal responsibility. As a result, the federal government funds education for on-reserve status youth and also provides funding to the provincial government for status and Inuit youth attending provincial schools. Currently there are 5,212 students in Ontario attending First Nations schools, out of a total of 50,000 Aboriginal primary and secondary school students.³⁰ For non-status First Nations and Métis youth, the federal government largely does not recognize treaty responsibility, and funding these students falls to the provincial government.³¹

It has been widely recognized that both the federal and provincial governments have historically failed to live up to their responsibility to support primary and secondary education for Aboriginal students. In the past, schools have been non-existent in many First Nations communities, and education outside of the community in residential schools was often abusive, assimilationist, and of poor quality.³² Recently the provincial and federal governments, in conjunction with Aboriginal communities and organizations, have attempted to remedy some of the historical injustices concerning Aboriginal education in Canada. Efforts include the establishment of Aboriginal-controlled schools in reserve communities and the increased inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives in curriculum. Despite these changes, Aboriginal youth in Ontario still have significantly poorer educational outcomes at the primary and secondary level, when compared to non-Aboriginal youth.³³ This does not stem from any inherent lack of ability on the part of students themselves, but rather a number of social and educational issues deriving from the colonial legacy of Canada. The legacy of residential schools has created an atmosphere of distrust between many Aboriginal communities and the federal and provincial governments. In many cases, Aboriginal schools are still inadequately funded and lack basic technology and textbooks. In other cases, Aboriginal perspectives have been poorly integrated into the mainstream curriculum and remain neglected or treated superficially. The challenges Aboriginal students in reserve, rural and urban settings face speak to the continuing obligation of the federal and provincial governments to adequately support primary and secondary education for Aboriginal youth. Without a high quality, culturally responsive education system at the primary and secondary levels, Aboriginal youth will continue to be underrepresented at the post-secondary level.

Principle Five: Aboriginal nations and communities should have control over the content, design and delivery of primary and secondary education curricula in reserve settings.

In an effort to counter the damaging legacy of residential schools, new initiatives have placed control of primary, and sometimes secondary, education in the hands of Aboriginal communities on reserve communities. In Canada, Aboriginal peoples have been recognized as having a constitutional right to pass Indigenous knowledge on to the younger generation.³⁴ Indigenous knowledge refers to the traditionally-rooted but changing body of information known to various community members through culture, observation, and lived experience.³⁵ Indigenous knowledge can include knowledge about plants, animals, natural phenomena, the development of hunting, fishing, agriculture and forestry techniques, as well as cosmologies and worldviews. An example of the former would be strategies for integrating selective logging into a specific geographic area without harming natural ecological cycles.³⁶ Examples of the latter would be the philosophical underpinnings of creation myths and other stories, holistic and reciprocal approaches to relationships, and appeals to oral history and elder knowledge as authoritative.³⁷ Indigenous

³⁰ Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009). *Background: Aboriginal education in Ontario*. Toronto: Government of Ontario.

³¹ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). *No higher priority Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada*. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

³² Ibid.

³³ Carr-Stewart, Sheila. (2006). The changing educational governance of First Nations schools in Canada: towards local control and educational equity. *Management in Education: 20* (5), 6-12.

³⁴ Battiste, Marie. (2002). *Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: a literature review with recommendations*. Ottawa, ON: National Working Group on Education and the Minister of Indian Affairs Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Nadasdy, P. (2005). Transcending the debate over the ecologically noble Indian. *Ethnography. 52*(2), 292-328.

³⁷ Ibid.

knowledge is an evolving, changing body of work specific to particular Aboriginal communities. Indigenous knowledge systems have been recognized by the United Nations as critical to the survival of diverse communities and cultures, as well as having very concrete applications for contemporary global issues like tracking and resolving global issues like climate change.³⁸ An education system for Aboriginal students that includes Indigenous knowledge and Aboriginal control of education has been understood as an essential component of building and maintaining community identity.³⁹

The Assembly of First Nations holds the position that Aboriginal control of education ensures that Aboriginal students receive the necessary training for involvement in contemporary society, while reflecting the belief that parents and communities should be strongly involved in deciding what their children learn.⁴⁰ This includes control over budgeting, determining the types of facilities needed to meet local needs, hiring staff and curriculum development. Many contemporary agreements between the federal government and Aboriginal nations explicitly devolve educational control to the nations.⁴¹ Students believe that the trend towards increasing Aboriginal control of schools is an important one for fostering an inclusive, welcoming environment for Aboriginal students, providing an education that recognizes and affirms cultural identity, and counteracting the legacy of residential schools. Aboriginal control of education increases self-determination, while responding to the discrimination and neglect that Aboriginal peoples face in the mainstream education system.⁴² Given the concerns that while Aboriginal control of reserve schools is recognized in principle, in practice communities lack sufficient resources to deliver educational programs, students believe that Aboriginal education initiatives should be supported by the federal and provincial governments.

Principle Six: Early outreach initiatives are important in improving access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students; these programs should be managed by Aboriginal communities and tailored to each community's specific needs.

Early outreach is the engagement of youth in a dialogue about the benefits and opportunities of higher education, and the provision of support for student success in reaching and persisting through a program of study. Early outreach is vital given that nearly half of youth decide to attend PSE before Grade 9.⁴³ Outreach initiatives for Aboriginal students can include mentorship programs in primary and secondary school, visits to post-secondary institutions, interaction with Elders, and academic supports.⁴⁴ Outreach programs are important for facilitating access to post-secondary education because they can help students develop the skills they need to succeed at the post-secondary level, gain familiarity with post-secondary institutions, and develop personal confidence and motivation.⁴⁵

Given both the harmful legacy of outreach initiatives initiating from outside the Aboriginal community, as well as the belief that community members best understand the specific needs of the community, early outreach initiatives should be managed by the target community.⁴⁶ In this instance, community refers to distinct geographic groups of people, like reserves, but also to groups of people who may be geographically dispersed by share common circumstances and needs, including urban Aboriginal communities.

³⁸ Kawamura, H. (2004). Symbolic and political ecology among contemporary New Perce Indians in Idaho, USA". *Agriculture and Human Values*. 21, 157-169.

³⁹ Battiste, Marie. (2002). *Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: a literature review with recommendations*. Ottawa, ON: National Working Group on Education and the Minister of Indian Affairs Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

⁴⁰ Carr-Stewart, Sheila. (2006). The changing educational governance of First Nations schools in Canada: towards local control and educational equity. *Management in Education*: 20 (5), 6-12.

⁴¹ Such as the 1998 Nisga'a Final Agreement (British Columbia) and the 1998 Mi'kmaq Education Act (Nova Scotia). In addition, in 2006 the provincial government of British Columbia undertook a Tripartite Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement as a process to develop federal and provincial legislation to recognize Aboriginal jurisdiction over education, and develop local educational programs.

⁴² R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal peoples and post-secondary education: what educators have learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

⁴³ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer. (2010). *When did you decide?* L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project.

⁴⁴ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising practices: increasing and supporting participation for Aboriginal students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

While students believe that communities should have a direct role in outreach initiatives, it is recognized that in many cases, Aboriginal communities lack sufficient resources to fund educational outreach initiatives. Consequently, while community members may be strongly motivated to improve educational outcomes for their youth, they may be unable to implement outreach programs. Additionally, many types of outreach programs are expensive, particularly those that involve travel from remote communities to post-secondary institutions.⁴⁷ As a result, students believe the provincial and federal governments should provide financial and other support for Aboriginal outreach programs, while ensuring that control and management of these initiatives is with Aboriginal communities.

Concerns

Concern Three: Inadequate support at the primary and secondary levels leaves Aboriginal students underprepared to enter university.

It has been well documented that Aboriginal students are inadequately supported in the primary and secondary school system, both at on-reserve and off-reserve schools. The Chiefs of Ontario note that, “many First Nations students struggle with basic literacy and numeracy skills and for many, post-secondary education remains a dream”.⁴⁸ Aboriginal youth have secondary school dropout rates that are double those of non-Aboriginal youth, with a third of all Aboriginal 25-68 year olds not having obtained a secondary school diploma. This number rises as high as half of all youth for some on-reserve communities.⁴⁹ Historically, Aboriginal schools, including industrial, day and residential schools, were poorly funded and held to poor educational standards, and problems persist to the present day.⁵⁰ Schools located in rural and remote Aboriginal communities often lack basic resources and inadequate funding has been a challenge in raising the standard of Aboriginal education in Ontario.⁵¹ For example, elementary teachers working in reserve communities make 30 per cent less on average than their rural counterparts, which has contributed to difficulties attracting and retaining qualified staff. Teachers in Aboriginal communities have expressed concern that schools are falling behind because of rising costs in supplies, utilities, and salaries of teachers and support staff.⁵² Others have argued that students would be more motivated to attend and excel at school if funds were available to replace outdated textbooks and invest in new equipment.⁵³

A recent comparison undertaken by the Chiefs of Ontario found that band schools received approximately 65 per cent of the per-student funding that students in the provincial system received. Part of this discrepancy stems from a 2 per cent annual cap on federal funding for primary and secondary education that has been in place since 1996. Statistics Canada estimates that educational costs from the 1997-1998 to 2003-2004 school year increased by 23 per cent, and have further risen since.⁵⁴ Federal funding, then, has not kept pace with the increasing costs of providing a quality education at the primary and secondary levels

Inadequate preparation not only leaves students lacking the hard skills necessary for success in a university environment; it also impacts student confidence and motivation. A report by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

⁴⁷ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising practices: increasing and supporting participation for Aboriginal students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

⁴⁸ Chabot, Lise. (2005). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁴⁹ Berger, Joseph, Anne Motte, and Andrew Parkin. (2009). *The price of knowledge: access and student finance in Canada*. 4th edition. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

⁵⁰ Carr-Stewart, Sheila. (2006). The changing educational governance of First Nations schools in Canada: towards local control and educational equity. *Management in Education*: 20 (5), 6-12.

⁵¹ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4): 389-419.

⁵² The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

⁵³ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4): 389-419.

⁵⁴ VanEvery-Albert, Claudine (2005). *A Review of the Band Operated Funding Formula*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

found that a weak foundation in primary and secondary school was part of the reason Aboriginal students were underrepresented at the post-secondary level.⁵⁵ Several studies note that Aboriginal students are concerned about their academic preparation, and consequently less confident about their abilities and less likely to apply to post-secondary institutions, particularly university.⁵⁶ A high teacher turn-over rate and lack of resources in on-reserve schools, as well as poor transition programs for students transferring from on-reserve to off-reserve schooling, all erode the quality of education Aboriginal students receive.

Concern Four: Rural and remote Aboriginal communities often lack information infrastructure and support systems; as a result, students often have inadequate information about post-secondary education.

Many schools in Aboriginal communities lack the necessary support systems. Teachers often have to deal with a variety of personal and situational factors, along with pressure to improve student performance, which can lead to teacher fatigue and inadequate resources to accommodate post-secondary education counselling.⁵⁷ In some Aboriginal communities, close to half the students are deemed to be at risk, and teachers and other staff feel they do not have sufficient time mentor these students.⁵⁸ In managing day-to-day issues, guidance on personal strengths, post-secondary career pathways, and educational funding options inevitably get pushed to the backburner.

Compounding the lack of resources for post-secondary guidance is the lack of communication that has been documented between school staff and Aboriginal parents. While there are a number of initiatives in place to improve parent-teacher interaction in Aboriginal communities, these have not always had the desired results. For instance, recent evaluation of British Columbia's Parental Engagement Strategy found that fewer than 25 per cent of teachers were satisfied with the level of communication they had with Aboriginal parents. In turn, Aboriginal parents expressed distrust and antipathy regarding the public education system, possibly relating to their own negative experiences with the residential school system.⁵⁹ Similar concerns have been reported in Ontario, where Aboriginal parents may experience racism, and apathetic teachers when they try to become more involved in the education system.⁶⁰

Evidence demonstrates that parents play a strong role in the post-secondary aspirations of their children; youth whose parents value education are more likely to attend post-secondary education and persist through their studies.⁶¹ Consequently the lack of trust and communication between Aboriginal parents and school staff can undermine the ability of parents and teachers to provide positive motivational and informational support for students considering studying at a post-secondary institution.

Concern Five: Aboriginal students living in urban environments face primary and secondary school barriers to participation in post-secondary education.

While much of the discussion of Aboriginal students focuses on those living in rural and remote communities, it is important to remember that only a minority of Aboriginal students attend reserve schools and over half of the

⁵⁵ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4): 389-419.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4): 389-419.

⁵⁸ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4): 389-419.

⁵⁹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2002). *Parent and education engagement partnership project: a discussion paper*. British Columbia: Project Advisory Committee.

⁶⁰ Chabot, Lise. (2005). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁶¹ Shaienks, Danielle, Tomasz Gluszynski, and Justin Bayard. (2009). *Postsecondary education participation and dropping out; differences across university, college and other types of post-secondary institutions*. Ottawa: Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics.

Aboriginal population in Ontario lives in cities.⁶² Like many Aboriginal students in rural and reserve settings, urban Aboriginal students face socio-economic barriers to participation. On average, they come from families with incomes substantial lower than the Ontario median,⁶³ and in the context of rising tuition, this can exacerbate financial barriers in access to higher education. Urban Aboriginal student tend to attend schools in low-income areas, which have higher drop-out rates and fewer students that continue onto post-secondary studies.⁶⁴

The urban Aboriginal community is also more dispersed than the reserve community. Consequently, community support focused on Aboriginal youth may be less readily available, and the educational curriculum in primary and secondary schools may be less inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives. For example, while the Ontario government has recently developed secondary school courses on Aboriginal peoples, these courses are not offered at schools with small Aboriginal student populations.⁶⁵ In addition, there is concern that students from outside the dominant culture are more likely to have difficulties in the mainstream education system. Studies have noted that Aboriginal students are underrepresented in gifted programs and are less likely to have their abilities recognized and their talents nurtured.⁶⁶ The lack of culturally relevant courses available in urban schools, combined with socio-economic marginalization, can lead to lowered student confidence and student engagement making students less likely to complete high school and enter post-secondary education.

Concern Six: Aboriginal perspectives, histories, and cultures have not been adequately integrated into primary and secondary school education, and Métis perspectives are particularly underrepresented

Despite a recent emphasis on integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the Ontario primary and secondary school curriculum, there is concern that Aboriginal perspectives are still marginalized in the education system. Despite the existence of eight Native Studies courses at the secondary-level, a limited-sample survey found that 80 per cent of secondary schools surveyed offered no Native Studies courses.⁶⁷ Many Aboriginal groups believe that the contemporary primary, secondary and post-secondary education systems do not include Indigenous knowledge on equitable footing alongside Euro-Canadian knowledge. As one educator explains, “the existing curriculum has given Aboriginal people new knowledge to help them participate in Canadian society, but it has not empowered Aboriginal identity by promoting an understanding of Aboriginal worldviews.”⁶⁸ There are also concerns that Indigenous knowledge is presented at the bottom of a hierarchy that privileges European knowledge, and that it is treated as belonging only to a cultural realm, and not substantively integrated into other areas of the curriculum like sciences or literature.⁶⁹ Often, the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge into primary and secondary school curriculum is seen as a secondary initiative in the face of more pressing daily concerns, like meeting curriculum requirements and preparing students for province-wide testing. Finally, when some Aboriginal content does manage to make it into the classroom, rarely does it include Métis perspectives and issues.

⁶² Peters, E. (2007). First Nations and Metis people and diversity in Canadian cities. In Keith Banting, T.J. Courchene, and F.L. Seidle (Eds.), *Volume III Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada* (pp. 207-246). Montreal, QB: The Institute for Research on Public Policy.

⁶³ Statistics Canada. (2003). *Household income groups (24) in constant (2000) dollars and selected demographic, educational, cultural, language and labour force characteristics of primary household maintainer (87) for private households for Canada, provinces and territories*. 1995. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

⁶⁴ Sweet, R., Anisef, P., Walters, D. and Phythian, K. (2010). *Post-high school pathways of immigrant youth*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

⁶⁵ King, A.J.C., W.K. Warren, M.A. King, J.E. Brook, and P.R. Kocher. (2009). *Who Doesn't Go To Post-Secondary Education? Final Report of Findings for Colleges Ontario Collaborative Research Project*. Kingston, ON: Social Program Evaluation Group Faculty of Education, Queen's University.

⁶⁶ McCluskey, K.W. and Torrance, E.P. (2004). Mentoring: One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development. In K. W. McCluskey and A. M. Mays (eds), *Mentoring for talent development* (pp. 178-195). Sioux Falls, SD: Reclaiming Youth International, Augustana College.

⁶⁷ Faries, Emily. (2004). *Research Paper on Aboriginal Curriculum in Ontario*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁶⁸ Battiste, Marie. (2002). *Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: a literature review with recommendations*. Ottawa: National Working Group on Education and the Minister of Indian Affairs Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Aboriginal parents have expressed concern that the Aboriginal curriculum is under-utilized, and not prioritized by educators.⁷⁰ One elementary school teacher noted that even reserve schools “don’t address the Native issues as much as we can/should, as we are coping with the day-to-day crises of children at risk, rather than focusing on the cultural awareness aspects specifically”.⁷¹ The lack of scholarship on Aboriginal pedagogies also inhibits schools in offering Aboriginal curriculum.⁷² In a survey of Aboriginal schools in Ontario, 82 per cent cited a need for more curriculum development in the area of Native Studies, and 98 per cent, or every school except for one, declared a need for more funding to establish and implement Native Studies courses.⁷³ In addition, the holistic collaborative approach that underlies many Aboriginal worldviews may be difficult to incorporate in an individualistic, competitive learning environment, where teachers are restricted by curricular and other demands in implementing comprehensive changes.⁷⁴ The inability of provincially-funded schools to adequately incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum at all levels of education risks further alienating Aboriginal parents and students from the education system. Additionally, a lack of culturally relevant learning resources may negatively affect student motivation, persistence and engagement, reducing the likelihood that Aboriginal students will persevere through secondary school and enrol in post-secondary education.

Concern Seven: At all levels of the education system, there is a shortage of qualified Aboriginal instructors to teach Aboriginal content, and the formal accreditation system may not recognize Aboriginal expertise.

At the primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, there is a shortage of qualified instructors available to teach Aboriginal content in Aboriginal courses. This was a common concern raised by Aboriginal students at many of our member campuses. This often results in Aboriginal content being taught by non-Aboriginal instructors who may not have a clear understanding of the context surrounding issues, or may present information inaccurately or incompletely.⁷⁵ Often there are qualified Aboriginal individuals available to teach language or cultural courses, but these individuals’ expertise may be unrecognized by the formal accreditation system, and consequently they are not recognized as able teachers.⁷⁶ At other times, students themselves, even in primary school, may be called upon to provide “the Aboriginal perspective”.⁷⁷ This is problematic for a number of reasons. Students are not meant to be teachers, they are not experts, and may be still learning or struggling to find out more about their Aboriginal identity. Assuming that an Aboriginal student, who is from a particular culture and a particular geographic location, can comment on all things Aboriginal is grossly unfair and tokenistic. Moreover, asking a student to stand up in a class and present “the Aboriginal perspective” places a great deal of pressure on them, singles them out from the class, and leaves them to singlehandedly combat stereotypes and racism in what may not be a comfortable environment.

Recommendations

Recommendation Two: The provincial and federal governments must improve the public education system available to Aboriginal students, including culturally relevant material at all levels of education and robust student support services.

The provincial and federal governments must work together with Aboriginal communities to improve the primary and secondary education systems available to Aboriginal students. Students believe that adequate support at the primary

⁷⁰ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2002). Parent and education engagement partnership project: a discussion paper. British Columbia: Project Advisory Committee.

⁷¹ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4) : 389-419.

⁷² Battiste, Marie. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: a literature review with recommendations. Ottawa: National Working Group on Education and the Minister of Indian Affairs Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

⁷³ Faries, Emily. (2004). Research Paper on Aboriginal Curriculum in Ontario. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁷⁴ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in Aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4) : 389-419.

⁷⁵ McMaster First Nations Student Association Focus Group, Nov. 1st, 2011.

⁷⁶ Meeting with Julia Candlish, June 2011.

⁷⁷ Aboriginal focus group at Waterloo. Oct 19th, 2011.

and secondary level is necessary for students to develop the tools and strategies they need to succeed at the post-secondary level. As the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning declares, “one component of Aboriginal education should not be given precedence over others....government involvement in First Nations and Aboriginal post-secondary education should not be an either/or matter”.⁷⁸ Only with adequate funding from the primary through to post-secondary level can Aboriginal students be given the support they need to develop their own talents and pursue the post-secondary pathways of their choice.

The federal government should work to ensure that on-reserve schools are funded at a level that meets local needs and prepare students to enter post-secondary education.⁷⁹ The current funding system where Aboriginal schools are funded at approximately 65 per cent the per-student rate of provincial schools is unsustainable.⁸⁰ The lack of funding must be rectified to ensure that all Aboriginal students have access to a high quality primary and secondary education, and that sufficient support is available for the development of culturally relevant curricula.

The provincial government should ensure that adequate resources are available to the 80 per cent of Aboriginal students that attend provincially funded schools. Funding for the development and implementation of culturally relevant programming in all aspects of education should be prioritized. While there have been some positive steps, such as the creation of a new textbook for a Grade 10 Native Studies course and a lower student-to-teacher threshold for Native Studies courses, much more needs to be done. Many primary and secondary schools require more resources to hire and train teachers in Native Studies, and implement Aboriginal curriculum.⁸¹ It is important to note that Native Studies curriculum in provincial schools benefits non-Aboriginal students as well, by exposing them to a diverse curriculum and combating racism and stereotypes.⁸²

Steps to improve the public education system for Aboriginal students should also include expanding provincial funding for Aboriginal support services in primary and secondary schools. Support services should vary with the needs of specific communities but include: home-school liaison activities, a safe space, orientation activities, guidance counselling, academic support services, cultural activities, visits by Elders, and transition support.⁸³ While initiatives often focus on remedial efforts with Aboriginal students who have fallen the furthest behind, in order to develop student motivation and confidences, primary and secondary education should also focus on giving each student the opportunity to develop and share their unique abilities.⁸⁴

Recommendation Three: Aboriginal content, including treaty rights and Métis perspectives, should be integrated into the curriculum taught to all Ontario students at the primary and secondary school levels.

Part of ensuring that Aboriginal students are not marginalized at the primary and secondary level, particularly the majority who attend non-band schools where they are largely out-numbered by non-Aboriginal students, is making sure that Aboriginal course content is taught not just as an Aboriginal issue, but as a subject that affects all people living in Canada. This reflects an understanding of Aboriginal issues as inseparable from the broader Canadian context. Taking steps to ensure that all students understand Aboriginal issues as relevant to of the past, present and future of Canada is part of combating racism, promoting understanding, and fostering an environment where Aboriginal students feel welcome and appreciated. Aboriginal content should be integrated into the Ontario curriculum at the primary and secondary level. Too often Aboriginal content is limited to historic, romantic, and static understandings of Aboriginal peoples, and perpetuates stereotypes about Aboriginal authenticity that do not help

⁷⁸ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No higher priority Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ VanEvery-Albert, Claudine (2005). *A Review of the Band Operated Funding Formula*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁸¹ Faries, Emily. (2004). Research Paper on Aboriginal Curriculum in Ontario. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2002). Parent and education engagement partnership project: a discussion paper. British Columbia: Project Advisory Committee.

⁸⁴ McCluskey, K.W. and Torrance, E.P. (2004). Mentoring: One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development. In K. W. McCluskey and A. M. Mays (eds), *Mentoring for talent development* (pp. 178-195). Sioux Falls, SD: Reclaiming Youth International, Augustana College.

promote true understanding of the complexity and richness of Aboriginal identity. The integration of Aboriginal content should include information about current topics including treaty rights and Métis perspectives. The way in which Aboriginal content is integrated into the curriculum would vary between the primary and secondary level to reflect differing levels of student development, but in either case should go beyond an understanding of Aboriginal culture as purely historical and include integrated knowledge in various disciplines.

Recommendation Four: The provincial and federal governments must provide resources to improve early outreach programs for Aboriginal students in reserve and non-reserve settings.

Early outreach programs in Aboriginal communities have had some success in improving secondary school graduation rates and increasing the proportion of students who enter post-secondary education. Student mentoring and other initiatives have the potential to help youth maximize their achievement and personal development.⁸⁵ However, evidence strongly indicates that unless program design and delivery is “responsive to the specific needs and capacities of diverse communities,” programs will have little success.⁸⁶

While the specific components of a successful early outreach program will vary with setting, all of them require multiple supports to address complex, interrelated barriers to post-secondary education, along with community support. The best outreach programs have multiple supports intended to recognize abilities, build on cultural dynamics, and expand existing support systems.⁸⁷ Successful outreach programs also are flexible in responding to the needs of their target community. For example, the Northern Lights project in Manitoba targeted at Aboriginal secondary school students, found that despite their best planning attempts, challenges encountered during the first year of the program required adjustment to expectations. The mentorship component of the program was strengthened, and more emphasis was placed on cultural heritage and identity.⁸⁸ Another promising development has been the expansion of the highly successful Pathways to Education program to urban Aboriginal communities in Winnipeg and Kingston. The Pathways program is built on the idea of providing multiple supports – financial, academic and motivational – but in ways modified to consider the needs of the community the program is operating in. For example, when the Winnipeg program began September it adjusted its student-to-support worker ratio and offered a free evening meal: two strategies to combat concerns that the drop-out rate would be higher because Aboriginal families often feel unwelcome in the local school system.⁸⁹

Early outreach programs should be flexible and recognize that there are multiple definitions of success that may be appropriate to different circumstances and individuals. For example, the Northern Light program defines success in broad terms as students returning to school, entering post-secondary education, or entering the workforce.⁹⁰ Outreach programs can be expensive – Pathways can cost upwards of \$4,000 per student – and communities often lack the resources to fund them. The provincial and federal governments should commit to increasing the resources available in Aboriginal communities to support early outreach programs, including the expansion of Pathways where appropriate. Support could be provided through multi-year funding grants to promising programs in communities of need.

Recommendation Five: Partnerships between post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal communities should be encouraged and incentivized by government to enhance access.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No higher priority Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

⁸⁷ McCluskey, K.W. and Torrance, E.P. (2004). Mentoring: One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development. In K. W. McCluskey and A. M. Mays (eds), *Mentoring for talent development* (pp. 178-195). Sioux Falls, SD: Reclaiming Youth International, Augustana College.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Hammer, Kate. (Feb. 19th, 2011). Model after-school program gambles big in Winnipeg. *Globe and Mail*. Accessed at: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/model-after-school-program-gambles-big-in-winnipeg/article1913853/page2/>

⁹⁰ McCluskey, K.W. and Torrance, E.P. (2004). Mentoring: One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development. In K. W. McCluskey and A. M. Mays (Eds.), *Mentoring for talent development* (178-195). Sioux Falls, SD: Reclaiming Youth International, Augustana College.

One mechanism that has had some success in raising Aboriginal post-secondary enrolment has been outreach partnerships between Aboriginal communities and post-secondary institutions. Partnerships between communities and post-secondary institutions expose students to higher education possibilities at a younger age and provide them with concrete experience in a post-secondary environment. One example of a community-institution outreach program is the Mentoring At-Risk Students (MARS) Project, based out of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The MARS Project is a partnership between the University of Winnipeg and Aboriginal community organizations. Aboriginal children and youth from the city are matched with post-secondary mentors. The mentors are screened and also provided with substantial training, and the opportunity to earn course credit through the program.⁹¹ The program has been relatively successful in facilitating long-term relationships between youth and mentors, and encouraging youth to enter post-secondary studies. Some institutions have also recruited students by networking with Aboriginal band council members, Elders, and local schools.⁹² For example, Northern College has used community networks to identify potential students and chartered planes to take youth to the college campus. Once at the campus, potential students are given the opportunity to talk to current students, investigate course options, and familiarize themselves with the institution.⁹³

Ontario colleges and universities can also now obtain a list of students who voluntarily identified as Aboriginal but left their applications incomplete or were not accepted through the Ontario University Application Centre and the Ontario College Application Service.⁹⁴ Some institutions already use this information to contact applicants and let them know about their student support programs and other options at their institutions.⁹⁵ This information could be used more broadly to specifically target outreach efforts to students that have already shown motivation to enter post-secondary studies, but were unable to enrol for a variety of reasons.

Given the challenges Aboriginal youth face in accessing post-secondary education, early outreach programs offered in partnership with post-secondary institutions can be an important means of motivating students to enrol and providing information on educational pathways. The provincial government should work to provide incentives for post-secondary institutions to develop outreach relationships with Aboriginal communities, including prioritizing targeted government funding.

Recommendation Six: The government should work to ensure that adequate funding is available to hire qualified Aboriginal teachers, including investigating alternative methods of accreditation.

The government should investigate strategies for ensuring that school boards have adequate resources available to hire Aboriginal teachers, and to offer more Native Studies courses and Aboriginal content to all elementary and secondary school students. In addition, the government should investigate whether alternative accreditation mechanisms are feasible for certain courses, like Aboriginal language courses, and strategy to increase the recruitment and retention of qualified Aboriginal teachers. These could include offering teaching accreditation at Aboriginal education institutions, offering accreditations as a distance education course, and letting community metrics act as a stand-in for formal accreditation in specific circumstances.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising practices: increasing and supporting participation for Aboriginal students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Financial Support

Principles

Principle Seven: Both the provincial and federal governments have a responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal students are able to access adequate funding for the pursuit of post-secondary education in Ontario.

Aboriginal students often face severe financial barriers to pursuing post-secondary studies. Many live in remote or rural communities, and must move away from their home community to attend a post-secondary institution, incurring additional costs associated with residence and travel.⁹⁶ In addition, the average income of Aboriginal people in Ontario falls significantly below the Ontario median, and Aboriginal people have higher unemployment rates than non-Aboriginals in Ontario.⁹⁷ All of these factors impact the ability to pay for higher education, on an individual, familial and community basis.

All willing and qualified students should have the opportunity to attend post-secondary education; financial circumstances should not be a barrier to anyone in pursuit of a higher education. Both the federal and provincial governments have a responsibility to ensure that financial barriers do not prevent otherwise qualified Aboriginal students from embarking on post-secondary studies. This responsibility stems from some interpretations of treaty agreements with First Nations and also from the importance of creating an equitable society where all individuals have the opportunity to benefit from a higher education. The federal government has recognized this obligation through programs designed to increase the participation and success of Aboriginal students in post-secondary education, including the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and the University College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEP).⁹⁸ Similarly, the Ontario government's Access to Opportunities Strategy is specifically targeted at raising Aboriginal post-secondary participation rates, and offers bursary program for Aboriginal students.⁹⁹ Through these programs, government has recognized the unique financial barriers that face Aboriginal students and articulated its responsibility for helping Aboriginal students overcome these barriers and access higher education at comparable rates to non-Aboriginal Ontarians.

Principle Eight: Métis and non-status First Nations must receive adequate financial toward their post-secondary education from the federal and provincial governments.

Evidence suggests that all groups of Aboriginal students – status First Nations, non-status First Nations, Métis, and Inuit – face financial barriers to post-secondary studies, including lower family incomes, the need to travel large distances to access post-secondary education, and often debt aversion.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, many federal funding programs restrict eligibility to status First Nations and Inuit students. In contrast, most provincial programs are available to any individual who self-identifies as Aboriginal and provides supporting documentation. Students believe that all Aboriginal students should be able to access financial assistance that enables them to adequately meet their financial need to access post-secondary education. The federal government's responsibility for Aboriginal post-secondary education is often perceived as a direct result of treaties with status First Nations, and specific arrangements with Inuit communities. While these unique obligations are important and should be affirmed and

⁹⁶ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, Miriam Kramer and Andrew Wismer. (2010). *Aboriginals in post-secondary education*. L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project.

⁹⁷ Statistics Canada. (2003). *Household income groups (24) in constant (2000) dollars and selected demographic, educational, cultural, language and labour force characteristics of primary household maintainer (87) for private households for Canada, provinces and territories*. 1995. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

⁹⁸ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2010). "University College Entrance Preparation Program". Accessed at: <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/edu/ep/pse2-eng.asp>

⁹⁹ Ontario Ministry of Education. (Feb. 2009). "Aboriginal Education in Ontario". Toronto: Government of Ontario.

¹⁰⁰ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

continued, students believe that all Aboriginal students with financial need, regardless of status or geographic location, should be able to access adequate funding for their post-secondary education.¹⁰¹

Concerns

Concern Eight: Aboriginal students often face disproportionate challenges in financing post-secondary education.

Aboriginal students often face significant challenges in financing post-secondary education, including low family incomes, additional travel costs, debt aversion, and price sensitivity.¹⁰² In 2005, the median income of status First Nations people – \$14,517¹⁰³ – was lower than the annual cost of attending university away from home, which is estimated to be in excess of \$20,000 per year.¹⁰⁴ Roughly half of all Aboriginal people in Ontario live in rural or northern communities. These individuals face additional financial challenges in financing their post-secondary educations. Unlike their urban counterparts, Aboriginal students from rural and northern communities usually do not have the option of reducing their post-secondary expenses by living at home while attending university. Students living away from home while attending university in Ontario incur an average of \$7,100 to \$10,300 in additional expenses, depending on the location of their institution.¹⁰⁵ In addition, students from rural or northern home communities often face significant travel costs for travel between their home community and post-secondary institution. While the Ontario Distance Grant provides a maximum of \$300 per year to OSAP-eligible students living over 80 kilometres from a post-secondary institution for travel expenses, this amount is often insufficient to cover even a single trip home for students from remote areas.¹⁰⁶

Finally, research suggests that in addition to having limited financial resources to draw on in financing a post-secondary education, Aboriginal students are often reluctant to accrue large amounts of debt to pay for tuition and other costs.¹⁰⁷ Aboriginal students are more likely than non-Aboriginal students to be concerned about their ability to pay off debt post-graduation. This concern is extremely valid if they wish to return to home reserve communities post-graduation where unemployment is often high, and well-paying job opportunities are few.¹⁰⁸ Students may be strongly driven to use their education in their home district to contribute to community development, regardless of pay-scale. Yet in a context where undergraduate tuition is rising at double the rate of inflation, increasing numbers of students need to go into debt to finance their education and acquiring a well paying job post graduation is a necessity.¹⁰⁹ Debt aversion and concern about post-graduation employment opportunities are significant financial barriers for Aboriginal students given that the current Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) provides the majority of its assistance in the form of a loan, and to apply for any grants under the program, students must also apply for loans.

Concern Nine: Federal funding of financial support programs for Aboriginal students is capped at two per cent increases per year. This model excludes many Aboriginal students, and consequently fails to meet their financial needs.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰² Debt aversion refers to a reluctance to enter into debt to finance post-secondary education, while price sensitivity refers to how the post-secondary participation rate of a group or individual is affected more by increases and decreases in the gross cost of education.

¹⁰³ Linda Gionet. (2009). First Nations people: Selected findings of the 2006 Census. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

¹⁰⁴ Craig Alexander and Shahrzad Mobasher Fard, *The Future Cost of a University Degree* (Toronto: TD Bank Financial Group, 2009).

¹⁰⁵ Statistics Canada. (2009). Low income cut-offs from 2008 and low income measures for 2007. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

¹⁰⁶ "Rural and Northern Focus Group" McMaster University, October 27th, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Palameta, Boris and Jean-Pierre Voyer. (2010). Willingness to pay for postsecondary education among underrepresented groups. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer. (2010). First generation post-secondary education students. L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project.

¹⁰⁹ Finnie, Ross, Richard Mueller, Arthur Sweetman and Alex Usher. (2009). New perspectives on access to post-secondary education. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

The major federal programs that provide financial support to Aboriginal students are the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and the University College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEP). PSSSP provides financial support to students who enrol in a post-secondary institution to assist with tuition, books, living costs, and other related expenses, while UCEP provides financial support to students enrolled in university or college preparation courses.¹¹⁰ Funding for these programs has been capped at 2 per cent annual growth since 1996.¹¹¹ The cap ignores the fact that post-secondary tuition and other costs have risen at an average of well over 2 per cent per year since 1996, and at close to 5 per cent per year since 2005. In addition, the number of Aboriginal applicants for PSSSP funding has increased during this period. In Ontario, more than 50 per cent of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 27, and the Aboriginal population in Ontario under the age of 14 grew by 14.8 per cent from 2001-2006.¹¹² The cap on funding increases for the PSSSP and UCEP means that more students are applying for less money to cover their costs. One result of this has been that despite increasing numbers of Aboriginal students studying at post-secondary institutions, the number of students receiving funding nationally through the programs has declined from 27,500 in to 22,000 over the past decade.¹¹³

Another concern with the PSSSP and UCEP is that the eligibility criteria exclude many potential students who identify as Aboriginal and have financial need. In particular, non-status First Nations and Métis individuals cannot apply for assistance under the federal programs. This exclusion is concerning on several fronts. Both non-status First Nations and Métis are recognized as Aboriginal peoples under the 1982 Canada Constitution Act. Both these groups also tend to have lower post-secondary participation rates, and socioeconomic indicators demonstrating they have a need of financial support for post-secondary education. Finally, in many cases legal standing as a “status” individual is based on somewhat arbitrary criteria. For example, because status is determined by outside designation, not self-identification, if a group or family was absent when the Indian Agent was recording status, despite being Aboriginal, they would not have status under the law.¹¹⁴ Up until 1960, all status First Nations who voted in a federal election or obtained a university degree, and all women who married non-status men automatically lost status.¹¹⁵ Moreover, Métis individuals have never been recognized as having status, and consequently have never been eligible for funding under the federal programs, despite facing many barriers to post-secondary education directly as a result of their Aboriginal identity. Approximately 50 per cent of non-status and Métis students cite financial barriers as one of the top reasons for not completing university or college.¹¹⁶ While there are a few independent programs across the country for Métis students, such as the Louis Riel Scholarship provided by the Manitoba Métis Federation, these are unable to fully meet the substantive need for funding.

Concern Ten: First Nations bands lack the federal funding for all eligible students aspiring to attend a post-secondary institution in a given year.

Given that federal funding for post-secondary education has been capped at 2 per cent increases per year since 1996, and the number of Aboriginal students studying at post-secondary institutions has dramatically increased over the same period, it is not surprising that First Nations bands are unable to fund all students aspiring to enter higher education in a given year. Further evidencing the failure of these programs to adequately meet the need of Aboriginal

¹¹⁰ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2010). “The Post-Secondary Student Support Program”. Accessed at: <http://www.aic-inac.gc.ca/edu/ep/pse1-eng.asp>

¹¹¹ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Communication Canada-Publishing, Ottawa.

¹¹² Statistics Canada. (2007). “Aboriginal identity population by age groups, median age and sex, 2006 counts for both sexes, for Canada, provinces and territories - 20% sample data”.

¹¹³ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Communication Canada-Publishing, Ottawa.

¹¹⁴ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Association of Canadian Community Colleges. (2005). Meeting the needs of Aboriginal learners. An overview of current programs and services, challenges, opportunities and lessons learned final report. Retrieved Jul 15, 2008 from http://www.acc.ca/ftp/pubs/200507_Aboriginal.pdf

learners is the fact that between 2001 and 2006, nearly 11,000 Aboriginal students could not access post-secondary education because they were denied funds through the program.¹¹⁷ Students who are denied funding often delay enrolment, because “socio-economic conditions prevailing in the communities mean that parents are not in a position to take up the slack”.¹¹⁸ Some students end up on waiting lists for funding for multiple years. In 2009, estimates indicated that First Nations funding requirements were at \$642 million, which was more than twice the actual budget allocated for PSSSP.¹¹⁹

First Nations bands are being forced to make difficult choices between qualified applicants about who will receive funding for their post-secondary studies. This has led to a myriad of issues concerning the distribution of funding. Individuals living off-reserve who have status but less immediate ties to the band may face challenges in making a compelling case for funding.¹²⁰ Similarly, people who had lost status through the clauses of the Indian Act that discriminated against women, and later regained status through Bill C-31 in 1985, often have weak ties to bands, which may make it more difficult for them to obtain band funding.¹²¹ Inevitably, given the funding shortages of the PSSSP program, band leaders must decide who does not go to post-secondary education in a given year. Virtually all First Nations have waiting lists for funding, which include individuals who have already been accepted to PSE but been forced to delay enrolment for multiple years as they wait for funding.¹²²

Concern Eleven: The provincial Aboriginal Bursary program reaches relatively few Aboriginal students.

The Aboriginal Bursary is a provincial program for Aboriginal students with financial need, studying full or part-time at a college, university, or Aboriginal post-secondary institution. The details of the application process, including how much money is received, who qualifies as having financial need, and any additional requirements is set by individual schools, but students generally do not have to be status-First Nations to qualify. In 2009-10, the Aboriginal Bursary was received by 741 students for an average of amount of \$1,600.¹²³ Given that there are approximately 14,000 Aboriginal students enrolled in post-secondary education in Ontario, and that many of these students have substantial financial need, it is concerning that so few students received the Aboriginal Bursary.

The low number of Aboriginal Bursary recipients is likely due to both the complicated application process and the limited availability of funds. The application for the Aboriginal Bursary is not tied to the OSAP application process, as are the vast majority of provincial bursaries, but rather involves a separate application set by the individual institution. As a result, there is little consistency in application processes between institutions. In addition, a student who applies for OSAP would not necessarily know that there was also a provincially-funded Aboriginal Bursary they could apply for, and students applying for the Aboriginal Bursary may not also realize that they can apply for OSAP. Perhaps most telling is that, despite significant unmet financial need in the Aboriginal community, institutions were only able to disburse 85 per cent of the Aboriginal Bursary funds in 2009-10.

In addition, studies have pointed to the fact that despite the increased costs of attending post-secondary education in recent years, the availability and magnitude of bursaries for Aboriginal students has not increased to meet the

¹¹⁷ Assembly of First Nations. (2010). Taking Action for First Nations post-secondary education: access and opportunity and outcomes discussion paper. Ottawa: The First Nations Post-Secondary Education; Access, Opportunity and Outcomes Panel.

¹¹⁸ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Communication Canada-Publishing, Ottawa.

¹¹⁹ Assembly of First Nations. (2010). Taking Action for First Nations post-secondary education: access and opportunity and outcomes discussion paper. Ottawa: The First Nations Post-Secondary Education; Access, Opportunity and Outcomes Panel.

¹²⁰ Preston, J. (2008). Overcoming the Obstacles: Postsecondary Education and Aboriginal Peoples. Brock Education, 18: 57-66.

¹²¹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹²² Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹²³ Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. (2009). “Aboriginal Bursary”, accessed at: <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/TCONT003464.html>.

increased need.¹²⁴ In 2009-2010, a mere \$1.5 million dollars was available in total funding for the Aboriginal Bursary.¹²⁵ The funding of the program is not based on the number of students with financial need who apply, but rather is a fixed amount per institution based on their Aboriginal student population. Consequently, applicants have no guarantee that they will receive any funding, let alone enough to meet their expenses. This contrasts with the OSAP process, where all students receive funding based on their need regardless of the demands on the provincial budget.

Concern Twelve: Approximately half of all Aboriginal students are mature students, and as such are ineligible for many provincial grant programs.

Studies indicate that approximately 50 per cent of Aboriginal university students are mature students.¹²⁶ There are many reasons why Aboriginal students tend to be older than non-Aboriginal students, including:

- Students may have to wait multiple years to receive PSSSP funding;
- Aboriginal students are more likely to attend college first, since more colleges are located near Aboriginal communities, and then subsequently transfer to university;
- The secondary school dropout rate for Aboriginal students is higher than for non-Aboriginal students, and students may have to finish a secondary school diploma before enrolling in post-secondary studies;
- Aboriginal students are more likely to have interrupted their university studies, and thus may take longer to graduate.

A number of provincial grant programs require students to have finished secondary school within the last four years to qualify. These include the Ontario Access Grant, and the Tuition Reduction Grant, both of which are designed to help low and middle income families. Consequently, a large number of Aboriginal students may be unable to access these programs.

Recommendations

Recommendation Eight: The provincial government must push the federal government to uncap and annually increase Post-Secondary Student Support Program funding to levels that will provide full support to all Aboriginal students in financial need and reflect the rising costs of education

Students believe that the federal government must uncap the PSSSP program and increase funding to a level that would provide full support for all eligible Aboriginal students. Give the stated objectives of both the provincial and federal governments to improve access to post-secondary education for all Aboriginal students, an arbitrary 2 per cent per annum cap that does not take into account population increases or actual costs is an unproductive policy. Over the next decade, 315,000 Aboriginal children are projected to be born throughout Canada.¹²⁷ It is important that a comprehensive financial program is in place to meet the needs of these students as they prepare to enter post-secondary studies. The current federal PSSSP program does not do so. Students recommend an immediate removal of the 2 per cent cap, and a commitment to base future funding on the number of eligible applicants as is done with other federal student aid programs, to ensure qualified Aboriginal student is prevented from attending a post-secondary institution due to a lack of funding.

¹²⁴ Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. (2010). Answering the call: The 2010 inventory of Canadian university programs and services for Aboriginal students. Ottawa: AUCC.

¹²⁵ Frechette, Jean-Guy. (Feb. 22nd, 2011). Ontario's Aboriginal Education Strategy: Presentation to the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. Toronto: Aboriginal Education Office, Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and Ministry of Education.

¹²⁶ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹²⁷ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

To avoid a future situation where the funding needs of Aboriginal students and funding availability through the PSSSP becomes dramatically mismatched, the amount of funding provided per student through the PSSSP must be annually indexed to a measure that reflects the actual increases in costs post-secondary students face. Tuition, books and housing prices often rise faster than inflation. An index measuring approximate changes in post-secondary costs should be used, and PSSSP funding should be adjusted according to projected increases in these prices. Additionally, the allowable expenses under the PSSSP should be reviewed and adjusted in light of the needs of Aboriginal students to ensure that no legitimate expenses are excluded from the funding formula.

Recommendation Nine: The provincial government must expand the Aboriginal Bursary program to meet the unmet financial need of all Aboriginal students.

The provincial government should take steps to ensure that all Aboriginal students in Ontario with financial need can access the Aboriginal Bursary program. Aboriginal students who have been accepted to a post-secondary institution have already overcome substantive barriers to higher education. Currently, the provincial government gives each university an allocated amount of Aboriginal Bursary funding for them to disperse as they see fit, and this amount is not based on actual need, but rather the funds available for the program. Students recommend the government set the funding for the program based on Aboriginal student need, and commit to providing each student who qualifies for OSAP with a bursary to help eliminate any unmet need. Expanding the Aboriginal Bursary program is particularly important given that evidence shows many Aboriginal students are debt averse and are therefore unlikely to apply for OSAP.

One possible implementation method could involve setting a maximum bursary amount whereby any financial need that would have otherwise been met by OSAP through a loan is converted to non-repayable aid through the Aboriginal Bursary. Any further expansion of the Aboriginal Bursary program should be equally available to all Aboriginal students, regardless of status, Métis or Inuit identity, and should be available to all Aboriginal students with financial need regardless of what year of study they are entering. No qualified status or non-status First Nations, Métis, or Inuit student should be deterred from enrolling in or completing post-secondary education due to a lack of funding.

Recommendation Ten: The provincial government must change the application process for the Aboriginal Bursary to increase use of the program.

To ensure that the maximum number of Aboriginal students apply for the Aboriginal Bursary, students recommend the provincial government proactively raise awareness of the bursary, by ensuring that Aboriginal community centres, schools, and other organizations have adequate information about the bursary and qualification criteria. In addition, a relatively simple way to improve the uptake rate of the Aboriginal Bursary would be to include the bursary in the OSAP application process. This could be done in a way that every student self-identifying as Aboriginal on the OSAP application process is directly considered for the bursary. This would remove some of the confusion associated with institutions individually disbursing funds through a variety of criteria and processes, and ensure that more Aboriginal students receive funding through the bursary. To address the issue of debt aversion, the Aboriginal Bursary could remain available independently of the OSAP application through the government or institutions so students can apply for the bursary program even if they do not wish to access OSAP. An alternative could be changing the OSAP application to allow students to access grants and bursaries without applying for loans; it should be noted that this change would have accessibility and financial ramifications beyond the Aboriginal Bursary.

Recommendation Eleven: The provincial government should make a multi-year plan to contribute to the bursary fund of Métis Nation of Ontario Education and Training , to ensure the sustainability of the fund and enable more Métis students to access financial assistance.

In recognition of the barriers many Métis students face in accessing financial assistance programs, the Métis Nation of Ontario Education and Training (MNOET), with federal and provincial assistance, has established a bursary fund for Métis students. The interest from the fund is disbursed each year to Métis students with financial need. However, the fund can only assist a limited number of students, and is only available to students studying at certain post-secondary institutions. To expand the availability of these bursaries, and ensure the program has long term sustainability and viability, the provincial government should make a multi-year commitment to increase the principle in the fund.

Recommendation Twelve: The provincial government should review guidelines around grant eligibility to ensure that mature Aboriginal students are not unfairly excluded from provincial grant programs.

Given that many Aboriginal students are mature and experience significant unmet financial need, the provincial government should review guidelines around eligibility for the Ontario Access Grant and the Tuition Reduction Grant to ensure that Aboriginal students are not unfairly excluded from these financial resources. In the case of the Tuition Reduction Grant, the cost of expanding eligibility to all Aboriginal students would be approximately \$4 million dollars, which is relatively small compared to the overall \$500 million dollar cost of the grant program.

Student Support Services

Principles

Principle Nine: Aboriginal students should be able to access specific on-campus student support services that adequately address their needs.

All students require access to appropriate student supports to be successful in their university studies. These can include academic and personal counselling, mentorship programs, transition support, health centres, housing support, and childcare services. Student support services are meant to foster community, encourage diversity and make students feel welcome and included in the fabric of the institution, regardless of their situation.

Aboriginal students require specific student services to address their needs and ensure they have the support they need to persist and excel through their studies. Some of these services overlap with general student support services that all students require, but Aboriginal students also benefit from specific support services designed to assist with some of the unique challenges they face in a university environment. Aboriginal students tend to be older than non-Aboriginal students, are more likely to be female, and are much more likely to have a dependent child.¹²⁸ They also may have to travel large distances from their home communities and deal with an unfamiliar culture and environment which can lead to loneliness and frustration.¹²⁹ Evidence suggests that the appropriate student support services can help combat these issues and decrease Aboriginals student attrition rates.¹³⁰ An American study of Aboriginal students found that availability of and engagement with specific Indigenous services was correlated with student success because these services allowed students to better connect with peers and faculty on campus.¹³¹ Students believe that it is essential that Aboriginal students have access to adequate student support services at their post-secondary institution to enable them to successfully complete their post-secondary studies.

Concerns

¹²⁸ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹²⁹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. (2009). Post-secondary student access and retention strategies. Literature review, Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

Concern Thirteen: Post-secondary education institutions often do not provide the specific support services needed by Aboriginal students.

There is concern that post-secondary institutions often do not provide adequate specific support services Aboriginal students need to persist and excel throughout their studies. Aboriginal students have drop-out rates that are between 33 and 56 per cent higher than those of non-Aboriginal students, indicating that these students are facing significant obstacles to completing their post-secondary studies.¹³² Specific areas of support services that have been shown to impact Aboriginal student success are childcare services, housing support services, Aboriginal student centres, and cultural supports.

Housing Support Services

Aboriginal students “require a greater range and level of supports if they are to enter and remain in PSE programs, including measures to [...] address the higher level and incidence of housing...needs of Aboriginal learners.”¹³³ The literature indicates that affordable housing is a key factor for Aboriginal students because of their low-income status.¹³⁴ Despite this, few institutions offer housing support specifically geared towards Aboriginal students.¹³⁵

Aboriginal Student Centres

Aboriginal student centres refer to physical spaces on campus designed to be a ‘safe place’ for Aboriginal students, which may include a student lounge, mentoring, academic, and personal counselling support. Aboriginal student centres are important because they “provide sense of belonging and guidance to students who may find that the university environment is very different from environments in which they had previously lived”.¹³⁶ Evidence suggests they can combat feelings of isolation, racism, while generating greater awareness of Aboriginal programs among non-Aboriginal students and faculty members.¹³⁷

A Canada-wide survey found that 73 per cent of universities and colleges have some type of Aboriginal student centre, and it is believed that nearly every Ontario institution has a centre, though the services provided varies widely.¹³⁸ Stakeholders at institutions in Ontario indicate that they view their Aboriginal student centres as a key component of attracting Aboriginal students to PSE and improving student retention.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, stakeholders also expressed strong concerns that these centres were often severely underfunded, which compromised their ability to provide essential services to students.¹⁴⁰ Less than a third of Aboriginal student centres receive dedicated funding from the government, the private sector, or Aboriginal organizations.¹⁴¹ Many Aboriginal student centres expressed a need for more physical space, tutors, counsellors, and administrative staff, in addition to funding and families for cultural and ceremonial events.

Cultural Supports

¹³² Berger, Joseph, Anne Motte and Andrew Parkin. (2009). *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Council of Ministers of Education. (2010). *A Literature Review of Factors that Support Successful Transitions by Aboriginal People from K-12 to Postsecondary Education*. Toronto: Council of Ministers of Education.

¹³⁵ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹³⁶ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. (2010). *Answering the call: The 2010 inventory of Canadian university programs and services for Aboriginal students*. Ottawa: AUCC.

¹³⁹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

In addition to childcare facilities and Aboriginal student centres, cultural supports are also important in fostering Aboriginal student success in higher education. These can include activities and events that recognize Aboriginal languages and traditions, and raise the profile of Aboriginal culture on campus.¹⁴² Cultural supports can include Elders in residence programs, whereby Aboriginal Elders come to the campus community for a period of time to act as role-models and provide guidance for students. Other supports involve holding cultural events like pow-wows and smudging ceremonies throughout the year, and bringing in guest speakers. Cultural supports are important because they combat the alienation some Aboriginal students may feel transitioning to PSE institutions, provide connection with other Aboriginal students, faculty and community members, and can foster a sense of cultural identity and pride.¹⁴³ Many stakeholders involved with cultural supports for Aboriginal students have expressed concern over a lack of stable funding, and indicated that a lack of funding has constrained their ability to offer cultural activities and events.¹⁴⁴

Concern Fourteen: Not all universities in Ontario provide childcare on campus and, when it is offered, the cost is often prohibitively high and wait times are long.

The literature on the barriers that Aboriginal students face to education repeatedly indicates that childcare is a significant factor in determining whether to stay in post-secondary education. Nearly 30 per cent of Aboriginal post-secondary students report caring for a dependent child.¹⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, then, Aboriginal students are much more likely to spend time on dependent care responsibilities than non-Aboriginal students; 45 per cent of Aboriginal students spend time on dependent care responsibilities, compared to just 23 per cent of non-Aboriginal students.¹⁴⁶ A comprehensive literature review published in 2010 by the Council of Ministers of Education found that Aboriginal students are much more likely than non-Aboriginal students to face barriers to PSE attainment specifically because of their higher incidence of dependent care responsibilities. According to a survey cited in the study, “family responsibilities were the main reasons for [Aboriginal students] not completing PSE.”¹⁴⁷ Caring for a child, younger sibling, or other family member means students with dependants have higher financial costs, but less time to spend working while enrolled in post-secondary studies.

Fourteen of the 20 universities in Ontario provide childcare on campus, while only eight of which offer infant care. Wait times for these daycare facilities vary by campus, but are frequently longer than a year. Many facilities could not provide a precise wait time, making it difficult for student parents to plan for future enrolment. Excessive wait times often mean that a student with a child will have to put off their education. Moreover, the wait times indicate that these facilities are understaffed or without enough space. There is also concern that the cost of on-campus childcare is prohibitively high. Average prices for the childcare facilities on Ontario’s university campuses are shown in Table 1. While the provincial Childcare Bursary offers some support to parents, the maximum offered is \$70 per week for a single parent with no spousal support, and caregivers can only access this funding if they have three or more dependent children. This amounts to less than a third the weekly cost of daycare at an Ontario institution. Finally, despite a strong need for childcare facilities among Aboriginal students, only 13 per cent of post-secondary institutions indicated having specific supports in place to help Aboriginal students find daycare on- or off-campus.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁴³ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁴⁴ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁴⁵ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁴⁶ McCloy, U., & Sattler, P. (2010). *From Postsecondary Application to the Labour Market: The Pathways of Under-represented Groups*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁴⁷ Council of Ministers of Education. (2010). *A Literature Review of Factors that Support Successful Transitions by Aboriginal People from K-12 to Postsecondary Education*. Toronto: Council of Ministers of Education.

¹⁴⁸ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Table 1: Average Cost of Childcare on Ontario University Campuses¹⁴⁹

Type of Daycare	Average Weekly Cost
Infant (3 to 18 months)	\$326
Toddler (18 months to 2.5 years)	\$262
Preschool (2.5 to 5 years)	\$214

Recommendations

Recommendation Thirteen: The provincial government must work with local Aboriginal Education Councils and Aboriginal communities to assess the student support service needs of Aboriginal Students, including Aboriginal student centres, and provide funding based on their recommendations.

To better meet the support services needs of Aboriginal students, the provincial government should work with the Aboriginal Education Council (AEC) established at each university to conduct an assessment of the support service needs of Aboriginal students. The AECs were established to ensure that institutions receiving provincial funding for Aboriginal post-secondary education initiatives had adequate consultation with the Aboriginal community in the decision-making process, regarding how the funding would be used.

It is important that Aboriginal students and community members have a direct line of communication to the senior administration, to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed. Students believe that AECs are best positioned to take stock of the student support needs of Aboriginal students at each post-secondary institution. Because AECs are composed of members of the Aboriginal community, who typically have strong involvement in Aboriginal student programs on campuses, assigning priority to their recommendations regarding student support funding will ensure that these programs remain controlled by the Aboriginal people using the programs. Consistent, dedicated funding should be provided to institutions, both for the creation and expansion of Aboriginal student centres, and also for regular maintenance and operating costs.

There is strong evidence that specialized, built-in support mechanisms for Aboriginal students dramatically improve student enrolment and retention rates. For example, the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia is a large facility in the middle of campus that provides a comprehensive selection of student services including First Nations counselling, a computer centre, a childcare centre, a library, Elders programs, and a gathering space.¹⁵⁰ The provincial government's one time investment of \$2.9 million for Aboriginal student centres in 2009 was an important start, but the establishment of comprehensive centres in Ontario requires sustainable funding. Aboriginal student supports should receive dedicated human and other resources that are integrated into the annual academic funding plans of institutions.

Recommendation Fourteen: The provincial and federal governments must provide funding for affordable, accessible, culturally appropriate daycare services for Aboriginal students with dependants.

¹⁴⁹ Based upon 2011 audit of daycare services in Ontario universities by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.

¹⁵⁰ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Without affordable, high quality childcare, many Aboriginal students face significant barriers in the pursuit of a university education. Aboriginal students leave university or college before completing their credential consistently cite lack of affordable child care as the primary reason why they leave the program.¹⁵¹ In order to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal university attainment rates, both the federal and provincial government must prioritize affordable childcare for post-secondary students.

The federal government must expand the need criteria of the PSSSP to fully cover the childcare costs incurred by Aboriginal students. Without including in the need assessment of students with dependants, their costs are vastly underestimated. Secondly, the provincial government should revamp the Childcare Bursary, so that any student with financial need and a dependent child can qualify, and the amount distributed through the bursary program more accurately reflects the real costs of childcare on Ontario campuses. Finally, the provincial government must provide targeted funding to universities toward the establishment of affordable, accessible, and culturally sensitive daycare centres. This could be done in conjunction with the Aboriginal student centres, two of which already provide on-site childcare.¹⁵² After these steps have been taken, we can continue to evaluate the factors affecting Aboriginal engagement with the post-secondary system to measure their success and make improvements where necessary.

Recommendation Fifteen: All post-secondary institutions should have, at minimum, an Aboriginal student centre, an Aboriginal counsellor, and Aboriginal specific secondary to post-secondary transitional services.

As a minimum standard, all post-secondary institutions should have an Aboriginal student centre, an Aboriginal counsellor and Aboriginal specific transition services for incoming students. These three services are recognized as key to the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal students. While some institutions would argue that they do not have a large enough Aboriginal population to warrant Aboriginal-specific student services, many students and support workers argue that the Aboriginal student population on campuses is much larger than institutional numbers indicate. Students are reluctant to self-identify, and in the absence of a visible Aboriginal community on campus or Aboriginal support services, may not see the benefit of self-identifying. The presence of a minimum standard of Aboriginal student services on each campus will help facilitate a more accepting, comfortable environment for Aboriginal students. The establishment of these services where they currently do not exist could be done by taking advantage of the Access to Opportunities provincial funding available for Aboriginal initiatives.

Recommendation Sixteen: All Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs) should have student representation, and institutions should make an effort to communicate the existence and purpose of the AEC to all Aboriginal students in particular, but also the student body more generally

Aboriginal students should have a voice on the AECs at every institution. While this is already the case at some schools, there are currently no regulations that enshrine this right at all institutions. Aboriginal students deal with the day to day realities of campus life, and have key insight into the needs and challenges of the Aboriginal student community on campus. Consequently, they should have representation on the council that disburses scholarship and student support funding. In addition, given that the vast majority of Aboriginal students do not know that the AECs exist, an effort should be made to communicate their existence and purpose, so that students are aware of a possible direct channel to voice their concerns to university administrators, faculty, and Aboriginal community members. It is also important that non-Aboriginal students are made aware of the existence of AECs. Not only may this encourage self-identification of Aboriginal students within the broader student body, but it also could help foster a broader campus awareness of Aboriginal issues.

¹⁵¹ Malatest, R.A. and Associates. Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario. Toronto: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010.

¹⁵² Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Institutional Transformation

Principles

Principle Ten: Both universities and government should work with Aboriginal communities to ensure that post-secondary institutions in Ontario incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, values, pedagogy and languages into both classroom instruction and the institution's wider environment in a manner that recognizes the importance of Aboriginal program control and delivery.

Historically, the formal education system in Ontario has not welcomed Aboriginal students or valued their knowledge and perspectives. Given the legacy of mistrust, stemming from both the residential school system and a traditionally Eurocentric post-secondary system, it is critical that the current post-secondary system values and integrates Aboriginal perspectives into the institutional environment and curriculum on an equal footing with Eurocentric views. Recognized by the United Nations as being an important epistemological and pedagogical tool, Indigenous knowledge systems include both alternative methodologies and alternative curriculum.¹⁵³ A more inclusive post-secondary system can only be implemented in conjunction with consultation and direction from Aboriginal nations, communities and organizations. Students believe that a post-secondary system that recognizes and affirms Aboriginal identities is a key step in raising the post-secondary participation rates of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

Post-secondary institutions have been working to increase the presence of Aboriginal knowledge in their course and program offerings. Students believe this is a positive step, but one which requires careful attention to the importance of Aboriginal control and delivery of Aboriginal programs. Past efforts to institute Aboriginal curriculum at mainstream institutions have been largely decided by non-Aboriginals, due to a combination of Eurocentric traditions of scholarship and also pressure to fit content into pre-existing formats and guidelines.¹⁵⁴

In contexts where Aboriginal organizations and communities have controlled program content and delivery, programs have tended to be more successful in recruiting and retaining Aboriginal learners.¹⁵⁵ Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, which have been present in Canada since the 1970s, have had success in attracting and graduating Aboriginal students, because these institutions pioneered the use of traditional teaching methods, consultation with Elders, partnership with the community, and Aboriginal administrators and professors at the post-secondary level.¹⁵⁶ Students believe that maintaining Aboriginal control of Aboriginal post-secondary education programs is important in ensuring that the structure and content of these programs truly reflects Aboriginal values and knowledge.

Principle Eleven: Both Aboriginal-managed institutions and Aboriginal programs and courses within accredited post-secondary institutions are essential components of a strategy to better integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the post-secondary curriculum.

Both Aboriginal programs and courses within accredited post-secondary institutions, and Aboriginal-managed and operated institutions are important in fostering a post-secondary environment that welcomes and values Aboriginal perspectives. Accredited institutions are universities and colleges in Ontario which offer a variety of educational programs, which may include Aboriginal content, but are not primarily focused on providing higher education for Aboriginal students in Aboriginal communities. There are 20 accredited universities in Ontario, all of which have received accreditation to offer university level courses through provincial or federal legislation. Aboriginal-managed

¹⁵³ Battiste, Marie. (2005). Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations. World Indigenous Higher Education Consortium Journal. Accessed at: <http://www.win-hec.org/>.

¹⁵⁴ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

institutions are institutions that were created by and for Aboriginal communities, to serve the specific educational needs of Aboriginal students, and are administered and taught primarily by Aboriginal faculty. These institutions are not independently accredited by provincial legislation, but many offer university level courses in partnership with an accredited institution. There are currently nine Aboriginal managed post-secondary institutions in Ontario that have educated nearly 30,000 students since first being established in the 1970s.¹⁵⁷

Aboriginal programs and courses within accredited post-secondary institutions are valuable in several ways. They provide Aboriginal students with the opportunity to study Aboriginal issues at well-established institutions with a wide variety of course selections both within Aboriginal and outside of the Aboriginal curriculum. The presence of Indigenous Studies departments at accredited institutions also provides non-Aboriginal students the opportunity to engage with course content on Aboriginal issues, and interact with Aboriginal students, faculty, and staff.¹⁵⁸ Aboriginal controlled institutions of higher learning, however, fill several voids left by accredited institutions. Most accredited institutions are located outside of Aboriginal communities in large urban areas. Moreover, accredited institutions serve a diverse body of students, and have no specific mandate to cater to the needs of the Aboriginal community.

In contrast, Aboriginal-managed institutions have mandates that specifically focus on providing Aboriginal education to serve the needs of Aboriginal communities, and gear the majority of their content to these objectives. Aboriginal managed institutions located in Aboriginal communities serve those students unable or unwilling to leave their community to pursue a higher education. In this way, these institutions mitigate much of the financial and social hardship created in moving to a university campus.¹⁵⁹ Aboriginal post-secondary institutions have nearly doubled their enrolment in North America in the past five years, and experience 80 per cent to 90 per cent student success in completing educational programs.¹⁶⁰ Both Aboriginal programs within accredited post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal controlled institutions serve important needs in terms of raising the profile, accessibility and quality of Aboriginal PSE in Ontario.

Concerns

Concern Fifteen: Post-secondary institutions often consider the only legitimate approach to knowledge to be Eurocentric content and structure, ignoring Aboriginal culture, knowledge and language.

Despite the increasing numbers of Aboriginal-focused courses and departments at Ontario post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal content and structure is often presented as subordinate to European worldviews, and treated as irrelevant to subject areas outside of Indigenous Studies.¹⁶¹ A recent report cites subtle and systemic racism as the “biggest barrier for FN [First Nations] learning.”¹⁶² As a participant in Aboriginal post-secondary education strategies put it, “[Non-Aboriginal people] are allowed to be ignorant of Aboriginal people. Thus we exercise racism unconsciously.”¹⁶³ Several Aboriginal students have cited faculty as presenting discriminatory or subtly racist

¹⁵⁷ The Aboriginal Institute’s Consortium. (2005). A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁶⁰ The Aboriginal Institute’s Consortium. (2005). A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

¹⁶¹ For a definition of “Indigenous Knowledge” please see the Early Outreach section of this paper.

¹⁶² Battiste, Marie. (2005). Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations. World Indigenous Higher Education Consortium Journal. Accessed at: <http://www.win-hec.org/>.

¹⁶³ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

perspectives in classes.¹⁶⁴ This attitude is reflected in the hierarchy of knowledge, where Aboriginal knowledge is seen often understood as only having relevance in a cultural, artistic, or historic sense.¹⁶⁵

In addition, there are difficulties in making the more substantive changes to the pedagogical and evaluative structure of universities that would incorporate Aboriginal methodologies and pedagogies. For example, while it may be relatively easy to include a section on Aboriginal authors in a Canadian literature course, it would be much harder to change the structure of individual work and hierarchical evaluation that underlies the course design to reflect Aboriginal values of reciprocity and collaboration. To a large extent, current initiatives to include Indigenous Studies in university programs have focused on content, rather than structural changes. A more comprehensive approach to the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in post-secondary curriculum would recognize the contributions to diverse fields of study that Indigenous knowledge has made, and also the alternative methodologies for study that can be found in Aboriginal knowledge.

Concern Sixteen: Some Aboriginal students may feel alienated by the structure of post-secondary institutions and may feel that university education lacks relevance because it neglects Aboriginal culture, perspectives, knowledge and pedagogy.

Many of the longstanding norms and practices of post-secondary institutions are based on the values and cultural norms of non-Aboriginal society.¹⁶⁶ As a result, “many Aboriginal students do not see themselves or their culture reflected in the typical Canadian university setting.”¹⁶⁷ Aboriginal students may experience strong anxiety related to feeling out of place in the institutional culture of university, and also being torn between the university environment and their commitment to their families and home communities.¹⁶⁸ While significant attempts have been made to foster a more inclusive institutional environment, issues of alienation for Aboriginal students still persist.

Compounding this issue is the fact that the percentage of Aboriginal staff at the post-secondary level is extremely low, and does not reflect the proportion of Aboriginal students studying at post-secondary institutions.¹⁶⁹ Aboriginal faculty and staff are important because they can act as role models and mentors to Aboriginal students dealing with transitions to the university setting. These individuals can also encourage students to pursue post-secondary studies, and help foster a welcoming and open institutional environment, and their absence can make the adjustment to a university environment more challenging for Aboriginal students.¹⁷⁰

Concern Seventeen: Aboriginal-managed post-secondary institutions are often inadequately supported by the provincial and federal governments.

Currently, there are a number of Aboriginal-managed post-secondary institutions in Canada. The largest is the First Nations University of Canada in Saskatchewan, which is the only Aboriginal-managed institution accredited as an

¹⁶⁴ McMaster University. (28 October 2010). Aboriginal Focus Group.

¹⁶⁵ Battiste, Marie. (2005). Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations. World Indigenous Higher Education Consortium Journal. Accessed at: <http://www.win-hec.org/>.

¹⁶⁶ First Nation, Métis & Inuit Centre for Excellence. (2008). *Transforming Aboriginal Post-Secondary Accessibility Exemplary Practices Discussion Paper*. Vancouver: Coastal Corridor Consortium.

¹⁶⁷ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁶⁸ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer. (2010). *First Generation post-secondary education students*. L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project.

¹⁶⁹ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁷⁰ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

independent degree-granting institution.¹⁷¹ Ontario has nine Aboriginal controlled institutions that offer degrees in partnership with accredited universities, including:

- The Kenjigewin Teg Educational Institute located on the M'Chigeeng First Nation, on Mnidoo Mnising (Manitoulin Island) which strives to provide a comprehensive, qualitative, cultural and holistic approach to First Nations based education, training and services in conjunction with Ryerson, Queen's, Laurentian, and other institutions
- The First Nations Technical Institute located on Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory (near Brighton), which operates according to a community-based education model, and offers joint degree programs with Ryerson University
- The Iohahiio Adult Education Facility located on Akwesasne Mohawk territory (near Cornwall), which offers a variety of university and college level courses
- Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig located in Sault Ste. Marie and Garden River First Nation which endeavours to facilitate research in policy development in areas that concern First Nations, and offers two degree granting programs: Anishinaabe Studies and Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe Language) in partnership with Algoma University

These institutions fill the important role of providing Aboriginal centered education within Aboriginal communities. Programs offered through these institutions can appeal to Aboriginal students living in remote areas, because they allow them to pursue higher education within their own community.¹⁷² A common concern is that Aboriginal institutions are inadequately funded, and the funding that the institutions do receive is not consistent.

Currently, the federal government provides funding for Aboriginal program development and design through a component of the PSSSP called the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). However, ISSP funding is limited to 12 per cent of PSSSP funding as a whole, which is generally insufficient to meet the demand for Aboriginal curriculum and course development. Any increases in funding beyond 12 per cent of the PSSSP pool would take away from the funding available to support individual students through federal band funding. Compounding this issue is the fact that the number of Aboriginal institutions competing for ISSP funding has dramatically increased in recent years.¹⁷³ For example, in 2001-2002 Ontario's Aboriginal post-secondary institutions received approximately \$3.1 million in funding through the federal ISSP program, but requested nearly four times that amount.¹⁷⁴ Finally, while ISSP funding can be used for curriculum development, it cannot be applied to operating costs, leaving a funding void for Aboriginal managed institutions.

The provincial government also has some mechanisms through which to support Aboriginal post-secondary institutions. The Aboriginal Post-secondary Education and Training Strategy (AETS) was implemented in the early 1990s to support the development and delivery of post-secondary programs for Aboriginal students. AETS required that institutions accessing funding have partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organizations and create joint decision-making bodies, Aboriginal Education Councils, that ensure Aboriginal representatives are have their perspectives heard by institutional governing bodies. AETS was generally successful in establishing programs at accredited institutions to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners and increasing Aboriginal enrolment in PSE.

¹⁷¹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹⁷² R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁷³ The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

¹⁷⁴ The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

Unfortunately, AETS was a five year initiative that concluded in 1996. In the 2008-2009 year, the provincial government consolidated Aboriginal program funding under the Post-secondary Education Funding for Aboriginal Learners (PEFAL) program. Under this program, a total of \$24.6 million is allocated to Aboriginal education initiatives, but only 14 per cent of this money is directly sent to Aboriginal-managed institutions,¹⁷⁵ and they must reapply for funding with formal proposals each year as multi-year agreements are not permitted under current guidelines.¹⁷⁶

Because none of the Aboriginal post-secondary institutions in Ontario are accredited degree- or diploma-granting institutions, they must partner with an accredited institution to access ISSP and PEFAL funding.¹⁷⁷ The partner institution bestows the actual diploma or degree given to a student, on behalf of the Aboriginal institution where they likely completed most of their course of study. As a result of this partnership model, rather than funding being directly provided to Aboriginal institutions, accredited institutions receive annual operating grants from the provincial government for the students studying at Aboriginal institutes.¹⁷⁸ Aboriginal institutions are unable to fully recoup this funding from the partner institution, because they often must pay administrative and other fees for the partnership. Moreover, while in some cases students at Aboriginal-managed institutions do spend significant time at the partner institutions and utilize partner resources, often the Aboriginal institution is located at great distance from the partner, and students may spend little or no actual time at the partner institution.

While partnerships in many cases have been valuable to both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, the current lack of legislative accreditation and autonomous funding has been a point of contention between Aboriginal-managed institutions and the federal and provincial governments. The Assembly of First Nations likened the current system to Aboriginal institutions being “forced to pay double the cost to operate and deliver post-secondary programs”.¹⁷⁹ The inadequate, unstable funding support for Aboriginal-managed institutions has significant consequences for student access to post-secondary education. Estimates have put the provincial support for students studying at Aboriginal post-secondary institutions at a seventh that of students studying in accredited colleges and universities. In the 2007-2008 year, this amounted to \$1,527 per student.¹⁸⁰ Aboriginal institutions often have waiting lists or have to refuse students because they are unable to fund enough spaces to meet student demand.¹⁸¹

Recommendations

Recommendation Seventeen: The federal and provincial governments must work with universities and Aboriginal stakeholders to foster a welcoming environment for Aboriginal students at Ontario’s post-secondary institutions, including taking concrete action towards the elimination of racism, providing access to Aboriginal course content, Aboriginal faculty, administrative and support staff.

The federal and provincial government must continue to work with universities and Aboriginal stakeholders to ensure that progress continues to be made in fostering a welcoming environment for Aboriginal students on Ontario campuses. Aboriginal course content and structure should be available to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students that incorporates Aboriginal knowledge and, when possible, this curriculum should be delivered by Aboriginal faculty and

¹⁷⁵ Frechette, Jean-Guy. (Feb. 22nd, 2011). *Ontario’s Aboriginal Education Strategy: Presentation to the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*. Toronto: Aboriginal Education Office, Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and Ministry of Education.

¹⁷⁶ The Aboriginal Institute’s Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

¹⁷⁷ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). *No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

¹⁷⁸ The Aboriginal Institute’s Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

¹⁷⁹ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). *No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

¹⁸⁰ Ontario Native Education Counselling Association. (2009). *Factsheet*. Naughton, ON.

¹⁸¹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

staff.¹⁸² In addition to curriculum changes, institutions should acknowledge the racism and discrimination that too often colours the experiences of Aboriginal learners and work with existing support networks and diversity centres to address this issue at the level of the institution as a whole.¹⁸³ Finally, at non-Aboriginal institutions, there should be Aboriginal representation at all levels of leadership, to ensure that Aboriginal communities are consulted in the development and implementation of Aboriginal curriculum and other student services. This could take the form of representation on governing boards, consultation with Elders, or expansion of the role of AECs.¹⁸⁴

Recommendation Eighteen: The provincial government must review the current partnership model of funding for Aboriginal-managed institutions to ensure that students studying at Aboriginal post-secondary institutions are adequately funded. This should include collaboration with the Aboriginal Institutes Consortium, as its institutions work towards meeting the criteria for independent accreditation.

The current partnership model of funding is unsustainable for Aboriginal-managed institutions, and must be revamped to ensure that these institutions receive adequate funding. The provincial government should re-examine its funding guidelines to ensure that Aboriginal post-secondary institutions in Ontario are adequately funded.

It is important that the provincial government recognize the important role Aboriginal institutions can play in raising post-secondary attainment rates for Aboriginal students, and fund them accordingly.¹⁸⁵ Guidelines should be created to enable Aboriginal-managed institutions to receive operating funding in the form of an FTE amount similar to accredited colleges and universities. This would give more authority to the Aboriginal institutions to deliver programs and help ensure that dollars intended for Aboriginal students are being spent on its intention.¹⁸⁶

In addition, many of the funding problems that Aboriginal-managed post-secondary institutions face stem from their current lack of independent accreditation, despite acknowledgement by other institutions and the government as offering a variety of college and university level courses. Without accreditation, the only way Aboriginal institutions can ensure that their students' credentials are broadly recognized by academics and employers is to partner with an existing accredited university or college. The Aboriginal Institutes Consortium, group of Aboriginal-managed institutions in Ontario, has created a task-force to work towards standardization of procedures between consortium members and meeting the provincial criteria for independent accreditation.¹⁸⁷ The provincial government should work with the Consortium, as well as individual Aboriginal institutions, towards college- and university-level accreditation for qualified Aboriginal-managed institutions.

Recommendation Nineteen: To combat racism at the institutional level, the government, in conjunction with Aboriginal communities and institutions, should provide anti-racist Aboriginal cultural training for administrators, faculty and staff. In addition, pedagogical training should also be made available to professors who wish to incorporate Aboriginal materials into their coursework.

Unfortunately, many Aboriginal students still encounter racism, stereotypes and an unwelcoming environment when they arrive at university. To facilitate the development of a more Aboriginal-friendly campus environment, the government, Aboriginal communities, and institutions should instate Aboriginal cultural training for university

¹⁸² R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

¹⁸³ First Nation, Métis & Inuit Centre for Excellence. (2008). *Transforming Aboriginal Post-Secondary Accessibility Exemplary Practices Discussion Paper*. Vancouver: Coastal Corridor Consortium.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

¹⁸⁶ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹⁸⁷ Roy, Stephanie. (March 2011). Session G: Building Postsecondary Education and Training System Capacity. Conference Presentation. Toronto: Aboriginal Postsecondary Education Gathering.

administrators, faculty and staff. The specific form the training would take, would vary from institution to institution, but would respond to a widespread need for the broader university community to develop a clear understanding of the issues Aboriginal students face on post-secondary campuses. In some instances, it may make sense to couch this training within existing diversity services and training, while at other campuses there may be a need for cultural training as a stand-alone program. Students believe the decision of how Aboriginal cultural training is implemented is best left to the Aboriginal communities at institutions. In addition, the government, in conjunction with Aboriginal communities on campus, should fund and develop pedagogical resources designed to assist non-Aboriginal professors in learning how to present Aboriginal course content appropriately. This could involve building stronger relationships between on-campus Aboriginal services, and professors and administrators.

Evaluation

Principles

Principle Twelve: Evaluation is an essential element of measuring the success of provincial, federal, and institutional programs designed to raise post-secondary attainment rates for Aboriginal learners.

The evaluation and modification of programs in response to findings is an essential component of designing programs that are effective in improving access and serving the needs of Aboriginal students. Evaluation provides information about the strengths and weaknesses of programs, as well as an opportunity for students, parents, faculty and administrators to provide feedback on how programs and support mechanisms could be improved. Consequently, evaluative mechanisms should be built into plans and initiatives designed to address access and persistence issues for Aboriginal students at the post-secondary level.

Concerns

Concern Eighteen: There is very little data available on enrolment and attainment rates of Aboriginal students, especially among non-status and Métis students, and the data that exists likely underreports Aboriginal participation.

There are widespread difficulties in gathering comprehensive data about Aboriginal application, admission, enrolment and persistence rates at post-secondary institutions in Ontario.¹⁸⁸ Different data sources may use different criteria for Aboriginal identity. For example, some surveys include those reporting general “Aboriginal ancestry” as Aboriginal and some only consider individuals who currently identify as “First Nations”, “Métis”, or “Inuit” to be Aboriginal. In addition census data may underreport the level of Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education, due to the tendency of Aboriginal people to not participate in census data collection.¹⁸⁹

Some individuals may also be reluctant to self identify as Aboriginal.¹⁹⁰ For example, a recent inventory of Aboriginal programs at post-secondary institutions found that there were substantial differences between the number of students who self-identified as Aboriginal and the number of students identified as Aboriginal through institutional data.¹⁹¹ Lakehead University has taken steps to formally report the number of Aboriginal students attending classes, as well as the number of Aboriginal graduates from each program, but they are in the minority.¹⁹² Many institutions lack the resources and motivation to track Aboriginal students, even within their own institution.

Recommendations

¹⁸⁸ Stephanie Oldford and Charles Ungerleider. (2010). *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁸⁹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Recommendation Twenty: The provincial government must make resources available to facilitate information gathering on Aboriginal students within post-secondary education.

With respect to all of the initiatives outlined, students believe evaluation and modification of programs in response to findings is an essential component of designing programs that effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal students. Evaluation is important because it provides information about the strengths and weaknesses of programs, as well as an opportunity for students, parents, faculty and administrators to provide feedback on steps for program improvement. It should be noted that a system wide, one size fits all model of evaluation will not capture the diversity of both program objectives and student goals. Different programs may have different standards of success, and diverse measures should be used, taking into account local contexts.

Several Aboriginal organizations have called for greater information gathering and sharing regarding Aboriginal programs, including a forum to share best practices and a national website where information about successful initiatives can be accessed by institutions, communities, learners, and other stakeholders.¹⁹³ Many Aboriginal stakeholders, however, have been frustrated by the lack of resources available to support ongoing information gathering.¹⁹⁴ The government could play a strong role in this area, by implementing standards for program data collection, and providing funding and forums for resources and information sharing.¹⁹⁵ Exit interviews with students who are leaving university could be an important, cost-effective means of identifying factors that affect student retention.¹⁹⁶

Recommendation Twenty-One: The provincial government must begin to annually audit Aboriginal student enrolment and attainment rates in all post-secondary education institutions in Ontario, and set public goals and objectives for Aboriginal post-secondary attainment.

The provincial government should track the participation, persistence, and attainment rates of Aboriginal students each year, and set public goals for raising these rates. Setting public goals is a way of holding the government accountable for providing the necessary support for Aboriginal students to raise post-secondary attainment. To facilitate robust tracking of student participation, persistence and attainment, including being able to capture student mobility across institutions, a unique identifier for each student will be necessary. The forthcoming implementation of the Ontario Education Number (OEN), a unique student number that tracks students from first contact with the Ontario education system throughout their whole educational and training career, will be necessary to improve current understandings of educational pathways, transitions, participation rates and outcomes.¹⁹⁷ Since many Aboriginal students may not immediately enter the Ontario education system, ways of integrating the OEN system with Aboriginal-run primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools should be investigated and implemented where appropriate. In addition, strategies of encouraging self-identification should be investigated to ensure that Aboriginal students are not being underrepresented in provincial data.

¹⁹³ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). *No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

¹⁹⁴ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Rae, Bob. (2005). *Ontario a leader in learning: report and recommendations*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Aboriginal Students Policy Statement

WHEREAS all willing and qualified students in Ontario must be able to access and excel within Ontario's post-secondary education system;

WHEREAS Aboriginal students continue to face unique historical and cultural barriers to participation in higher education;

WHEREAS both the provincial and federal governments hold responsibility for providing Aboriginal communities with improved access to post-secondary education;

WHEREAS the federal and provincial governments both have a clear obligation to fund high quality, culturally appropriate primary and secondary education for Aboriginal students to adequately prepare them for post-secondary education;

WHEREAS Aboriginal nations and communities should have control over the content, design and delivery of primary and secondary education curricula in reserve settings;

WHEREAS early outreach initiatives are important in improving access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students; these programs should be managed by Aboriginal communities and tailored to each community's specific needs;

WHEREAS both the provincial and federal governments have a responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal students are able to access adequate funding for the pursuit of post-secondary education in Ontario;

WHEREAS Métis and non-status First Nations must receive adequate financial support from the federal and provincial governments;

WHEREAS Aboriginal students should be able to access specific on-campus student support services that adequately address their needs;

WHEREAS both universities and government should work with Aboriginal communities to ensure that post-secondary institutions in Ontario incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, values, pedagogy and languages into both classroom instruction and the institution's wider environment in a manner that recognizes the importance of Aboriginal program control and delivery;

WHEREAS both Aboriginal-managed institutions and Aboriginal programs and courses within accredited post-secondary institutions are essential components of a strategy to better integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the post-secondary curriculum;

WHEREAS evaluation is an essential element of measuring the success of provincial, federal, and institutional programs designed to raise post-secondary attainment rates for Aboriginal learners;

WHEREAS while enrolment rates among Aboriginal students have increased, they remain significantly less likely than other Ontarians to enter post-secondary education;

WHEREAS inadequate support from the government has created significant barriers for Aboriginal individuals in pursuing post-secondary education;

WHEREAS inadequate support at the primary and secondary levels leaves Aboriginal students underprepared to enter university;

WHEREAS rural and remote Aboriginal communities often lack information infrastructure and support systems; as a result, students often have inadequate information about post-secondary education;

WHEREAS Aboriginal students living in urban environments face primary and secondary school barriers to participation in post-secondary education;

WHEREAS Aboriginal perspectives, histories, and cultures have not been adequately integrated into primary and secondary school education, and Métis perspectives are particularly underrepresented;

WHEREAS At all levels of the education system, there is a shortage of qualified aboriginal instructors to teach aboriginal content, and the formal accreditation system may not recognize aboriginal expertise.

WHEREAS Aboriginal students often face disproportionate challenges in financing post-secondary education;

WHEREAS federal funding of financial support programs for Aboriginal students is capped at two per cent increases per year. This model excludes many Aboriginal students, and consequently fails to meet their financial needs;

WHEREAS First Nations bands lack the federal funding to support all eligible students aspiring to attend a post-secondary institution in a given year;

WHEREAS the provincial Aboriginal Bursary program reaches relatively few Aboriginal students;

WHEREAS approximately half of all Aboriginal students are mature students, and as such are ineligible for many provincial grant programs.

WHEREAS post-secondary education institutions often do not provide the specific support services needed by Aboriginal students;

WHEREAS not all universities in Ontario provide childcare on campus and, when it is offered, the cost is often prohibitively high and wait times are long;

WHEREAS post-secondary institutions often consider the only legitimate approach to knowledge to be Eurocentric content and structure, ignoring Aboriginal culture, knowledge and language;

WHEREAS some Aboriginal students may feel alienated by the structure of post-secondary institutions and may feel that university education lacks relevance because it neglects Aboriginal culture, perspectives, knowledge and pedagogy;

WHEREAS Aboriginal-managed post-secondary institutions are often inadequately supported by the provincial and federal governments;

WHEREAS there is very little data available on enrolment and attainment rates of Aboriginal students, especially among non-status and Métis students, and the data that exists likely underreports Aboriginal participation;

BIRT the provincial and federal governments and post-secondary institutions must take action to raise Aboriginal post-secondary participation and attainment rates;

BIFRT the provincial and federal governments must improve the public education system available to Aboriginal students, including culturally relevant material at all levels of education and robust student support services;

BIFRT aboriginal content, including treaty rights and Métis perspectives, should be integrated into the curriculum taught to all Ontario students at the primary and secondary school levels.

BIFRT the provincial and federal governments must provide resources to improve early outreach programs for Aboriginal students in reserve and non-reserve settings;

BIFRT partnerships between post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal communities should be encouraged and incentivized by government to enhance access;

BIFRT The government should work to ensure that adequate funding is available to hire qualified aboriginal teachers, including investigating alternative methods of accreditation.

BIFRT the provincial government must push the federal government to uncap and annually increase Post-Secondary Student Support Program funding to levels that will provide full support to all Aboriginal students in financial need and reflect the rising costs of education;

BIFRT the provincial government must expand the Aboriginal Bursary program to meet the unmet financial need of all Aboriginal students;

BIFRT the provincial government must change the application process for the Aboriginal Bursary to increase use of the program;

BIFRT the provincial government should make a multi-year plan to contribute to the bursary fund of Métis Nation of Ontario Education and Training, to ensure the sustainability of the fund and enable more Métis students to access financial assistance;

BIFRT the provincial government should review guidelines around grant eligibility to ensure mature aboriginal students are not unfairly excluded from provincial grant programs.

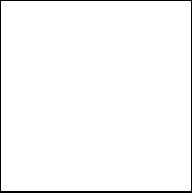
BIFRT the provincial government must work with local Aboriginal Education Councils and Aboriginal communities to assess the student support service needs of Aboriginal Students, including Aboriginal student centres, and provide funding based on their recommendations;

BIFRT the provincial and federal governments must provide funding for affordable, accessible, culturally appropriate daycare services for Aboriginal students with dependants;

BIFRT all post-secondary institutions should have, at minimum, an Aboriginal student centre, an Aboriginal counsellor, and aboriginal specific secondary to post-secondary transitional services.

BIFRT All aboriginal education councils should have student representation, and institutions should make an effort to communicate the existence and purpose of the AEC to all aboriginal students in particular, but also the student body more generally.

BIFRT the federal and provincial governments must work with universities and Aboriginal stakeholders to foster a welcoming environment for Aboriginal students at Ontario's post-secondary institutions, including taking concrete action towards the elimination of racism, providing access to Aboriginal course content, Aboriginal faculty, administrative and support staff;



BIFRT the provincial government must review the current partnership model of funding for Aboriginal-managed institutions to ensure that students studying at Aboriginal post-secondary institutions are adequately funded. This should include collaboration with the Aboriginal Institutes Consortium, as its institutions work towards meeting the criteria for independent accreditation;

BIFRT to combat racism at the institutional level, the government, in conjunction with aboriginal communities and institutions, should provide anti-racist aboriginal cultural training for administrators, faculty and staff. In addition, pedagogical training should also be made available to professors who wish to incorporate Aboriginal materials into their coursework.

BIFRT the provincial government must make resources available to facilitate information gathering on Aboriginal students within post-secondary education;

BIFRT the provincial government must begin to annually audit Aboriginal student enrolment and attainment rates in all post-secondary education institutions in Ontario, and set public goals and objectives for Aboriginal post-secondary attainment.