# Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People

Written for the Saskatchewan Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People

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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

This report is produced by a research team from the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit to support the work of the Saskatchewan Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People. Specifically the research is designed to assist the Joint Task Force in identifying evidence-based public policies, programs, and practical approaches that have the greatest potential for positive impact on education and employment outcomes for First Nations and Métis People.

Section One consists of a literature review of effective practices employed within the early childhood, elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels of education. Labour force attachment is also explored. The primary focus is placed upon Saskatchewan research, but the review also examines national and international research efforts. A conceptual framework is presented indicating the five main themes in the literature review and outlining key elements within each theme. The literature review emphasizes the importance of paying attention to ethical space, shared governance, planning for success, monitoring success, and local innovation.

Section Two focuses on a variety of Saskatchewan Lighthouse Programs identified through purposeful sampling based on a proven track record in providing effective learning and training, leading either directly or indirectly to employment for First Nations and Métis people. On-site research, including interviews and focus groups, was conducted at most program sites and an appreciative inquiry-based approach was utilized to analyze this data. Each Lighthouse Program was analyzed through the lens of the conceptual framework from section one. For each Lighthouse Program the key dimensions were then summarized to present the promising practices used to address the education debt. The researchers found the conceptual framework

emerging from Section One aligned well with the main features found in the Lighthouse Programs. However, it is important to emphasize that local innovation was a key contributor to the success of each Lighthouse Program.

Section Three examines First Nations and Métis student and parent perceptions of current educational issues in Saskatchewan. Fifteen research sites visited by the researchers included: provincial and First Nations K–12 schools, adult education and training centers, two Teacher Education Programs, a First Nation school division, and two provincial correctional centers. Although rarely articulated in these precise terms, participants spoke eloquently of the historical education debt and its continued malign implications for Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan today. Many participants also expressed considerable hope and optimism for the future and were confident that if positive initiatives could be sustained Aboriginal people could aspire to enjoy a comparable standard to that currently enjoyed by the non-Aboriginal majority. Participants provided multiple examples from multiple perspectives of the concept of ethical space as a prerequisite for addressing the inter-generational consequences and manifestations of the education debt, leading to improved educational outcomes and employment opportunities for Aboriginal peoples. In defining what ethical space might look like once actualized in educational contexts participants spoke of the criticality of shared governance and strategic planning for success. Much of this planning required mobilizing adequate resources and developing the supports necessary to assist students through difficult transitions within the educational cycle and ultimately in making the transition from school to employment. Finally, participants repeatedly fore-grounded local contexts as the most appropriate frame for determining, implementing, and evaluating innovations to animate the ethical space, leading to the broader desired improvements for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples province-wide.

Themes emerging from this data include the fact that progress in improving educational outcomes and labor force attachment for First Nations and Métis peoples in Saskatchewan is very uneven across the province. Hope, optimism, innovation and significant improvement exists alongside deep despair, hopelessness, entrenched resistance and declining outcomes. Although not the only factor, location near employment opportunities appears to be a critical variable. First Nations and Métis communities located in geographic areas where employment opportunities are readily available tend to be showing greater improvements in educational outcomes and employment rates than communities where few economic opportunities exist. Additionally, post-secondary programs that provide academic transition support from high school or GED®, that provide personal and cultural support programming to students, and that are closely linked with employers, tend to have much more successful outcomes. Finally, inadequate student engagement, insufficient family support, early parenting or family responsibilities, lack of meaningful curriculum, and lack of connection between school and employment are major causes of current inequitable outcomes for Aboriginal learners in Saskatchewan schools and for Aboriginal under-representation in the provincial workforce.

Introduction

The project involves collaboration between the Joint Task Force (JTF) on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People and a research team from the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit at the University of Saskatchewan. The mandate of the Joint Task Force (JTF) is to provide the FSIN, the Government of Saskatchewan, and other potential partners with a report and recommendations that identify evidence-based public policies, programs, and practical approaches that have the greatest potential for positive impact on education and employment outcomes. To support this mandate the JTF contracted SELU to undertake research guided by the following principles:

- Take an appreciative inquiry approach in which positive assumptions are the starting point;

- Refrain from duplicating research that is already completed;

- Be client-centred;

- Focus on:

  1. Primary research with clients of the early childhood, K–12, and post-secondary education systems as well as those seeking labour attachment; and

  2. Identification of Saskatchewan *Lighthouse Programs* or practices where success is being achieved.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is twofold. The first purpose is to guide primary, client-centred research with First Nations and Métis people focusing on their experiences and ideas

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about education and employment. The second purpose is to identify and describe Lighthouse Programs and practices now in existence.

Objectives

Purpose One: Primary Client-Centred Research

1. To conduct primary research with First Nations and Métis users of the education systems at the middle, secondary and post-secondary levels; and

2. To conduct primary research with people seeking labour force attachment.

Purpose Two: Lighthouse Programs and Practices

1. To identify Lighthouse Programs and practices in Saskatchewan and elsewhere;

2. To describe those Lighthouse Programs/practices and to seek commonalities among them; and

3. To integrate the findings with current perspectives in the literature.

Research Questions

The research is guided by the following research questions:

Purpose One: Primary Person-Centred Research

1. What do you want us to know about your community?

2. What do you know in your heart will work?

3. What support do you need to get the education you want?

4. What support do you need to get the employment/career you want?

Purpose Two: Lighthouse Programs and Practices

1. What is working in education in your school/community?

Methodology

Purpose One: Primary Client-Centred Research

1. Interviews and focus groups were conducted at nine reserves and in several Métis communities. Those interviewed were students at the middle, secondary and post-secondary levels of the education system as well as parents/guardians.

2. Focus groups and interviews were conducted at two correctional facilities.

3. Interviews and focus groups were conducted at post-secondary institutions with students of the TEP programs, SIIT, ABE, Regional Colleges and Trade Centres.

4. Leaders of the K–12 and post-secondary institutions that have partnerships with First Nations and Métis people were interviewed.

Purpose Two: Lighthouse Programs and Practices

1. In consultation with Elders, First Nations and Métis leaders, educators, Ministry officials, researchers and others, programs that are demonstrably effective were identified.

2. On-site research including a review of existing documents, interviews and focus groups were conducted at each program site.

3. A report was written that described Lighthouse Programs/practices and identified commonalities amongst them.

Structure of the Report:

In Section One, following a brief descriptive overview of recent and pertinent statistics, a literature review of effective practices employed within the early childhood, elementary and secondary levels of education is presented. Practices at the post-secondary level are also examined and equal attention is paid to academic and professional programming, as well as

technical programming. Labour force attachment (LFA; specifically, practices related to the transitioning of young adults from secondary and post-secondary schooling into the labour force) is also explored in the literature review. Finally, insights are offered, as suggested from within this analysis. Wherever possible throughout the review and analysis, attention has been weighted such that half of the focus is placed upon research local to Saskatchewan, and then in diminishing degrees focus is placed upon national and international (US, Australian, and New Zealand) research efforts. In each of the review sections (early childhood, elementary and secondary, post-secondary) our method has been to provide a synthesis of research distilled into "promising" practices.

Section Two focuses on Lighthouse Programs identified in consultation with Elders, First Nations and Métis leaders, educators, Ministry officials, researchers and others. These Lighthouse Programs were selected because of their unique governance and funding structure and a proven track record of affording academic success to First Nations and Métis students. On-site research, including interviews and focus groups, was conducted at each program site and we utilized an appreciative inquiry based approach to analyze this data. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) defined appreciative inquiry as:

> the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organization, and the world around them. It involves systemic discovery of what gives life to an organization or community when it is most effective and most capable in economic, ecological and human terms (p. 7).

The Lighthouse Programs include: Sturgeon Lake Central School, Treaty 4 Student Success Program Incorporated, Cowessess Community Education Centre, Sakewew High School

in North Battleford, Whitecap Dakota First Nation–Saskatoon Public School Division Partnership Agreement, Punnichy Community High School Career Transition Program, Regina Trades and Skill Centre, and Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program.

Section Three focuses on First Nations and Métis students' and parents' perspectives on current educational issues in Saskatchewan. On-site research, including interviews and focus groups, was conducted in 15 First Nation and Métis communities regarding educational programs; and here we also utilized an appreciative inquiry-based approach to analyze this data. The data and the themes emerging from the data are then presented and analyzed.

SECTION ONE: A Literature Review on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People

Year over year, publicly available statistics collected by the Government of Canada demonstrate the inequitable conditions faced by many of Canada's Aboriginal communities. With few exceptions, the data offer a portrait of challenge and diminished prospect at rates far below those experienced by non-Aboriginal Canadians.   Though descriptive statistics are provided as a piece of the evidence, anecdotal reports offer few suggestions that contradict the generalized view. The purpose of the present document emerges from these insights, and is an attempt to mitigate the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.   The document is delimited in scope to match that of the Saskatchewan Joint Taskforce (JTF) on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People, and furthermore delimited to examine select areas of focus for the JTF by way of review of contemporary research literature.

Following a brief descriptive overview of recent statistics, this section will examine effective practices employed within the early childhood, elementary and secondary levels of education. In the next section, practices at the post-secondary level will be examined; equal attention is paid to academic, professional and technical programming. Labour force attachment (LFA; specifically, practices related to the transitioning of young adults from secondary and post-secondary schooling into the labour force) is part of the second section of this literature review. Finally, insights are offered, as suggested from within this analysis. Wherever possible throughout the review and analysis, attention has been weighted such that half of the focus is placed upon research local to Saskatchewan, and then in diminishing degrees focus is placed upon national and international (US, Australian, and New Zealand) research efforts. In each of

the review sections (early childhood, elementary and secondary, post-secondary) our method has been to provide synthesis of research distilled into "promising" practices.

Overview of the Contemporary Context

Aboriginal Peoples represent a sizable minority population within the evolving Canadian cultural mosaic. Though Statistics Canada has not yet released 2011 census datasets pertaining specifically to Aboriginal populations, some data are available (although in differing formats) from both the 2006 and 2001 censuses. Comparisons of data offered in these two snapshots provide a modest form of trend line, but any attempt to generate specific trends from the data discussed below ought to be undertaken with considerable caution.

In 2006, Statistics Canada reported Canada's population to be 31,241,030 residents (2006a)—an increase of 1.6 million (or 5.13%) over 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2001).[1] Of these, the population of individuals self-identifying as Aboriginal (North American Indian, Métis, and Inuit) in 2006 was reported as 1,172,790 (Statistics Canada, 2006a)—itself an increase of roughly 196,000 (or 16.75%) from numbers reported five years earlier (Statistics Canada, 2001)[2]. The population of Canadians of Aboriginal identity is growing at more than three times the rate of the population as a whole. In Saskatchewan, the population trends are similar. In 2006, Canadians of Aboriginal identity resident in Saskatchewan represented 14.8% of the provincial population—or 141,890 of a total population marked at the time of 953,850. As shown in Figure 1.1 these values represent a growth in population of Aboriginal Canadians in Saskatchewan over 2001 (130,185 individuals), particularly compared to the decline of growth in population for the

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[1] Reported as 29,639,030 residents in 2001.
[2] Reported as 976,305 residents in 2001.

population more generally (963,155) (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006a) Juxtaposed against other layers of demographic analysis, growth by these rates for Aboriginal populations is rare.

Figure 1.1 Percentage of Population Growth or Decline
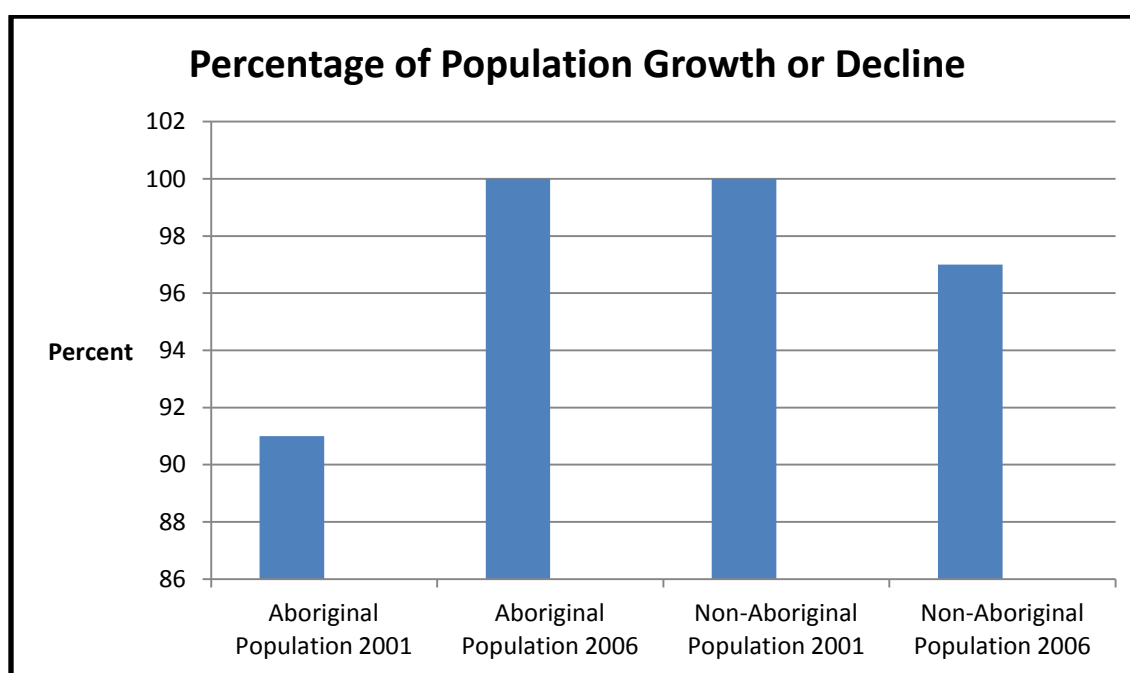
Source: Calculations based on data provided in Statistics Canada 2001, 2006a

In terms of average income, Statistics Canada provides data broken down by those who have achieved an educational certificate or diploma less than that of a Bachelor's degree from a University, equal to a Bachelor's degree from a University, and greater than a Bachelor's degree from a University. The numbers for both Canada and Saskatchewan are troubling, to say the least. Data is presented for years 2000 and 2005 and for those 15 years of age and older. In Canada, average yearly income (before taxes) for a member of the public with non-Aboriginal identity who had obtained certification or diploma less than a Bachelor's degree, in 2000 and 2005 respectively, was $29,143 and $30,401. All things equal, the average for a Canadian of

Aboriginal identity would be $20,448 and $22,531, in those years respectively—70% and 74% of what the average non-Aboriginal Canadian would have made. For those with a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, the values were $51,416 and $53,030 for the non-Aboriginal populous; $39,524 and $42,410 for Aboriginal Canadians—77% and 80%. For non-Aboriginal identity Canadians with a level of education higher than a Bachelor's degree, the values were $68,193 in 2000 and $69,382 in 2005. For Aboriginal Canadians with the same qualifications the values were $49,551 and $51,088—or 73% and 74% of an average income for other Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2006b).

While income levels are frequently less than 80% of what the average non-Aboriginal Canadian might expect, residents of Saskatchewan of Aboriginal identity could often expect even less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts in the years under investigation. In 2000, the average income for a non-Aboriginal resident of Saskatchewan with less than a Bachelor's degree was $27,297; in 2005 it was $29,328. For an Aboriginal resident, the average was $16,931, then $18,392 in 2005. These figures are both well below the Canadian average and measure at only 62% and 63% of Saskatchewan-resident counterparts. For those with more than a Bachelor's degree in Saskatchewan the numbers show 69% and 65% of non-Aboriginal income in 2000 and 2005—meaning that the wage gap increased between these two years in favour of non-Aboriginal Saskatchewan residents during this timeframe. Only for those Aboriginal residents with a Bachelor's degree is parity found, but only in terms of percentage of non-Aboriginal Saskatchewan average annual income when compared against the similar percentage for Canada in general. That is to say, Aboriginal residents of Saskatchewan still show average incomes significantly less than their non-Aboriginal neighbours, but less so than when focus is pulled back and Canada-wide data are used. These numbers are shown in Table 1.1.

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Table 1.1 Average Annual Income Disparities between Certified Canadians of Aboriginal Identity and Non-Aboriginal Identity in 2000 and 2005

		2000			2005		
		Non-Aboriginal Average Annual Income	Aboriginal Average Annual Income	Aboriginal Average Income as Percentage of Non-Aboriginal Average Income	Non-Aboriginal Average Annual Income	Aboriginal Average Annual Income	Aboriginal Average Income as Percentage of Non-Aboriginal Average Income
Canada	< BA or Equivalent	$29,143	$20,448	0.70	$30,401	$22,531	0.74
	BA or Equivalent	$51,416	$39,524	0.77	$53,030	$42,410	0.80
	> BA or Equivalent	$68,193	$49,551	0.73	$69,382	$51,088	0.74
Saskatchewan	< BA or Equivalent	$27,297	$16,931	0.62	$29,328	$18,392	0.63
	BA or Equivalent	$45,345	$35,152	0.78	$49,620	$41,838	0.84
	> BA or Equivalent	$66,616	$46,234	0.69	$71,117	$46,522	0.65

Source: Calculations based on data provided in Statistics Canada, 2006b

Grim as the disparity the statistics above portray, the larger context offered elsewhere demonstrates that Aboriginal identity Canadians achieve certification at levels significantly below non-Aboriginal Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2006c). Data released in the 2006 Census show that Aboriginal Canadians represented roughly 3% of Canadians 15 years of age or older. Of that population age range, 56% of Canadians of Aboriginal identity hold a certificate or diploma (including high school diploma) less than a Bachelor's degree—for non-Aboriginal identity Canadians the same is true of 77%. Four percent of Aboriginal Canadians held a Bachelor's degree from a University in 2005; while for non-Aboriginal Canadians the proportion was 12%. Just over 1.7% of Aboriginal Identity Canadians held a degree above the level of a Bachelor's (including professional degrees in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and

optometry; as well as Master's and earned Doctoral degrees). For non-Aboriginal Canadians, 6.7% hold these higher level degrees (Statistics Canada, 2006c). Interesting is the statement presented in a synthesis of the above discussed data: (a) Canadians of Aboriginal identity are 27.3% less likely than non-Aboriginal Canadians to hold *less than a Bachelor's degree or equivalent*—but for those who do, they can expect to make 26% less annual income than non-Aboriginal Canadians; (b) Canadians of Aboriginal identity are 66.6% less likely than non-Aboriginal Canadians to hold a Bachelor's degree or equivalent—but for those who do, they can expect to make 20% less annual income than non-Aboriginal Canadians; and (c) Canadians of Aboriginal identity are 74.7% less likely than non-Aboriginal Canadians to hold a degree at a level greater than a Bachelor's—but for those who do, they can expect to make 26% less annual income than their non-Aboriginal counterparts with identical qualifications.

As a consequence today poverty in Saskatchewan is not distributed evenly across racial lines since, excluding people living on reserves, Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan are almost four times more likely to be living in poverty than non-Aboriginals (Hunter & Douglas, 2006). The situation is even grimmer with respect to child poverty. UNICEF reported that Canada ranks 24th out of 35 industrialized nations with a child poverty rate of 13.3% (Monsebraaten, 2011, July 13) and Saskatchewan had the third highest poverty rates among Canadian provinces (Gingrich & Douglas, 2009). In 2007, the last year for which there are accurate figures, the rate of under 18 year olds living in poverty was 16.7% (Gingrich & Douglas, 2009). Child poverty is even more pronounced for Aboriginal families in Saskatchewan as a staggering 45% of Aboriginal children live in low-income families, a proportion six times greater than that of non-Aboriginal children. While disadvantage was less pronounced (but still significant) for Métis children at 28.3%, an overwhelming 57.9% of First Nations children in Saskatchewan regularly

go without some of the basic necessities of life (Gingrich & Douglas, 2009). This deprivation has profound, wide-ranging and long term effects on children, as Hunter and Douglas (2006) attested:

> Poverty can do both immediate and lasting harm to children. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to lack adequate food, clothing and basic health care, live in substandard housing and poorly resourced neighbourhoods, become victims of crime and violence, be less successful in school, suffer ill health and have shortened life spans. (p.1)

It has long been known that race and social class are major determinants of educational opportunities and achievement as well as future life chances (Bernstein, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Oakes, 2005). Birdsall (1999) who considered education as an asset found "unequal access of the poor to good-quality schooling" (p. i) resulted in a disproportional reduction to income growth for the poorest families. Severe poverty has an even more deleterious effect on educational outcomes (Hirsch, 2007, September) in all OECD countries, including Canada (West, 2007). A large body of research suggests that the pervasive disadvantage experienced by Saskatchewan's Aboriginal peoples emanates from, and is reflected in, poor educational achievement normalized by the legacy of colonialism (Battiste, 2005; Bell, 2004; Carr-Stewart, 2001; Richards 2008). This legacy has created intergenerational disparities, which impede educational progress among many Aboriginal students, leading to the reproduction of low socio-economic status in succeeding generations. That Aboriginal people benefit the least from publicly funded education has long been suspected, but the degree to which race influences educational outcomes has become abundantly clear over the past decade with the collection of detailed data on student achievement by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. Especially troubling are recent statistics indicating that while over 82% of Saskatchewan's non-Aboriginal

students graduate from Grade 12 only 32.5% of Aboriginal students achieve a high school diploma (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010). Completion rates for Aboriginal students attending provincial schools in the North or First Nation controlled schools on reserve are even lower, at less than 30%. Furthermore, those Aboriginal students who did complete high school on average score between 20–30% lower on standardized tests than other students, impeding their progression to post-secondary education or technical training. Overall, approximately 53% of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population over the age of 15 have less than Grade 12 education, compared to 38% of the non-Aboriginal population. About 26% of Aboriginal people have completed post-secondary education, compared to 41% of the non-Aboriginal population. As a result Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan are tied with their counterparts in Manitoba with the lowest rates of educational attainment, both at the K–12 and post-secondary levels, of all Aboriginal groups in Canada (Mendelson, 2006; Richards, 2008). Moreover unemployment among Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan is the highest in Canada at 36.2% (Mendelson, 2006).

These inequitable educational outcomes have profound implications for the future of the province of Saskatchewan given that the links between education, employment, income, and wellbeing have been substantially documented (Howe, 2002, 2011; Mendelson, 2006). Improving educational outcomes, especially attaining a high school diploma, is critical to labour force attachment, which is the main prerequisite to alleviating the poverty and eliminating the wider disparities in quality of life experienced by Aboriginal people. While not discounting deeper systemic issues and the barriers posed by pervasive prejudice, a large body of evidence points to the immediate economic and social benefits that attaining a high school diploma confers upon Aboriginal people (Howe, 2002, 2006, 2011; Mendelson, 2006; Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe, & Cowan, 2009)

Reducing these disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of Saskatchewan is also critical to sustaining cross-cultural harmony and social cohesion in a context where racial animosity is already problematic. According to Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), people tend to befriend and spend time with others they perceive to be in their own social class (p. 51). They claim that "when we have less to do with other kinds of people, it's harder for us to trust them" (p. 51). Citing de Tocqueville, Wilkinson and Pickett contend that the social construction of prejudice leads to "real inequality produced by wealth and the law" (p. 52). This stratification based on wealth is bolstered by racist attitudes that lead to further marginalization.

In addition to advancing an unequivocally moral imperative, the goal of eliminating educational inequities for Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan constitutes a sound public investment that will likely pay substantial dividends in the coming decades. Cultivating similar educational outcomes for Canadian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2026, according to one recent estimate, would result in a cumulative national output gain of $401 billion and a cumulative increase in tax revenues of $39 billion (Sharpe et al., 2009, p. v). Saskatchewan, with one of the largest Aboriginal populations of any province, stands to benefit disproportionately from these gains because the province's relatively small tax base is currently stretched by the high costs associated with Aboriginal dependence. Similarly, increasing the proportion of Aboriginal people in full or part-time employment will have a disproportionate impact on alleviating current labour shortages stemming from the rapid resource boom. Alternatively, it is estimated that the fiscal cost of Aboriginal peoples' above-average use of government services related to continued social disadvantage will increase from $6.2 billion to $8.4 billion annually until 2026 (Sharpe et al., 2009, p.vii). For the same demographic reasons, Saskatchewan will shoulder a disproportionate share of that burden if educational outcomes do

not improve. Even more recent research specific to Saskatchewan suggests that achieving educational parity for Aboriginal peoples would result in a monetary benefit of $16.2 billion, a non-monetary benefit of $48.6 billion, and a social benefit of $25.2 billion for a cumulative benefit to the province of Saskatchewan of $90 billion (Howe, 2011).

In addition to these massive monetary benefits research from another context (Wolfe and Haveman, 2001, June) catalogued a series of what they term "non-market effects of schooling" and contends that "the literature on the intergenerational effects of education is generally neglected in assessing the full impact of education." (p.2). Amongst the nonmarket effects that they include are the following:

- A positive link between one's own schooling and the schooling received by one's children

- A positive association between the schooling and health status of one's family members

- A positive relationship between one's own education and one's own health status

- A positive relationship between one's own education and the efficiency of choices made, such as consumer choices (which efficiency has positive effects on well-being similar to those of money income)

- A relationship between one's own schooling and fertility choices (in particular, decisions of one's female teenage children regarding non-marital childbearing)

- A relationship between the schooling/social capital of one's neighborhood and decisions by young people regarding their level of schooling, non-marital childbearing, and participation in criminal activities. (pp. 2–3)

In summary an abundance of research suggests that there is a close causal connection between education, employment, health, and other indices of wellbeing among Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan, suggesting that schooling is a vital point of intervention (O'Rourke, Craven, & Seeshing-Young, 2008). As the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development affirmed in February 2007:

> It is rare to find unanimity on any topic in the realm of public policy. When it comes to Aboriginal education, however, the now overwhelming consensus [is] that improving educational outcomes is absolutely critical to the future of individual Aboriginal learners, their families and children, their communities, and the broader Canadian society as a whole. (Cited by Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, p.2).

Clearly Saskatchewan's continued success and prosperity is contingent upon a future in which Aboriginal communities are empowered, culturally vibrant, healthy, safe, well-educated and engaged in meaningful and remunerative employment. Since publicly funded education constitutes the best tool for promoting individual and collective wellbeing and sustaining social cohesion, responding to the needs of Aboriginal learners to ensure more equitable outcomes is consequently the most compelling challenge currently facing Saskatchewan schools.

Given the importance of the topic both locally and globally, a large body of international research on improving educational outcomes has emerged since the 1960s (Epstein, 2001; Hattie, 2011; Heck, 2007; Murphy, 2010,). When focused on Indigenous educational achievement in a variety of global contexts this inquiry has been informed broadly by two distinct and occasionally antagonistic streams of educational research and theory. The first is the *School Effectiveness/ Improvement* movements which have informed the development of "world

educational culture" (Kamens and McNeely, 2010, p.5) over the last three decades. In contrast to this universalistic approach, another body of research influenced by critical race and postcolonial theory, has emphasized the importance of creating c*ulturally congruent* educational systems as a means of ensuring academic success for Aboriginal students (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Cottrell & Orlowski, 2012; Hickling-Hudson and Alquist, 2003)

Building on Edmonds' early research which confirmed that schools and school characteristics *can* make a difference in student achievement, international effective schools and school improvement research have merged to form a more sophisticated understanding of school culture and ecology with a view to building capacity for learning and managing change (Fullan & Levin, 2009, June 17; Levin, 2009; Sackney, 2007). This body of research and theory has also been a catalyst in the increasingly widespread adoption of 'accountability systems' based on large-scale assessments and standardized tests, with rewards and sanctions for schools and divisions based on student performances (Sackney, 2007). Much has been learned from these initiatives about how to improve outcomes, largely based on the assumption that disadvantaged students do not need different types of interventions but rather require more intensive support and greater exposure to the quality educational factors that promote higher levels of achievement for successful students (Elmore, 2006; Murphy, 2010). In synthesizing the findings from this research Leithwood (2009) identified five classroom conditions and four school learning conditions as being especially critical for Aboriginal students. These included: engaging instruction, rich curricula, time for learning, smaller class sizes, heterogeneous student groupings, academic press, school disciplinary climate, diverse student populations and small school size.

The positivist assumptions underpinning much of the School Effectiveness/ Improvement literature has generated significant criticism (Sandoval-Hernandez, 2008; Reynolds &Teddie, 2000), as has the tendency of large-scale assessments and standardized tests to frame Aboriginal students in deficit terms across multiple jurisdictions (Bouvier and Karlenzig, 2006). Influenced by critical race and postcolonial theory, (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002), another body of scholarship has asserted that race and racism remain deeply embedded in school landscapes and affect all aspects of educational systems (Battiste, 2005; Castagno and Brayboy, 2008; Cherubini, 2009a, 2009b; Grey & Beresford, 2008; Kanu, 2006, 2007; Hickling-Hudson and Alquist, 2003; Jagers & Carroll, 2002; O'Rourke et al., 2008; Riehl, 2000). Reflecting the growing presence of Indigenous researchers within the academy, much of this scholarship sees contemporary schools as neo-colonial sites and insists that achievement gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are likely to continue until schools are decolonized (Kanu, 2006, 2007; Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist, 2003; Silver, Mallett, Greene & Simard, 2002). This research challenges educators to "confront their epistemic and ontological assumptions about teaching and learning" (Cherubini, 2009b, pp. 12–13) and calls for a transformation of schools to create more respectful, invitational and culturally-congruent learning environments. In identifying the main features of such a transformative education system the Canadian Council on Learning (2007) highlighted the following priorities: incorporating Indigenous knowledge, culture and language as foundational to curriculum; creating strong partnerships with Aboriginal people as part of school governance; increasing employment of Aboriginal peoples at all levels of school systems; and creating an appreciation for life-long learning and effective teacher training.

In the subsections that follow, this review will offer an exploration of contemporary insights focused on remedy in one modest layer of this most complex situation: education for labour force attachment. As previously noted, this review will proceed through an investigation of promising practices in (a) early childhood education (b) elementary and secondary level academic attainment by Aboriginal identity children (c) post-secondary attainment and qualification by Aboriginal identity adults including ABE attainment. Labour force attachment efforts will be described in conjunction with the programs that support them and new developments will be noted.

Historical Context for K–12 Aboriginal Education in Saskatchewan

According to Bellegarde and LaFontaine (2007) Aboriginal people originally controlled their own education system, utilizing community, family and Elders as teachers in the millennia before European contact. When European fur traders arrived in Western Canada in the late 17th century Indigenous knowledge was critical to their survival; and this knowledge was often accessed through marriages *a la facon du pays* between traders and Indigenous women. A 200 year fur trading relationship was followed by an abrupt shift to agricultural settlement in the 1870s (Dickason, 2008). Coinciding with the depletion of the buffalo and the advent of Canadian nation-building, Indigenous peoples in what became Saskatchewan agreed to treaties with the federal government which guaranteed them reserve lands and other rights, including education, in advance of large scale White settlement (Carr-Stewart, 2001). The current boundaries of the province (created in 1905) include parts of treaties 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10 and are home to 73 First Nation communities. The legislative framework governing Indigenous education in Canada developed out of the larger policy decisions made by the federal

government regarding Indigenous peoples' places in the newly-created Dominion. Since Indigenous peoples were seen as alien 'others' (Cottrell & Orlowski, 2012) by Canadian authorities, the education of Indigenous children was largely a segregated endeavour. Section 93 of the Canadian constitution assigned jurisdiction over education to the provinces, resulting in the establishment of secular and denominational publicly funded systems, regulated by provincial Ministries of Education, in most provinces, including Saskatchewan. However, section 91–24 of the constitution assigned responsibility to the federal government for "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians". Thus the federal Indian Act subsequently became the all-encompassing mechanism for fulfilling Canada's treaty obligations (including education) in all matters related to First Nations people (Carr-Stewart, 2001). Thus two education systems –a federal system for Indigenous peoples and provincial/state systems for all others – were established in Saskatchewan and "educational delivery, standards, expectations, and modes of schooling and educational attainment were significantly different for students in each system" (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1996 cited by Carr-Stewart and Steeves, 2009, p. 4).

Colonialism is typically practiced through extreme discursive warfare and in Saskatchewan schools was a formidable weapon wielded by Church and state against Indigenous communities for the purpose of assimilation (Armitage, 1995). The use of education as a tool in the cultural transformation of Indigenous peoples found particularly graphic expression in residential or industrial schools which operated between the 1870s and the 1990s as Church/state partnerships (Smith, 2009). Embedded in, and emanating from, the specific political and ideological dynamics of the emerging Canadian nation state, these institutions were also informed by ideas and practices circulating more widely, and should be seen as symptomatic of a particular moment in educational globalization. The segregation of Indigenous children from

families and communities; the suppression of traditional customs, ceremonies, languages and modes of dress; the emphasis on acquiring practical skills through physical labour; and the limiting of children to lower grades; were all colonial ideas of Indigenous educational 'best practice' which circulated globally at this time (Armitage, 1995). Notably these ideas flowed from the U.S. to Canada in the Davin Report of 1879 which was an early and influential form of what Green (2005) termed "evidence-based policy making", since it sought "foreign examples of policies and practices to borrow, and empirical data on the effects of foreign policies and practices as evidential support for policies advocated at home" (p. 3). In both Canada and the U.S. Indigenous peoples and cultures were problematized and schools as vehicles of assimilation and cultural transformation were presented as the solution. As an official with the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs remarked:

> The boarding school disassociates the Indian from the deleterious home influences to which he would otherwise be subjected. It reclaims him from the uncivilized state in which he has been brought up. It brings him into contact from day to day with all that tends to effect a change in his views and habits of life. By precept and example, he is taught to endeavour to excel in what will be most useful to him (Miller, 1990, p. 196).

The spread of neo-European settlement provided the infrastructure and educational, evangelical, philanthropic, and state networks constituted the circuits through which a Eurocentric modernist, colonialist discourse around race and education circulated and became hegemonic, rendering Indigenous peoples and epistemologies 'other' in the creation of national systems of education (Tikly, 2001). Colonial education also spread a common structure of Eurocentric schooling and mandated a form of curriculum based on an episteme rooted in the Graeco-Roman tradition. This system sought to suppress and supersede earlier Indigenous forms of education and has provided

the basis on which recent postcolonial reform efforts have built (Hickling-Hudson, 2007). In this respect, colonial forms of schooling, and the pedagogies, technologies, structures and forms of knowledge that they engendered, have proved remarkably resistant to change (Hickling-Hudson, 2007).

Although the Davin Report advocated the inclusion of the Métis children in federal residential and industrial schools, for the most part these schools restricted enrollment to First Nations students. A small number of Métis parents negotiated school fees with residential school administrators, and some schools took Métis children as day students. However, by 1910 the federal government had effectively excluded Métis children from their schools, limiting their responsibility to the education of treaty or status Indians. The provincial government and most provincial school districts also refused to accept responsibility for their education based on the argument that Métis people typically did not own property or pay school taxes. With few exceptions, then, educational institutions in Saskatchewan until the mid-20th century excluded the Métis (Racette, 2007). As Barron (1990) observed:

> At the most fundamental level, racism operated as a structural barrier ... Nowhere was this more evident than in the systematic debarment of Métis children from local schools. Superintendents' reports were replete with references to the fact that Métis people were not welcome and that Native parents had been discouraged from sending their children to schools. The excuse commonly cited was that Native children represented a health hazard, a fact under-scored in a 1943 school report:
>
> These children are not wanted in Tipperary School, Kenlis School and Pheasant Plains School. Some parents even threaten to take their children out of school if more of the Métis attend....

In reality, the health issue was little more than a smoke-screen for racial and class

prejudice.... and that if the Department of Education allowed them to remain in school the

other children would walk out. (p. 246).

According to Carr-Stewart (2001) the federal government "did not fulfil its constitutional

obligations" (p. 126) and the quality of educational services provided to for First Nations were

limited. Because of chronic underfunding from the outset only a small number of First Nations

children were accommodated, schools were often located off reserve and studies were offered

primarily at the early elementary level. Bellegarde and LaFontaine (2007) asserted that colonial

education was "designed to isolate/assimilate First Nations peoples" largely through residential

schools and industrial schools. Miller (2011) reported that students were not allowed to use their

Aboriginal languages, Aboriginal traditions were denigrated and students were taught to despise

their parents' cultures and spiritual ceremonies. Living conditions were harsh in that the food

was poor, clothing was inadequate, the school academic and vocational program was deficient,

and discipline was insensitive. Many children were subjected to emotional, physical, and/or

sexual abuse.

A comparative lens locates in this early phase of educational globalization the genesis of

what Ladson-Billings (2006) termed the *education debt* and the roots of many contemporary

educational challenges in Saskatchewan, especially the enduring disconnect between Indigenous

peoples and state sponsored formal educational institutions. Indigenous peoples have long

argued that colonial educational institutions were essentially vehicles of "cultural genocide"

(Bear, 2001, p. 13) and authorities in the Canada have recently acknowledged and offered formal

apology for the fact that industrial schools were responsible for "brutalizing [children]

emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually" (Pearce, in press). There is also

growing awareness of the damaging social, psychological, sexual, emotional, and cognitive consequences of these abuses and inequities. It is also increasingly understood that these effects contribute to intergenerational disadvantage such as low self-esteem, negative attitudes toward school or studying, poor educational background, or underdeveloped cognitive abilities and become endemic in families and communities (Barnes, Josefitz, & Cole, 2006). In addition to short-changing students in terms of educational quality and ability to secure employment an additional consequence of assimilative education in Saskatchewan and other Canadian jurisdictions is that the cohesiveness and social sustainability of Indigenous families and communities have been compromised. This has created a "complex situation where a high level of *dependency* toward the state is combined with a *profound distrust* of that same state" (Papillon & Cosentino, 2004, p. 1) among many Indigenous peoples.

Canadian authorities adhered to an aggressively assimilationist approach to the education of Indigenous peoples in the face of sustained Indigenous opposition and dismal academic results. A variety of investigations from the early 20th century onwards (Miller, 1996) pointed to the poor educational results and health consequences for Indigenous students attending residential schools and provided ammunition for critics. Unprecedented fiscal pressures placed on the federal government by the Great Depression and World War Two gave further impetus to these arguments. Insights from the progressive education movement also compelled educators to question the efficacy of enforcing a Eurocentric curriculum which was entirely misaligned with Indigenous students' home values (Reyhner & Eder, 1992). Post-war liberalism and the emergent discourse of "equality" and "common citizenship" which accompanied the expansion of the North American welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s, resulted in dramatic shifts in state policy respecting Indigenous peoples in Canada (Cornell, 2005, p. 12). For virtually the first time since

the 19th century treaty negotiations, Indigenous representatives were now included in consultations with federal authorities, but their input was often tokenistic and subordinated to government agendas. Despite Indigenous recommendations, federal authorities continued to adhere to total assimilation as the ultimate goal of state policy; but policy makers now articulated that desired outcome in the new liberal lexicon of equity, using terms like 'integration', 'equality', 'freedom', and 'full citizenship' to describe the anticipated benevolent results (Papillon & Cosentino, 2004). In Canada, the federal government began to articulate these goals of integration and equality as part of its 1951 revision of the Indian Act; and this was accompanied by a shift from segregation to integration in the provision of services, including education, to First Nation communities. Consistent with these larger goals the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) began negotiating tuition agreements with provinces such as Saskatchewan to integrate Indigenous students into provincial schools (Brady, 1995). As a consequence the percentage of Native children attending provincial schools rose from 27% in 1963 to 56.3% in 1979 (Brady, 1995, p. 351). This integration phase culminated in the Trudeau government's 1969 White Paper, which proposed terminating special status and treaties and recommended that "the governments of the provinces …take over the same responsibilities for Indians that they have for other citizens in their provinces" (Government of Canada, 1969, p. 6).

Racette (2007) indicated that in 1944 the Saskatchewan provincial government accepted responsibility for the education of Métis and non-status Indian children leading to the building of elementary schools particularly in the north. However, up until 1974, only two northern schools offered Grade 12 and it was not until 1976 that the Northern School Board (later known as the Northern Lights School Division) was established. Over time this has led to more autonomy over education for Métis living in the north whereas those living in central and southern

Saskatchewan typically participate on a minority basis in the provincial education system. According to Statistics Canada 2006 (cited in Government of Saskatchewan, 2009, p. 10) 65% of First Nations and Métis children attend provincially funded schools. However, inequities continued. First Nations and Métis children were not offered equal educational opportunities and access to provincial schools was often denied.

Ladson-Billings (2006) used the analogy of the *National Debt* to articulate a deeper understanding of the significance of the *achievement gap* in the U.S context. The national deficit refers to the monetary shortfall for one budget cycle; whereas, the national debt refers to "the sum of all previously incurred annual federal deficits" (p. 4). In the case of the achievement gap Ladson-Billings argued "that the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies" (p. 5) over the course of many years have all contributed to today's outcome. "Each effort we make toward improving education is counter balanced by the ongoing and mounting debt that we have accumulated" (p. 9). Often, this is evidenced through a lack of trust on the part of minority and disadvantaged students, parents, and community members not only in education but in areas like housing, health care and government services over their life-time. Like the national debt, the consequences from the achievement gap are "contributory and cumulative and make it near-impossible for us to reify the achievement gap as *the* source and cause of social inequality" (p. 10). Ladson-Billings concluded, "We do not merely have an achievement gap ─ we have an education debt" (p. 10). Although Ladson-Billings was referring to the U.S, her insights also have direct application to the intergenerational consequences of the educational disadvantage and cultural and cognitive dissonance experienced by Aboriginal peoples in the Saskatchewan context. Here too we have an education debt that has been misleadingly articulated as an "achievement gap" since the 1950s.

The urbanization trend among Saskatchewan Aboriginal people which began in the 1950s swelled the number of Aboriginal families moving to larger cities in the 1970s and 1980s (Cottrell, Preston, & Pearce 2012) leading to a rapid increase in the number of Aboriginal students attending provincially funded schools. This development coincided with the early rumblings of what would become postcolonial theory and a significant jump in the number of young Aboriginal people attending university and entering the teaching profession locally. These developments provided the catalyst within local educational circles for the beginning of shift away from a *deficit* orientation towards Aboriginal education and a growing awareness of the epistemological value of First Nations and Métis cultures, languages and knowledge systems not just for Aboriginal students but indeed for all learners.

Simpson (2007) indicated the introduction of Core Curriculum in the 1980s supported the integration of First Nations and Métis content and perspectives as a foundation for provincial curriculum and resources for all students. With this in mind, a Native Curriculum Review Committee was created in 1982 and in 1984 the Minister of Education established the Indian and Métis Education Advisory Committee (IMEAC) as a more permanent structure. Since that time efforts to improve Aboriginal achievement in Saskatchewan has been informed by a frequently uneasy synthesis of two distinct approaches: school effectiveness theory and cultural congruence theory. The former is global in orientation; the latter is more locally focused and is driven by compelling demographic trajectories and the lobbying capacity of a variety of Aboriginal groups and individuals.

Developments in Indian and Métis Curriculum: Summary Annual Report 1984–85 (Government of Saskatchewan, 1985). According to its 1985 Report IMEAC worked closely with the Indian and Métis Curriculum Development Team to integrate Indian and Métis

materials and content into the Saskatchewan K–12 core curriculum, develop supplemental materials and develop the Native Studies and Language courses. This committee also developed the first phase of an Indian and Métis Awareness In-Service Program focused on cross-cultural awareness and understanding. Their annual report in 1988 traced the development of a second phase focused on adaptation and application (Government of Saskatchewan, 1988). Some of their decisions may have been made in response to the Saskatchewan Human Rights report of 1985 entitled *Education equity: A Report on Indian/Native Education in Saskatchewan* that quickly led to schools being required to develop *Equity Plans* on an annual basis.

In 1989 the Minister of Education renamed this committee the Indian and Métis Education Advising Committee (IMEAC) (Government of Saskatchewan, 1992). IMEAC emphasized the importance of developing inclusive, responsive, and culturally affirming educational offerings throughout the K–12 system (Simpson, 2007). This committee supported teacher education programs such as the First Nations University of Canada (formerly the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College), Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), and Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP), to provide well qualified First Nations and Métis teachers and administrators. Simpson (2007) emphasized that in 1989 the framework *Indian and Métis Education Policy from Kindergarten to Grade 12* reinforced the expectation for integration of First Nations and Métis content and perspectives across all required areas of study.

Developments in Indian and Métis Education 1991–92 highlighted an expansion of the committee's responsibilities to encompass "all of the areas detailed in the Indian and Métis Education Policy from Kindergarten to Grade 12" (Government of Saskatchewan, 1992, p. 1). The committee listed all the curriculum committees that it nominated representatives to serve on

and its report described the importance of involving Indian and Métis community members in decision-making processes "for education programming and for soliciting input into the development of courses of instruction" (p. 1). By this point Dene, Saulteaux and Cree language programs were being offered, particularly in the Northern Lights School Division.

By 1994–95 the annual report (Government of Saskatchewan, 1995) pointed out an expansion of recommendations to include the areas of policy and research, teacher education, alternate programming, curriculum integration, in-service support, evaluation and monitoring, governance, equity implementation, and relationship and communication. This report cited a definition from *Our Children, Our Community and Our Future (1997)*:

> Equity in education is the fair and equal treatment of all members of our society who are entitled to participate in and enjoy the benefits of an education. All students and adults have the opportunity to participate fully and to experience success and human dignity while developing the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to contribute meaningfully to society. (p. 25)

In 2000, this committee was renamed the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) and its recommendations included four main areas: cultural affirmation and school climate, shared decision making, core curriculum and actualization, and life-long learning (Government of Saskatchewan, 2000). The publication of *Building Partnerships: First Nations and Métis Peoples and the Provincial Education System ─ Policy Framework* (Saskatchewan Government, 2003) indicated a further positive change of direction for Aboriginal education. Partnerships were moving beyond traditional definitions of parental involvement to supporting "shared management and governance of the provincial education system" (p. 2).

Postcolonial theory asserted an increasing influence over provincial education policy in Saskatchewan in the early 21st century. Cottrell et al. (2012) indicated,

> Typically postcolonial strategies seek to effect reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the descendants of European settlers within larger multicultural contexts through formal apology for the damage wrought by colonization, official recognition of Indigenous cultures and languages, and strategies of material redistribution. (p. 246)

In keeping with this direction, clear efforts to forge a new relationship between the provincial educational system and First Nations and Métis people was evident *The Learning Community in Aboriginal Education Priorities Report 2005–2007* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2005b) stressed that the work done on School[Plus] and on *Building Partnerships* was supportive for Aboriginal Education. "The past 50 years have witnessed a major change in orientation ─ a change that seeks to create, together as equal partners, a shared and harmonious future" (p. 9). The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee further contended, "The stream of Aboriginal education development and of improvement in Aboriginal student success is gathering strength" (p. 21).

The provincial government took a strong lead in promoting the development of partnerships. The *Building Partnerships: Educational Services Agreements Resource Guide* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2005a) emphasized these partnerships must respect:

> the visions, goals and principles of the First Nations and of the school division; the Treaty and inherent rights for lifelong learning; the *Canadian Constitution Act, 1982* that recognizes the existing inherent and treaty rights to education for Inuit, Métis and First Nations people; the understanding of the parties concerning the rights to education in the context of applicable legislation, Treaty rights, culture and history. (p. 4)

Further, the government committed to ensuring these partnerships would "focus on promoting equitable, amicable working relationships that involve shared decision making and shared accountability, while maintaining a high level of mutual respect and understanding" (p. 2). In 2008, the Minister of Education renamed the advisory committee the First Nations and Métis Education Provincial Advisory Committee (FNMEPAC) (First Nations and Métis Education Provincial Advisory Committee, 2012). The Speech from the Throne in 2007 announced the government would make it mandatory for teachers in the province to teach the "history and content of the Treaties in the K–12 curriculum" (Rohr, 2010, p. 1) and this was implemented in September of 2008 (p. 20). The Government of Saskatchewan (2010) reported "87% of participating students [grade sevens] reported that they had previously studied about treaties" (p. 56).

K─12 Aboriginal Education in Saskatchewan Today

In 2009–2010, from the total number of self-declared Aboriginal K–12 students, 29,042 attended provincially funded schools (20.9% of the total K–12 student population) and 16,514 students attended First Nations Schools (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010). In provincially funded schools the ratio of self-declared Aboriginal teachers to self-declared Aboriginal students was 1:257 and there were a total of 62 self-declared Aboriginal administrators. More students were studying Aboriginal languages at the elementary level than at the secondary level. As shown in Figure 1.2, a total of 1,781 secondary students were studying Aboriginal Languages including Cree (748), Dene (68), Saulteaux (41) and Nakawe (23).

The First Nations and Métis Education Provincial Advisory Committee (FNMEPAC) make recommendations to the Minister of Education for provincial programs, initiatives, and policy in First Nations and Métis Education (Saskatchewan Government, 2012c). The

Figure 1.2. High School Language Courses 2009–10
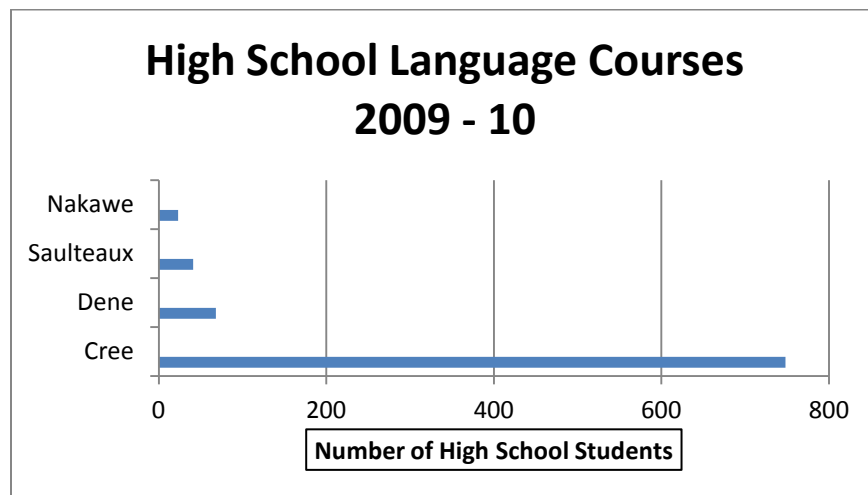
Source: Government of Saskatchewan, 2010

Government of Saskatchewan (2009) released *Inspiring Success: Building Towards Student Achievement,* a policy framework which addressed four areas: cultural affirmation and school climate; shared decision-making; curriculum actualization; and life-long learning. Within these four areas FNMEPAC proposed that schools must "promote the well being of each individual and community by affirming the cultures, traditions, languages, spirituality, and world views of the students," "ensure that decisions affecting the lives of children are made in partnership with Elders, parents, the community, educators, and government," "ensuring that Core Curriculum actualization takes place as intended, for all students and with concern for quality and authenticity," and offer "respect for diverse perspectives on learning, and recognition of

education as a multifaceted process that occurs continuously, in, and beyond school" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012c, First Nations and Métis Education Provincial Advisory Committee, Four Areas of Recommendations). The Government of Saskatchewan (2008a) guided implementation through the publication of *A Time for Significant Leadership: A Strategy for implementing First Nations and Métis education goals ─Implementation guide and toolkit.* These recent documents provided evidence of a postcolonial approach to education underpinned by school effectiveness theory in the Saskatchewan education system. Among other benefits this hybrid model can potentially create the ethical space where Aboriginal culture can be viewed as an asset and Aboriginal epistemologies viewed as a foundation for new learning

Tully (2000) described postcolonial initiatives as seeking to create in modern contexts "theoretical and political ... space for Indigenous peoples to establish terms of engagement on the basis of non-colonial relations" (p. 50). Similarly, Short (2005) viewed postcolonialism in settler societies like Canada and Australia as an "attempt to find a way to include Indigenous people in the cultural fabric of the nation which would seem fair and appropriate and therefore serve a legitimizing function for the settler state" (p. 267). Both definitions encapsulate current developments in Saskatchewan. Recent ministerial initiatives by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (Government of Saskatchewan 2008a, 2008b, 2009, & 2010) suggest that a fundamental shift in educational policy consistent with the tenets of postcolonial theory is underway (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006). By explicitly recognizing that the province's continued success requires a transformation of existing school systems to embrace the needs and voices of all, including those of Aboriginal ancestry (Government of Saskatchewan 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010), the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education has committed itself to establishing a new relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Official policy discourse describes publicly funded

schools as the "institutions with the greatest capacity to foster shared understanding and respect among different cultural groups and remain possibly the best hope for forging harmonious and prosperous futures in these increasingly diverse and globalized societies." (Cottrell, 2010, p. 223). Within a wider commitment to an accountability framework (Martell, 2008), the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education is now officially committed to creating a *"culturally responsive learning program that benefits all learners"* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009, p. 12).

The Pursuit of Ethical Space in Saskatchewan

In developing these principles the Ministry is guided in part by the concept of *ethical space* as a philosophical underpinning for postcolonial partnerships and initiatives between public schools and Aboriginal communities (Cottrell, Preston, Pearce, & Pelletier, 2009*;* Ermine, 2000, 2007, 2009). Cree philosopher and ethicist Willie Ermine's conceptualization of ethical space (2000, 2007, and 2009) described a framework in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can exchange worldviews and achieve mutual cultural acceptance in an atmosphere of respect and trust. With a keen eye to dignified relations, the framework acknowledges the diversity of human communities and the disjoint between peoples. It also supports a partnership model, affirms diversity of cultures, and beckons the use of a cooperative spirit between human communities to conceive an ethical order of societal relations. The ethical space only comes into being by the affirmation of alternate worldviews, characterized by different knowledge systems, cultural philosophies, and practices, beyond the established and predominantly Eurocentric underpinnings of many current, publicly-funded institutions. Ermine (2007, 2009) suggested that dialogue and a cooperative spirit for cross-cultural consensus between Aboriginal peoples and the provincial educational school system will create new currents of thought, permit the

production of new knowledge, and encourage the achievement of educational parity for all students within the system.

The implications of the concept of ethical space for public education in Saskatchewan are enormous and are already engendering profound transformations in the areas of policy, governance, administration, curriculum, pedagogy, funding, staffing, school construction and design, teacher training and in-servicing, and relations between schools and the wider communities they serve (Cottrell Pearce, Pelletier, Cunningham & Rohr, 2010; Cottrell et al., 2009). Fundamentally, ideas of ethical space invite educators to "confront their epistemic and ontological assumptions about teaching and learning [and challenge]…the established curriculum practices and interests that have been traditionally exercised in public schools" (Cherubini, 2009b, pp. 12–13). It encourages educators to embrace "Indigenous people's worldviews, social structures, and pedagogy as a legitimate foundation upon which to construct new meanings or knowledge alongside Western traditions and ways of knowing" (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006, p. 17). Although still in a formative stage, encounters in the ethical space must support a Saskatchewan publicly-funded curriculum that is local, place-based, subjective, intuitive, experiential, and culturally particularistic, in addition to one that is global, multicultural, standardized, objective, empirical, and data-driven. In short, it must combine elements of what Kamens & McNeely (2010) describe as a world educational ideology, with a more locally driven vision of schools as sites of ethical space, where Indigenous as well as Western cultures, ontologies, and epistemologies are foundational to learning. The following subsections will examine aspects of Saskatchewan schools through the lens of ethical space.

Early Childhood Education for Aboriginal Children

The Canadian Council on Learning (2009) indicated that in the Aboriginal worldview education is a holistic, life-long process and incorporates emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual development. Experiential learning from daily life is emphasized and learning is presented as an integrated process that is life-long and community-based. Within the Saskatchewan provincial school system the ideal Aboriginal worldview of education appears to be most closely approximated in the *community school model*. Similar to the Aboriginal worldview of education, this model considers education from early childhood to adulthood; includes formal and informal learning; addresses emotional, physical, and other dimensions of humanity; and recognizes the value of community in ensuring successful educational outcomes.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples (1996) claimed, "Research has confirmed the critical importance of infancy and early childhood as a foundation upon which identity, self-worth and intellectual strength are built" (Volume 3, Chapter 5, Section 3.1, par. 2). This includes "substantial research showing that children who participate in high quality early childhood development programs are more likely to finish high school and be employed" (par. 8).

Traditional child-rearing was a responsibility of the extended family to pass on "knowledge and skills that support a strong sense of identity and self-esteem" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, Volume 3, Chapter 5, Section 3.1, par. 5). However, because of colonization, displacement, and the damage wrought by residential schools some Aboriginal families are no longer able to "provide this positive environment for raising children". The commission recommended providing the option for Aboriginal parents "of

sending their children to early childhood programs from age three". The commission pointed out these early childhood programs, under Aboriginal control, could be "a means of reinforcing Aboriginal identity, instilling the values, attitudes and behaviours that give expression to Aboriginal cultures". Incorporating Aboriginal language in the early childhood program may be of particular merit "as there is an increasing body of research supporting the importance of fluency in a primary language before entering school". Both the Assembly of First Nations (2010) and the National Panel on First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserves (2012) supported the need for quality early childhood programs for First Nations children.

According to Cottrell et al. (2009) "Substantial research supports the fact that the provision of quality early childhood education lays the foundation for future personal, social, and academic success" (p. 120). They stressed the importance of these programs being culturally affirming, but identified a present shortage of "trained FN/M early childhood educators" (p. 133) and "linguistic and culturally-relevant resources" (p. 129). Currently the *First Nations Partnership Program*, operated between the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and the University of Victoria, is an example of a program working to address the issue of qualified early childhood educators. Cottrell et al. stated, "This program incorporates the contextual realities of individual communities and the Indigenous knowledge retained by Elders and community members" (p. 135).

Other researchers have stressed the importance of strong early childhood programs. Richards and Scott (2009) declared, "Early childhood education (ECE) is a valuable investment, particularly for children from marginalized communities few of whose members have a tradition of formal education. All Aboriginal children should have access to ECE" (p. v). In its

examination of the landscape of learning in Canada, The Canadian Council on Learning (2010) acknowledged, "Learning in the first five years of childhood has critical implications for well-being and later success in school, at work, and in the community ─ more so than learning in any other stage of life" (Reports & Data, State of Learning in Canada, Summary).

Saskatchewan Learning acknowledged that early childhood is "a time when the building blocks for physical well-being, school readiness and social belonging are established" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012b, Early Years). Providing appropriate childhood development experiences results in long-term benefits such as "improved educational attainment and performance, increased employment opportunities, improved social skills, reduced involvement in the criminal justice system and better health" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010, p. 74).

In Saskatchewan pre-kindergartens are established in community schools for three and four year old children where the emphasis is to support disadvantaged/vulnerable children. These programs include a *parental involvement* component to help parents to better understand the important role they play in their child's education. This indicated a growing awareness that schools cannot do it all.   In 2009–10, 212 pre-kindergarten programs were serving 3,511 children and their families (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010, p. 74). The Government of Saskatchewan also funds a half-time kindergarten program for all five year olds. In 2009–10 a total of 18,404 kindergarten students attended and of these students 3,969 self-declared as Aboriginal students, which represents 21.6% (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010, p. 53).

Although some schools may house a day care centre these require a parent to pay a monthly fee. For low income working parents or those attending an educational institution the government may subsidize the cost of day care (Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services &

Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2012). *KidsFirst* offers supports for the most vulnerable off-reserve Aboriginal families in nine communities in Saskatchewan. These supports include: prenatal referral and support, in-hospital questionnaire, assessment, home visiting services, mental health and addiction services, early learning and childcare, and family support opportunities (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012b, Early Leaning).

Since the late 1990s Aboriginal Head Start, funded by Health Canada, has offered programs to First Nations people living in urban and northern communities or on reserves (Health Canada, 2011a, 2011b). The focus of this program is to enhance child development and school readiness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children. Local preschool programs for 3–5 year old children are designed and controlled by Aboriginal communities. The main components of the program are: education and school readiness, health promotion, nutrition, social support and parental involvement. Head Start Programs help parents and other family and community members to learn and improve skills that contribute to healthy child development. Presently Head Start supports 9,000 children in over 300 Aboriginal communities on reserves (Health Canada, 2011b). However, as with many other aspects of educational services, many Aboriginal communities complain of a chronic lack of funding to provide adequate early childhood education programs for their children.

Cultural Affirmation

Battiste (2002) summarized current Canadian culturally congruent Aboriginal education discourse by saying, "Indigenous knowledge is now seen as an educational remedy that will empower Aboriginal students if applications of their Indigenous knowledge, heritage, and languages are integrated into the Canadian educational system" (p. 9). Brown (2008) agreed that the development of a positive cultural identity is essential to Aboriginal student success. He

supported teaching from a constructivist perspective or pedagogy that is "equitable for all learners" (p. 8) and was concerned teachers examine both verbal and non-verbal communication. Similarly Piquemal and Nickels (2005) argued that cultural discontinuity was frequently experienced by Aboriginal children in kindergarten classrooms, as a result of a lack of cultural knowledge by the teacher with respect to Aboriginal ethics, values and rules of behaviour. Stelmach (2010) determined that teachers at St. Mary who were cultivating Aboriginal achievement recognized that "an affirming school culture" (p. 33) was foundational to their success. The Assembly of First Nations (2010) stressed, "First Nations life-long learning systems must be founded on First Nations languages, cultures, histories, philosophies, worldviews and values, as these are the heart of our identity" (p. 8). The National Panel of First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserve (2012) concurred that it is through cultural affirmation that students build confidence, self-esteem and resiliency.

Efforts have been made since the 1970s to ensure the availability of First Nations and Métis teachers but the numbers are still small, especially compared to the rapidly increasing numbers of Saskatchewan school age children of Aboriginal ancestry. Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs have helped school divisions to recruit and retain Aboriginal teachers. Cottrell et al. (2010) found that "a cadre of committed, young teachers of First Nations ancestry" (p. 33) provided a positive role model for Aboriginal students which contributed to a positive school climate. In this study, the Regina Public School Division had a strong focus on recruiting from the Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs beginning in second year. However, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (2010) claimed, "There is competition between federal on-reserve schools and provincially-funded schools to recruit those graduates" (p. 3). Further, Raham (2010) identified "an acute shortage of qualified teachers of native languages" (p. 6) and

"a shortage of highly qualified principals of a[A]boriginal heritage" (p. 7). The Government of Saskatchewan (2010) corroborated that the number of Aboriginal teachers in Saskatchewan schools, while on the increase, is far from representative of the school population.

St. Denis, Bouvier and Battiste (1998) conducted a study involving 106 Aboriginal teachers who were employed in the Saskatchewan public educational system. These teachers represented a cross section of the 3% of the provincial teaching population of the province who self identified as Aboriginal in 1996–7 (p. 76). Of these participants 25% self identified as First Nations and the remainder as Métis. Only 26% of these teachers indicated they spoke an Aboriginal language and 93% were raised off reserve. The majority of these teachers had taken their training in one of the Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs (ITEP, SUNTEP or NORTEP) and had completed a Bachelor of Education degree (95%). This training was "credited as having enriched and transformed their lives because of the attention provided to their histories, cultures, voices, and experiences" (p. 77). St. Denis, Bouvier, and Battiste found many Aboriginal teachers felt isolated in challenging teaching positions with limited support. To a large degree this resulted from the way Aboriginal teachers were often viewed as the expert based on:

> the assumption that their racial or cultural identity alone would make them effective teachers; that they would be able to solve all the problems confronting disempowered youth and their communities; that they alone can eradicate racism or have special knowledge about how to effectively challenge it. (p. vii)

Participants confirmed the "pervasiveness of racism" (p. 10) mentioned in the literature review and participants agreed little Aboriginal content was being integrated within the curriculum beyond Native Studies classes. Although aware that a core requirement in teacher education

programs was now a class in Native Studies, participants recognized a need for on-going professional development in the area of equity. Teacher participants in this study noted it was essential to consult Aboriginal communities, Elders, and Aboriginal organizations regarding the content and approaches to teaching Native Studies. It was viewed as essential for "establishing appropriate protocols with Indigenous peoples to stop misappropriation of Indigenous knowledge" (p. 78). The researchers recommended the provision of Aboriginal consultants and networking opportunities among Aboriginal teachers to provide much needed support for Aboriginal professionals.

St. Denis (2010) completed research with 59 Aboriginal teachers from public schools across Canada. Although remaining committed to improving education for Aboriginal learners, these teachers expressed considerable frustration with the lack of progress to date. Frequently, Aboriginal teachers were viewed as the resident expert and felt they were left with the task of solving all the Aboriginal issues. Aboriginal teachers in this study described a pervasive lack of inclusion of Aboriginal epistemologies and perspectives by many teachers in the schools, often justified by a stated preference for a multicultural approach. Many of the participants reported numerous incidents of racism towards themselves, Aboriginal students or Aboriginal people generally. Amongst the recommendations St. Denis expressed were a need to raise awareness of the importance of including Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing within the curriculum, the hiring of more Aboriginal teachers particularly for high schools and in the area of curriculum development, the provision of proper training and on-going professional development for teachers, and the creation of a supportive culture (including both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal allies) for this important work.

Cottrell et al. (2010) described a culturally affirming school climate that contributed to the success of students. Teachers emphasized the importance of teaching treaties, First Nations languages and cultures in the school. Decentralized staffing decisions made after consultation with the Division's Aboriginal Advisory Council and the Elders Advisory Board had resulted in the hiring of an Indigenous Studies teacher. A Cree club also gave students and staff the opportunity "to interact in a celebration of cultural expression" (p. 38). Students mentioned powwow dancing, drum groups, beading circles, incorporation of traditional games and visits from the Elder. The researchers suggested that these activities "appear to have given students an opportunity to develop skills and personal confidence, in the process strengthening their identity, self-esteem and resilience" (p. 39).

Culturally responsive approaches to teaching are often difficult to implement, especially when the majority of teachers are non-Aboriginal. Pewewardy and Hammer (2003) identified five crucial elements: Cultural literacy; self-analysis of attitudes and beliefs; caring, trusting and inclusive classrooms; respect for diversity; and transformative curriculum to engender meaning. Nicol, Archibald and Baker (2010) worked with seven educators, in a Pacific Northwest school division as they explored culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy for teaching mathematics over a three year period. In this study the educators developed a model for culturally responsive teaching that "incorporates connection to culture and community, respects and is responsive to Indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies, and is rooted in relationships and places" (p. 3). Like Pewewardy and Hammer, Nicol et al. asserted the integration of Indigenous knowledge is "a foundational aspect of education with Indigenous learners" (p. 4) and there are no short cuts to becoming a culturally responsive teacher. Rather, Nicol et al. found culturally responsive education is "a way of being" (p. 6) and involves more

than the use of appropriate curriculum materials. Nicol et al concluded, "Developing culturally responsive practices requires years of sustained and connected professional development involving opportunities for teachers to question, explore, and examine their teaching in collaborative and collective space" (p. 7).

August and Shanahan (2006) found oral proficiency and literacy in a first language supports later English language reading and writing skill development. They also noted that home language experiences can have a positive impact on literacy achievement. They asserted students at both the elementary and secondary level instructed in their first language as well as in English perform at a higher level of reading proficiency than minority-language students instructed only in English. Hyslop (2011, September 6) described Chief Atahm Immersion School on the Adams Lake reserve, which offers an Aboriginal immersion program in British Columbia, but does not provide English instruction until grade four. The curriculum is created by the parents and the community and includes many hands-on learning experiences. Parents in this small school "want their children to grow up knowing who they are, where they came from, and why their identity should be a source of pride" (Beyond a Traditional Education) Further, Hyslop indicated teachers may or may not be fluent in the native language (Secwepemctsin) so Elders are present in the classroom to provide language help or even separate lessons.

Culturally based education means more than teaching languages and culture as a special project. The National Indian Education Association (n.d.) stated, "It is a systematic approach fully incorporating and integrating specific cultural ways of thinking, learning, and problem-solving into educational practice" The training of new teachers should develop their ability to provide high quality culturally-based education. The Saskatoon Public School Division (2008) consulted with the Alaskan Native Knowledge Network and the Alaskan Department of

Education. They considered educational programs offered across the Prairie Provinces and established the following characteristics of a culturally responsive education: affirming, honouring, holistic, ceremonial, healing, value based, symbolic, purposeful, community based, inclusive, respectful of cultural diversity and celebration of life.

The Alaska Native Knowledge Network (1998) established standards for culturally-responsive schools that were adopted by the Assembly of Alaska Native Educators. These standards provided "a way for schools and communities [in Alaska] to examine the extent to which they are attending to the educational and cultural well being of the students in their care" (p. 2). These standards were built on a "belief that a firm grounding in the heritage language and culture indigenous to a particular place is a fundamental pre-requisite" (p. 2) for student success. These guidelines encourage a strong tie between the school and the community and place an emphasis on real-life experiential learning. "It is intended that all forms of knowledge, ways of knowing and worldviews be recognized as equally valid, adaptable and complementary to one another in mutually beneficial ways" (p. 3). The standards were developed for use in Alaska and would need to be examined and adapted to meet the needs of other local communities. The Alaska Native Knowledge Network (1999) also directed attention to drawing up guidelines for preparing new teachers (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to provide culturally-responsive education for Alaska's schools. In particular, it is essential that new teachers "understand the significance of the role of cultural identity in providing a strong foundation for all social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development and demonstrate the ability to build on that understanding in their teaching" (p. 8).

Sense of Belonging

Researchers identified a sense of belonging and additional support as critical for Aboriginal student success. Richmond and Smith (2012) quoted a participant saying, "[Aboriginal youth] just need more support all round. And we need people who are more sensitive to the issues that we are facing" (p. 10). However, Richmond and Smith found youth in urban school environments often do not trust their teachers and therefore do not seek their help. For this to change, they suggested teachers will need to come to a better understanding of the students' "social and cultural context" (p. 13). They asserted it would be helpful to hire more Aboriginal teachers and support staff and to also ensure that curriculum is inclusive of Aboriginal histories, languages, and knowledge. The Alberta Teachers' Association (2010) similarly clarified that minority students often feel marginalized and suffer feelings of isolation, frustration and rejection. "These feelings can seriously affect a student's self-esteem, academic motivation and achievement, and sense of identity" (p. vi).

Aikenhead (2012) recognized the importance of activities such as the "annual province-wide science fair for on-reserve students in Grades 6–12" (p. 48) largely sponsored by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN). Both Indigenous knowledge projects and Eurocentric science projects are included in this fair and judged on their own merits. Aikenhead stressed activities like this demonstrate the two knowledge systems can co-exist and "*their co-existence defines a level playing field for the participation of Indigenous students in STEM* [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] *education at all levels*" (p. 49).

In their study of a school where Aboriginal students were experiencing a significant level of success Cottrell et al. (2010) observed, "Building quality relationships that foster and affirm

students' and parents' sense of belonging was identified by teaching staff as critical to student academic success" (p. 39). Similarly, Stelmach (2010) found teachers from St. Mary, in the Prince Albert Catholic School Division, also believed that in order to help Aboriginal students be academically successful their staff "establishes and maintains meaningful relationships with students and parents that connect them to the school" (p. 33). Students from St. Mary confirmed that teachers were readily available to offer help as needed. Raham (2010) also emphasized "school connectedness is a significant factor in decisions to stay in school" (p. 4) and relationships with caring teachers were central to those connections.

Bouvier and Stelmach (2009), in their study of factors contributing to Aboriginal student success in another school, noted, "Positive relationships appeared to pervade interactions among students, teachers, parents, support staff, school administration, district staff, and the wider community" (p. vii). Closely related was a sense of connection to the school but also to individuals that "stemmed from particular relationships" (p. 59). Bouvier and Stelmach concluded, "There was no doubt in our minds that the teachers and staff had a *personal* interest in the Aboriginal students that exceeded their professional responsibilities" (p. 60). The role of the Family School Liaison Worker and the Mentorship Coordinator were seen as "fundamentally important to Aboriginal student achievement" (p. 69).   The researchers also established that all partners in education for this school affirmed the "importance of instilling cultural pride" (p. 45) while only teachers, staff and students believed cultural affirmation was a factor in the success of Aboriginal students in the school. Furthermore, opportunities for Aboriginal students to teach non-Aboriginal students about Aboriginal customs and traditions "led to better understanding" (p. 62). In order to offer academic support teachers emphasized the importance of finding out the root cause of problems. However, in this study

the most common and passionate responses to the question of [Aboriginal student] success was related to the non-academic support the school provided. Importantly, it was the manner in which this support was offered; teacher/staff provided support that we describe as non-judgmental but frank, and seamless yet not enabling. (p. 51)

In addition, school division funds were expended to support teacher retention thereby better supporting Aboriginal learners. High expectations for Aboriginal academic achievement were maintained for completion of high school but also for participation in post-secondary education.

Stelmach (2010) found that teachers believed that in order to help Aboriginal students to be successful their school "creates a supportive and responsive school environment" (p. 33). Teachers at this school were aware of the challenges Aboriginal students face; made no judgments, offered support and expected students to "excel despite their circumstances" (p. 40). However, "there was strong recognition of the need to empathize with the students' positions" (p. 55). Even if students decided to drop out, exit strategies were utilized so students knew they were encouraged to return when they were ready. A unique practice outlined by Cottrell et al. (2009) was to set up mentorships to link individual students with a successful Aboriginal person within the school community.

Cottrell et al. (2009) found "a fundamental reconfiguration of the relationships between schools, teachers, and administrators and the students, families, and communities that they serve is required to significantly improve educational outcomes for FN/M learners in Saskatchewan" (p. 1). This requires an in-depth examination of teaching philosophy and the vision of Aboriginal education. Educators need to genuinely grapple with fundamental questions like: What is the job of the teacher in Aboriginal education? What is the role of the school? How do we involve

the Aboriginal parents and community members in decision-making for Aboriginal education? What are the assumptions on which we base Aboriginal education? How do all educators work together to provide equity for Aboriginal students? What is Aboriginal academic success? What is appropriate assessment for Aboriginal students? When teachers fail to seriously weigh these important questions there is little hope of improved achievement for Aboriginal students. At this time many teachers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, feel ill prepared to meet these challenges (St. Denis, 2010). Good intentions are not enough; appropriate training and on-going professional development are essential.

Transition from one school to another presents a problem for Aboriginal students in part due to a lack of sense of attachment. High mobility may mean this is an issue for students at several points during elementary school. To a large degree teachers are left to make the student welcome. Bell (2004) asserted this is particularly true when students move out of their home community in order to attend high school. In some cases, school counselors, liaison workers, and social workers are called on to provide support for students.

In order to create a sense of belonging in larger centres, high schools make special efforts to have grade nine students begin to identify with the new school. During grade eight this may include visits to the high school and presentations may be made at the elementary school by high school personnel in order to acquaint the students with the high school and alleviate any concerns incoming students may have. Individual counseling supports may also be offered. Open Houses are staged and may make students feel they would be comfortable at the high school. After entering grade 9, there may be special welcome week events. For students who have to leave their home community to attend high school, transition is a major hurdle and extra

supports are essential. In addition, for students returning to high school after formerly dropping out, in some high schools re-entry programs have been designed to meet their needs.

Monitoring Success

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) (2009) emphasized in Canada governments, Aboriginal organizations, and communities are "making decisions and developing policies that reflect a better understanding and awareness of an Aboriginal perspective on learning" (p. 3). However, the use of traditional measurement approaches has resulted in an incomplete picture that focuses on the discrepancies between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational achievement, framing Aboriginal students in deficit terms. In response to recognition that Aboriginal learning is much broader than what happens in the classroom, the CCL developed the Holistic Lifelong Learning Measurement Framework in consultation with Aboriginal learning experts from across the country. It is made up of three main components: sources and domains of knowledge, the lifelong learning journey and community wellbeing. Use of this framework, which also includes a list of indicators, will "provide Aboriginal communities across Canada with a comprehensive picture of both their learning strengths and challenges" (p. 3). According to CCL, a positive aspect of this model is that it measures social and economic conditions that may impede progress.

Cottrell et al. (2012) referred to "a globalised education culture, with its emphasis on standardized testing" as a result of School Effectiveness theory (p. 250). They agreed with Bouvier and Karlenzig (2006) that because most standardized tests are culturally misaligned with Indigenous values they tend to frame Aboriginal students in deficit terms and "reinforce pervasively negative racial stereotypes and perpetuate representations of Aboriginal peoples and

cultures as problematic in the broader Saskatchewan context" (p. 250). However, Bouvier and Karlenzig (2006) and Cottrell et al. (2012) pointed out that a simultaneous and arguably more beneficial implication is that the data emerging from these tests focus attention on the fundamental disconnect between Aboriginal students and provincial curricula. Consequently, the outcomes of testing challenge policymakers to create more invitational and culturally-relevant learning environments within Saskatchewan's classrooms to ensure more equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students (Martell, 2008).

Raham (2010) stated, "Effective use of classroom assessment improves learning, and the effects are greatest for lower-achieving students" (p. 9). There is merit in teachers becoming proficient at using multiple forms of assessment to guide instructional decisions. Raham also believed that developing "more holistic and culturally relevant measures of Aboriginal learning" (p. 9) was essential and she recommended the development of a national system for monitoring Aboriginal achievement K–12. At present interprovincial comparisons are difficult. Similarly Bell (2004) advised, "All provinces and territories implement programs to measure, track, and report on progress of Aboriginal students and require the use of this data in annual school improvement plans which are co-developed and shared with parents and community" (p. 324).

Claypool and Preston (2011) suggested that appropriate Aboriginal assessment is holistic and takes into consideration not only the intellectual but also the physical, emotional and spiritual. In the Aboriginal culture, "learning is an introspective realization of how the self is an elaborate, balanced network of mind, body, emotion, and spirit, all of which are connected to the natural environmental forces of life" (Aboriginal Worldview, par. 2). Participants in the study revealed that before a student can become an engaged learner the student must come to know self and develop a positive attitude towards learning. A child develops self-confidence, self-respect,

and self-esteem through positive relationships with family and community which foster a sense of belonging. Participants claimed a child without traditional and cultural knowledge is at risk for social, psychological, and learning problems. The researchers pointed out schools tend to use quantitative assessment whereas for Aboriginal people, "learning is a lifelong journey, which, when assessed, is done through personalized qualitative means" (Educators: Myriad forms of Western Styles of learning and Assessment, par. 4). Claypool and Preston contended that educators could embrace the idea that education is a journey of life and the process of learning is as important as the learning itself. There is a "need to balance students' academic assessment with other physical, emotional, and spiritual forms of assessment" (Abstract).

Authentic Partnerships

Matthews, Howard, and Perry (2003), who conducted their research on mathematics learning in Australia, stressed the importance of teachers building partnerships and forming networks with Aboriginal people. "There has to be a continuing sharing and coming together of minds where educators sit and listen to Aboriginal people, Aboriginal educators and, more importantly, enter into meaningful dialogue with Aboriginal students" (Introduction, par. 5). They recommended making learning experiences very hands-on and relevant to the students' daily lives. "Self-confidence, feeling of competence and willingness to learn" (Parents of Aboriginal Children, par. 3) must be considered as important factors contributing to mathematics achievement.

Cottrell et al. (2009) defined ethical space as a place "where two societies can facilitate meaningful dialogue towards the negotiation of a new order" (p. 25). Ermine (2009) suggested relationship building, dialogue, parity and emotionality were inherent in this type of work due to

the complexity of required changes. The First Nations and Métis Education Provincial Advisory Committee (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012c) stated, "Ethical space is the place between members who agree to set aside individual or competing agendas to work together to accelerate the pace of positive change for the benefit of learners" (p. 11). Authentic partnerships require this in order to find solutions to very complex problems.

This recommended use of authentic partnerships is very consistent with postcolonial theory and results in a reconfiguration of political relationships. This *new non-colonial relationship,* between First Nations and Métis peoples with members of the provincial educational system, is also evident in the work of other provincial, national, and international governing bodies. There is an increasing acceptance of "Indigenous peoples' worldviews, social structures, and pedagogy as a legitimate foundation upon which to construct new meanings or knowledge alongside Western traditions and ways of knowing" (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006, p. 17).

Promising Practices

Bell (2004) found parallels in his case studies that confirmed the research literature. He attributed the success of the participants in his study to strong leadership and governance structures, high expectations for students, a focus on academic achievement and long-term success, secure and welcoming climate for children and families, respect for Aboriginal culture and tradition to make learning relevant, quality staff development, and provision of a wide range of programs/supports for learning. Bell noted, "Transitions from elementary to junior high and secondary education seemed to be key points where students dropped out" (p. 16). Those students who moved away from their home community to attend school were most vulnerable.

To date most of the research regarding Aboriginal student achievement has been qualitative. Baker (2008) found successful school practices and effective programs described in these studies revealed common themes: "Systematic/Holistic Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in Schools, Mentorship Programs, Effective Teacher Education, Strong Community and Parent Relationships" (p. 7). Baker found it is essential that input from the Aboriginal community is respected and it can be helpful to teach students about the effects of colonization and racism.

Alberta Education (2008) claimed the research literature on promising practices for Aboriginal academic achievement supported five common themes: parent and community engagement; language and cultural programming; teachers, instruction, curriculum, and resources; professional development; and individual student supports. The two case studies revealed it was important "to develop relationships, attain cultural knowledge, provide a sense of belonging, encourage literacy, and promote academic success" (p. 32). Schools had a welcoming and respectful environment and teachers had high expectations for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. Teachers from both schools in the study "were supportive of provincial initiatives to infuse FNMI perspectives into the curriculum" (p. 33). Staff commitment to individual student success and wellbeing was addressed through regular access to Elders and support during student transitions. Alberta Education highlighted the use of coordinated services and supports "to mitigate the impact of poverty and other social issues" (p. 34).

Leithwood (2009) maintained all those engaged in change should "focus their energies 'laser-like' on conditions in their organizations which the best available evidence suggests will make significant contributions to the learning of those First Nations and Métis children who are

struggling at school" (p. 79). He suggested these could be focused on critical classroom learning

conditions, school learning conditions, and family/community learning conditions.

Leithwood (2009) considered the classroom learning conditions which most affect

student achievement by students "who share some of the challenges faced by many First Nations

and Métis children, in particular, poverty and cultural diversity" (p. 82). Classroom learning

conditions are closely related to teacher quality. First, instruction that truly engages students in

their learning is more effective. Culturally responsive educational experiences and pedagogy can

contribute to student engagement.   Leithwood also acknowledged when teachers share the same

cultural background "they find it easier to establish such high quality relationships with their

students" (p. 84) and students may be more engaged in their learning. Second, Leithwood

declared students need to be offered a rich curriculum. Rather than being narrowly focused on

literacy skills a rich curriculum offers "the full array of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and

dispositions valued by society" (p. 85). The curriculum will include application of skills learned

in a subject area so students can see their relevancy in real life. Within a rich curriculum,

metacognitive skills are taught so students learn to monitor and regulate their own learning.

Third, Leithwood emphasized the importance of time for learning. Attention must be directed

towards ensuring "students are engaged in meaningful learning as much of their time in school as

possible" (p. 87).   Leithwood specified research has shown "a considerable proportion of the

achievement gap is accounted for by the very different experiences of economically advantaged

and disadvantaged students during the summer school break" (p. 88).   Therefore, providing

summer learning experiences may prove to be a very promising practice. Fourth, Leithwood

stressed smaller elementary school class size, of below 20 students, results in increased student

achievement.   Other positive effects include "greater engagement by students in instruction,

reduced grade retention, reduced dropout rates in secondary schools, and increased aspirations amongst students to attend college" (Finn, 2001 cited by Leithwood, 2009, p. 89). However, Leithwood recommended smaller class size "as a strategy narrowly restricted to struggling students" (p. 89). The fifth classroom condition Leithwood indicated had a proven influence on achievement was heterogeneous student grouping. Research evidence strongly establishes heterogeneous grouping is beneficial for "students having difficulty at school, especially those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds" (p. 89–90) as they will learn more. In heterogeneous classrooms students are exposed to high expectations, a faster pace of learning, peer modeling of effective learning, and more challenging curriculum.

Leithwood (2009) also addressed critical school learning conditions. Academic press which includes setting "high but achievable goals and classroom academic standards" (p. 91) is essential. Teachers must "believe in the capacity of their students to achieve and encourage their students to respect and pursue academic success" (p. 91). This encourages students to meet higher achievement standards. Leithwood asserted school disciplinary climate also has an effect on student achievement. When addressed appropriately, a positive learning environment is created and student achievement will be higher. Schools with a diverse student population, where staff members address diversity issues, have the potential to increase students' ability to get along with a more diverse group of people. Leithwood reported this experience stretches "students' understandings and beliefs in ways that would be unlikely in a more homogenous environment" (p. 92) resulting in increased learning. Small school size can also benefit students who find school challenging or who are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Studies to date recommend limiting schools for these students to a maximum of 300 students in an elementary school and 600 students in a high school. Reduced school size will encourage stronger personal

relationships between students and staff, a more focused academic program, closer monitoring of school work, and higher student attendance rates. Smaller schools also encourage the development of a sense of community which Leithwood highlighted as leading to students being more engaged and motivated and students experiencing a collective sense of belonging. This can contribute to students developing a higher sense of self-efficacy regarding their own academic achievement.

However, Leithwood (2009) warned that closing the achievement gap for First Nations and Métis learners "is likely impossible without improving key learning conditions rooted in families and communities" (p. 94). He acknowledged this will be a real challenge as these are closely related to parental income, education and occupation. First, enhanced early learning opportunities must be provided, including language-based programming. Prior research found early learning experiences provided through pre-kindergarten and day care, make a significant contribution to later school success. Second, Leithwood cited the work of Henderson and Berla, in 1994, who asserted productive educational cultures in the home help children to be more successful in school and throughout life. Leithwood summarized their findings by saying:

> The best predictors of student achievement are the extent to which the child's family is able to: create a home environment that encourages learning; express high but realistic expectations for the child's achievement and future occupation; and become involved in their children's education at school and in the community. Among these variables, parental expectations have the largest effects on student achievement. (p. 96)

In addition, when schools support families to develop these three conditions,

children from low income families and diverse cultural backgrounds approach the grades and test scores expected for middle-class children. They are also more likely to take advantage of a full range of educational opportunities after graduating from high school. Even with only one or two of these conditions in place, children do measurably better at school. (p. 97).

For these reasons schools need to find ways to support and encourage parents so they can provide these educational cultures within the home for their children. However, parents must accept the responsibility of providing positive parenting for the benefit of their children. Partnerships with parents are therefore Leithwood's third critical family/community learning condition. Today the role for parents in schools is much expanded. However, Leithwood declared, "Involving parents primarily in the instruction of their own children is most likely to contribute to student growth" (p. 98). Leithwood cited the work of Cummins (1986) who affirmed when parents and communities are struggling to survive, classroom teachers must interact with students and parents in redefined ways. Leithwood stated, "Students need to become empowered and such empowerment includes both cognitive or academic skills and cultural identity" (p. 99).

Dempster and Bagakis (2009), who collected data from seven countries where teachers tried to nurture the learning of all students, indicated the role of parents "in learning is primarily one of support" (p. 102). Parents are able to model behaviours, attitudes, and values for their child. Parents can enhance their child's learning by creating a supportive home environment where learning is valued, learning challenges are accepted, and successes are celebrated. Dempster and Bagakis stressed parents need to demonstrate "acceptance of the responsibility to maintain a home environment which supports children's learning" (p. 102).

Leithwood (2009) highlighted a total of twelve learning conditions centered in the classroom, the school, and the family that hold out the most hope for closing the achievement gap for First Nations and Métis learners. While all children will benefit from them, those who struggle in school are in a position to benefit the most. Once the critical conditions are accepted the work can be focused on how to best make this happen.

Leithwood (2010) addressed principals and further expanded on "what parents can do in the home to improve the chances of their children's success in school" (p. 4). He urged parents to help their children with their homework, have expectations for what their children will do in school, and help their children to understand achievement in education can lead to a better life when they have graduated. With regard to parental expectations Leithwood pronounced, "Those expectation are perhaps the biggest factor that explains kids' motivation to learn at school" (p. 5). Leithwood advocated for a shift in thinking from how we get parents into the school towards how we support parents at home.

Willms, Friesen and Milton (2009) studied social, academic and intellectual engagement by surveying over 32,000 adolescent students in five provinces across Canada (grades 5–12). Approximately a quarter of these students were from Saskatchewan. They found "71% had a positive sense of belonging at school, 69% had positive records of school attendance, [but] only 37% of students were intellectually engaged in their language arts and mathematics classes" (p. 17). Students with higher socioeconomic status had higher levels of school engagement but these differences were most pronounced for intellectual engagement. However, classroom and school climate had the strongest influence on student engagement. In this area, "high expectations for student success appears to be the most important factor" (p. 24). Less than 50% of student in the study were confident about their skills in language arts and mathematics and felt challenged in

their classes. Both lack of confidence and lack of challenge contributed to lower student engagement. Intellectual engagement was defined in this study as "students' sense of interest in, feelings about the relevance of the school work they are asked to do, and motivation to do well in class" (p. 31). This study revealed that "intellectual engagement decreases steadily and significantly from Grade 6 to Grade 12" (p. 31). Willms, Friesen and Milton concluded schools need to consider factors that address social, academic and intellectual engagement in order to ensure more students are successful in their learning.

Improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students must include building attachment and hope while providing curricula that are meaningful to the students. "Eighty-one percent of American students stated they would not have dropped out of school programs if school programs were more relevant to their real life (Foley, 2012, p. 66)

Rasheed (2004) confirmed the value of engaging students in entrepreneurial education. He found students (10–14) who received entrepreneurial training scored higher in the constructs of achievement motivation, self-esteem and innovation while those students in the control group who were not trained in entrepreneurial activities scored substantially lower. This research built on the students' interest to learn about entrepreneurship and business information to the positive impact entrepreneurial training has on the constructs of student achievement motivation, self-esteem, and motivation. Rasheed's research directly affirms the mandate given to the Saskatchewan Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People. Concurrently, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association has unveiled plans to launch business and education partnerships to increase attendance and graduation rates of the Aboriginal population.

Student attachment is a critical measure of the effectiveness of the learning environment. Research conducted by Zwarych (2004) found students who perceived their school to be supportive scored higher in belonging and valued teacher relationships. A student's perceived attachment to the school resulted in higher marks. Class groups working in established cohorts over a number of years, such as French Immersion, scored the highest ratings. Zwarych indicated students wanted flexibility in course options or the number of courses taken per term and students wanted to be part of the decision-making process to increase attachment and belonging to the school. Zwarych's research highlighted the importance that a positive school environment can have on lowering dropout rates and the importance of administrators and teachers focusing on creating a supportive learning environment. The findings of this research identified school attachment results in higher achievement levels and higher retention rates.

Foley (2012) conducted over a decade of independent research in the area of teaching entrepreneurship to Indigenous students with positive results. The approach taken was a holistic engagement of the students, blending mainstream elements that are meaningful to the students while modifying and embracing the socio-cultural differences of the students. Foley stated the teaching of social skills and entrepreneurship resulted in the development of self-esteem while learning financial literacy and enterprise.

Anderson (2002) recognized the importance of entrepreneurship and supported this option as a method to meet the recommendations made by the Royal Commission for Aboriginal People (RCAP) in the 1996 report. Specifically, enterprise and entrepreneurial activity is deemed the means to how "…the world's impoverished Indigenous minority peoples might attain financial independence" (p. 59). Foley (2012) stated "…the key to successful entrepreneurship education for Indigenous peoples is the combination of an empowering

pedagogical approach and socio-culturally relevant content" (p. 59). Anderson (2002) affirmed that entrepreneurship is a package of skills and principles and concluded that success will come with education that helps Aboriginals identify viable opportunities and helps Aboriginals learn and apply management tools and techniques that convert opportunities into successful viable businesses, products and/or services (p. 42).

Raham (2010) supported the use of promising practices to guide the development of appropriate policies to support improved academic achievement for off-reserve Aboriginal students. Raham focused on paying particular attention to the development of literacy and language skills, engagement and retention, parent/community involvement, highly qualified teachers, strong school leadership, effective programming, and collection and use of performance information.

Promising Practices in Other Jurisdictions

Across Canada there are approximately 518 on-reserve K–12 schools under First Nations control (Assembly of First Nations, 2010). Many of these schools are led by First Nations principals working with qualified First Nations teachers. In these schools the local culture and language are emphasized. Approximately 70,000 First Nations students attend First Nations elementary and secondary schools and many of these schools include an early childhood component. However, in *First Nations Control of First Nations Education: It's Our Vision, It's Our Time,* the Assembly of First Nations described the inadequate provisions, by the federal and provincial government, for successful life-long learning for First Nations students within both First Nations schools and provincially funded school. The Assembly of First Nations made several recommendations, particularly pertaining to self governance and postcolonial

relationships, to encourage opportunities for sharing of successes. Cottrell (2010) stressed, "The uniqueness and diversity of Indigenous groups militate against any simple application of global solutions to local circumstances" (p. 223). However, Cottrell agreed with Cornell (2005) that both "Indigenous peoples and the states that seek to address this problem face daunting challenges. What works in one country may hold lessons for others. At the very least, it may point research in productive directions" (p. 6).

In British Columbia, *The New Relationship* (Government of British Columbia, First Nations Summit, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs & British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, 2005) envisioned "a new government-to-government relationship based on respect, recognition and accommodation of a[A]boriginal title and rights" (p. 1). This document expressed a willingness to work together to "achieve strong government, social justice and economic self-sufficiency for First Nations" (p. 1). It was recognized this would involve developing new processes and implementing new institutions and structures. Later the same year, the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada signed the *Transformative Change Accord* (Government of British Columbia, Government of Canada, & Leadership Council Representing the First Nations of British Columbia, 2005) with the Leadership Council representing the First Nations of British Columbia. This accord set out a ten-year action plan to "close the gap in the areas of education, health, housing and economic opportunities (p. 1). The province of British Columbia then signed a similar document, *The Métis Nation Relationship Accord* (Government of British Columbia & Métis Nation of British Columbia, 2006) with the Métis Nation of British Columbia. The signing of these three documents marked the beginning of major changes with respect to Aboriginal education in British Columbia underpinned by a postcolonial paradigm.

The Government of British Columbia introduced *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements* to establish "a collaborative partnership between Aboriginal communities and school districts that involves shared decision-making and specific goal setting to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students" (Government of British Columbia, n.d. a, Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements). The agreements "emphasize the integral nature of traditional culture, language and history to Aboriginal student development and success [and work] …. to increase knowledge and respect for Aboriginal culture, language and history among all students". (Government of British Columbia, n.d. b, Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement Brochure). Goals, indicators, and targets are established for a five-year period based on community dialogue. An annual report is compiled utilizing performance data to track progress in each goal area. The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (Government of British Columbia, 2011) reported on progress for 2010–11 by saying, "important actions were taken that demonstrate progress to reconcile Aboriginal rights and title, to recognize Aboriginal jurisdiction over the planning and delivery of services for children and families, and to foster greater understanding and knowledge of the histories, languages and cultures of Aboriginal people living in British Columbia" (p. 4).

In 1997 the Government of Nova Scotia, the Government of Canada and the Mi'kmaq[3] (represented by all thirteen chiefs) formed the Mi'kmaq–Nova Scotia–Tripartite Forum to strengthen their relationship and to address all Mi'kmaq concerns. Their committees work within a consensus model to "discuss and resolve issues and act as a catalyst for change" (Mi'kmaq–Nova Scotia–Canada Tripartite Forum, 2012, p. 6).

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[3] Mi'kmaq and Mi'kmaw are both accurate and used in the research literature

In addition the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey representing ten chiefs have entered into an agreement with the Province of Nova Scotia establishing jurisdiction over on-reserve education. The Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey represents the primary group of Aboriginal people living in Nova Scotia. In the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (2012) *Annual Report 2011–2012* progress is reported indicating "more students, in all grades, are graduating to the next grade level" (p. 13). Further the report noted: "steady improvement in attendance, graduation rates, retention rates, and post-secondary graduation rates. But more importantly, communities are taking ownership of their information, and the data we have is much more reliable and valid" (p. 22). The annual report claimed a strong academic focus on literacy, numeracy and student retention although a sports, health, and wellness program has also been incorporated. Established methods for data collection and the existing electronic communication system facilitate efforts to raise presently low Aboriginal achievement in literacy and numeracy.

Success to date is partially attributed to revitalization of the Mi'kmaw language. A Mi'kmaq language program, delivered through video conferencing, appropriate for use in daycares has been developed. All high schools are now making online Mi'kmaq language classes available to their students as well. A Mi'kmaw Language Proficiency Assessment Tool has been developed. In addition, the government of Nova Scotia raises the awareness of non-Aboriginals towards the Mi'kmaq people by offering *Aboriginal Perceptions Training* and an online program called *Aboriginal Cultural Awareness.*

The annual report pointed out the Cape Breton University in partnership with the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, the Nova Scotia Department of Education, and Atlantic Canada's First Nation Help Desk has opened a language lab to focus on language revitalization and the restoration of Mi'kmaw materials. In the language centre the *Jilaptoq Joint Initiative Project* is

focused on the creation of digital, multimedia and interactive Mi'kmaw educational support materials. This project is currently developing an interactive talking dictionary of over six thousand Mi'kmaw words.

International Context

Given the striking similarities between the histories and current circumstances of Indigenous peoples in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, the educational experiences of these four groups provide a particularly appropriate comparative focus. These modern states are all products of European colonizing projects which marginalized Indigenous peoples, and currently members of Indigenous groups are among the most disadvantaged in terms of educational outcomes in all four jurisdictions. Addressing education debts inherited from colonial pasts to close the educational achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners is, consequently, a shared and urgent policy priority. This transnational odyssey to achieve Indigenous educational parity is driven by a variety of motives, including the very significant implications of demographic trajectories for social justice, labor market participation, economic sustainability, cross-cultural harmony and social cohesion. It is also the result of a postcolonial struggle by Indigenous peoples to reassert control over their children's education and to see their cultures and epistemologies reflected in public educational institutions, curriculum and discourse.

Cottrell et al. (2009) reported the United States has a National Advisory Committee that reports to Congress. Their focus has been to identify and utilize promising practices derived from high-performance schools focused on goals and aspirations, processes and actions, and supports and capacity building. It is recognized that family and community involvement "are

fundamental to achievement in schools" (p. 163–164). Effective leaders "proactively seek assistance" (p. 165) as they address socio-cultural challenges "often centered on the impact of poverty and diversity" (p. 166).

The Santa Fe Indian School (2011) is a tribally controlled school offering a middle years and high school program to a population of approximately 700 students. There are 19 Pueblo Governors who have contracted the Board of Trustees to manage and administer the daily operation of the school. This is a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) boarding school that has experienced a high level of success. Students are involved in community projects related to current issues in the areas of health, the environment and natural resources. Community members are directly involved in the selection and development of these opportunities for experiential learning. The Parent Advisory Board is involved in planning, development, operation, and evaluation of federal and supplemental programs.   They also advise the superintendent and the Board of Trustees regarding the administration and management of the school. A recent two-year strategic planning process, open to all tribal stakeholders, has resulted in a community-driven long-term vision.

The middle-years staff at the Santa Fe Indian School is committed to the wellbeing of their students and to their success. Many efforts are made to link the curriculum with the 19 Pueblo communities and cultures. The Middle Years Program, with grade seven entrants often "with academic achievement at the 3rd or 4th grade level" (Cavanagh, 2005, p. 30) and many special needs students, has been able to achieve "1 ½ year gains in Math and 2-year gains in Reading" (Santa Fe Indian School, 2011, Academics, Middle School). They also noted improved attendance and attitudes toward school. Cavanagh (2005) claimed "the academic proficiency of the 700-student school's students also ranks well above the recorded averages of

other BIA facilities" (p. 27). Further Cavanagh specified the Santa Fe Indian School sends 90%

of their graduates to 2–4 year colleges, including technical schools. Of these 60% earn a college

degree (p. 30).   In 1987 "the United States Department of Education identified SFIS as one of

270 outstanding secondary schools in America" (Santa Fe Indian School, 2011, Mission).

Cottrell et al. (2009) described seven different models developed to address low

Aboriginal academic achievement in Australia. The models included: the social justice model,

the community development model, the enhanced coordination model, the cultural recognition

model, the school responsiveness model, the elite model, and the compensatory model. However,

"to date political and educational policy-makers in Australia have largely rejected the demands

of indigenous people for formal control over their children's education" (p. 177).

Cottrell et al. (2009) suggested that the greatest commonalities in terms of Indigenous

educational circumstances exist between Saskatchewan and New Zealand. Similarities include a

common British colonial heritage, treaty context, racial binaries until a more recent influx of

immigrant students, and recent demographic and economic imperatives. Since the 1970s, Maori

rights, as set out in the Treaty of Waitangi, have resulted in a "commitment to biculturalism" (p.

178). Efforts have been made to train teachers fluent in the Maori language who also have

knowledge of the Maori culture. School Improvement research findings have been used as a way

to improve academic achievement and encourage accountability. Part of this initiative has been

to recognize the value of early childhood education and to provide half-time approved programs

for 85,000 3-and-4 year-old children (Government of New Zealand, 2008a). Of these children

79% were given fully funded spots in the program as a way of encouraging increased

participation. Attention focused on improving student retention, has resulted in efforts to assist

students to develop a positive self concept, and to offer additional student supports through

engaging in inter-agency work (Government of New Zealand, 2009). In addition, since the 1980s some Maori parents have elected to enroll their children in alternate education programs largely controlled by the Maori community. Here, *Kaupapa Maori theory and practice "*centered on the use of tradition and contemporary notions of *whanau* (extended family) values, practices and structures" (p. 183). Cottrell et al. (2009) asserted there would be merit in comparative research conducted by Saskatchewan and New Zealand researchers to identify and share "best practices both in their public and indigenous-controlled school systems to improve outcomes for all learners within their schools." (p. 191).

Historical Context for Post-Secondary Aboriginal Education in Saskatchewan

Montgomery (2012) included a synopsis of post-secondary education in Canada in his recent doctoral dissertation. He found it was not until the repatriation of the *Constitution of Canada in 1982* that the federal government came to acknowledge that the right to education as negotiated in the treaties included more than elementary-level education. For several decades the federal government viewed funding for Aboriginal post-secondary education as strictly discretionary. As late as 1985 the *Nielson Report* reflected the federal government's reluctance to fund post-secondary education for First Nations and Inuit peoples.

Montgomery (2012) pointed out The *Indian Act* of 1876, limited who was entitled to claim *Registered Indian status* and thus able to access educational services. Since 1956 Montgomery claimed, "The Federal government assumed responsibility for the funding of Registered Indian students to attend post-secondary institutions" (p. 22) but until 1968 there were only limited funds available. With the exception of Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs, "it

is generally agreed that little in post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples existed prior to the 1970's" (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000, p. 13 cited in Montgomery, 2012, p. 22).

Montgomery (2012) indicated in 1968, the Federal Department of Indian and Northern Development (DIAND) created a vocational program to provide direct financial assistance to First Nations and Inuit students attending university or college for tuition, books, and living expenses. However, it was not until 1977 that a more comprehensive program was created through the *Appropriations Act* of DIAND to fund support programs in Aboriginal post-secondary education. Simultaneously, Montgomery (2012) underscored how Indigenous leaders sought a voice in post-secondary education for First Nations people. In 1973, the National Indian Brotherhood declared a policy statement, *Indian Control of Education*. Beyond funding for individuals to attend mainstream post-secondary institutions, it set out "a call for the local control of First Nations education and curriculum development at the university and vocational institute levels" (p. 23). The federal government accepted this policy in principle.

Further, Montgomery (2012) pointed out between the 1970s and the 1990s there was an increased enrollment in post-secondary education for Registered Indians. On some campuses partnerships were initiated between Indigenous communities and colleges/universities to develop better supports for Aboriginal students. In 1983 the *University and College Entrance Program* was established to provide preparatory classes for First Nations students who lacked university entrance qualifications. Montgomery described several important developments. Under the *Post Secondary Educational Assistance Program* DIAND funding was made available to all Registered Indians and Inuit eligible to attend universities or colleges. However, in 1989 this program was replaced by the *Post-Secondary Student Support Program* (PSSSP) which further limited eligibility and restricted direct student funding. These funds were and continue to be

provided to First Nations bands, which redistribute existing funds to their own band members who wish to take post-secondary studies. In addition, the *Indian Studies Support Program* provides funding to colleges and universities for the developing of post-secondary programs targeting Indigenous students. Montgomery (2012) emphasized in the 1990s the federal government began to transfer funds to the provincial government for Indigenous post-secondary programs. In recent years Indigenous perspectives have been introduced into curriculum, Native Studies departments have been created, a variety of Indigenous student support programs have been introduced, and recruitment programs targeting Indigenous students have been established. However, Montgomery concluded "there is still a long way to go before equity in post-secondary participation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians can be established" (p. 31).

Post-Secondary Aboriginal Education in Saskatchewan Today

Aboriginal student achievement at the early childhood and the K–12 levels, have a direct impact on post-secondary education achievement. Aboriginal student achievement at the post-secondary level can also impact the achievement level of other members of the student's family and community. In this sense early childhood, K–12 and post-secondary education are interlinked. The *achievement debt* must be addressed at all levels in order to ensure equity for all First Nations and Métis students.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2008) recognized rates for high school to post-secondary transition were lower than desired and that provinces and territories needed to work with the federal government and Aboriginal leaders and the Aboriginal learning sector to address this issue. Responses to this barrier have included providing post-secondary within the

community, training Aboriginal teachers who are more able to meet student needs, and establishing post-secondary institutions where culturally affirming programs are offered. Many programs provide field experiences which include job coaching to help students build feelings of work attachment. However, transitions to employment remain a very difficult issue particularly in areas where there are limited job opportunities within the community.

Gabriel Dumont Institute

Préfontaine (2007a) identified the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) of Métis Studies and Applied Research was established in 1980. Initially, GDI partnered with Employment and Immigration Canada and the provincial Department of Advanced Education and Manpower to set up the *Saskatchewan Training for Employment Program* (STEP) which offered a variety of courses that were accredited by the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). In response to increasing demands by the Métis community Gabriel Dumont Institute set up The Dumont Technical Institute (DTI) in 1992. Two years later, DTI signed a formal affiliation agreement with SIAST for this province-wide program. DTI's mandate was to serve the basic education, upgrading, technical, and vocational training for Saskatchewan Métis students. Préfontaine specified DTI had partnerships with Métis Employment and Training of Saskatchewan's Métis, Inc., Human Resources Development Canada, Saskatchewan's Provincial Training Allowance Program, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, and the province's regional colleges.

Today Gabriel Dumont Institute provides both educational and cultural services to Saskatchewan Métis people (Council of Ministers of Education, 2012, Data Base). Dumont Technical Institute (DTI), a branch of Gabriel Dumont Institute, offers basic education and skills

training at a variety of locations across the province. Another branch, Training and Employment, (Gabriel Dumont Institute, n.d. a) supports Métis students in improving their educational and employment outcomes through individual sponsorship programs, employment based programs and the immediate employment assistance program. Gabriel Dumont Institute has a publishing program 'Expressing our Heritage' which produces *Métis specific materials*. In addition, Gabriel Dumont Institute provides a library service and hosts the *Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture*.

Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program

Gabriel Dumont Institute (n.d. b) offers the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) in conjunction with the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan on campuses located in Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert. SUNTEP, established in 1980, is a four year accredited Bachelor of Education Program. It was designed for Métis and Non-Status Aboriginal students and provides them with the opportunity to become qualified teachers (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. e). This program "includes Native Studies and cross-cultural education with an emphasis on Métis and First Nations history and culture" (University of Regina, 2012). Students in the SUNTEP Program have their tuition fees paid through Saskatchewan government funding. In more recent years the Gabriel Dumont Institute (n.d. b) has started to offer the first two years of Arts & Science with a particular emphasis on Native Studies, Métis history, Métis literature and Indigenous languages.

First Nations Partnership Program

In 1989 the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and the University of Victoria forged a partnership to "prepare First Nations students to deliver quality child care programs both on and

off reserve" (First Nations Partnership Program, n.d., Synopsis). The First Nations Partnership Program (FNPP) is a two-year, accredited course leading to a Diploma in Child and Youth Care. To date the FNNP has been conducted in Saskatchewan for both the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and the Onion Lake Tribal Council. This program, for community members, is delivered within their own community and incorporates cultural practices, values, language, and spirituality in addition to mainstream theory, research and practice. The community has considerable input and Elders are included as valuable teachers regarding child care and development and youth care. Research regarding outcomes of this program has identified "unprecedented positive outcomes of this community-based, culturally grounded, partnership approach to capacity building" (First Nations Partnership Program, n.d., Research evaluation).

Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies

In 1976 the Saskatchewan Indian Community College was established to provide adult upgrading, introductory skills and trades, certified technical and vocational training, and basic management training (Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, 2012). In 1985 it became the Saskatchewan Institute of Technologies and was now controlled by the Federations of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.

The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) (2012) asserted their mandate is to provide training and labour force development for the First Nations people of Saskatchewan. Since 2000, SIIT has been recognized as a post-secondary institution and has offered accredited classes to meet the needs of First Nations and Métis students. Presently programs include adult basic education, trades and industrial training, health and community studies, and business administration and information technology classes on three campuses in

Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert. Since 2007, training centres have been established in La Ronge, Yorkton, Meadow Lake, and North Battleford. Aboriginal students are offered supports such as life coaching, job counseling, and access to Elders. Additional classes are offered throughout Saskatchewan to meet the needs of the individual communities and relationships are cultivated with local employers who provide training and employment opportunities for students. The Mobile Career Coach Project allows SIIT staff to set up in local Aboriginal communities upon request, assess individual skills and aptitudes, and to help Aboriginal people to choose a career. The Saskatchewan Institute of Technologies (2011) outlined 31% of their funding came from the Saskatchewan Government, 16% from the Canadian Government and an additional 27% from the Canadian Government to target Career Assessment Services for Aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan (p. 23).

Cottrell, Prytula, Hajnal, Pelletier, Greyeyes and Henry (2011) maintained the Saskatchewan government financial support for On-reserve Adult Basic Education (ABE) has been enhanced since 2007. Targeted funding was provided to the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) and the Saskatchewan Regional Colleges. Courses have been offered to 2700 students "26% at level 4 [Grade 12] and GED[®], 30% at level 3 [Grade 10], and 45% at level 1 & 2 and other pre-10 programs" (p. 6). These researchers found, 60% of students attended until the completion of the course, and there was "an overwhelmingly positive impact on First Nations learners, their families and their communities" (p. 61). These included: engaging in the Saskatchewan economy, encouraging further post-secondary study and improving relationships between institutions and First Nations leaders and learners. Within this study First Nations leaders also noted "a greater sense of individual responsibility and self-reliance" (p. 66) by those who had been ABE participants. Poor housing, lack of transportation,

inadequate day-care, substance abuse and addictions, lack of cultural understanding by instructors, lack of economic opportunities, and racist attitudes were cited as barriers for students in the ABE programs.

As a result of the ABE Roundtable annual meetings established in 2007, which are open to all partners in this program, all participants have been working to improve Aboriginal achievement (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012a, Métis Adult Basic Education–Essential Skills of the Workplace). To date this partnership has focused on building partnerships, reducing barriers, conducting a review of On-Reserve ABE, revising curriculum and providing culturally sensitive intake processes. As a result a combined *Adult Basic Education–Essential Skills for the Workplace Program* (ABE–ESWP) has been developed. This program supports individuals who are unemployed with low literacy skills, gives priority to First Nations and Métis applicants and includes substantial work place/job shadowing hours (Amendt, 2012, ABE Roundtable). The 9 Essential Skills for work, living and life identified by Human Resources and Skill Development Canada have been integrated throughout the program. Amendt indicated the *Circles of Intelligent Knowledge Program*, which encourages a cultural perspective, and the *Aboriginal Adult Literacy Assessment Tool* (AALAT) has been incorporated to improve the success of the program. Tailoring the program has resulted in an improved employment rate for those who completed the ABE–ESWP in 2011. However, the necessity of collecting systematic, consistent, standardized data as recommended by Cottrell et al. (2011) continues to be echoed by those trying to improve the outcomes of post-secondary education for Aboriginal students.

Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology

In Saskatchewan a variety of technical institutes and community colleges were established from the 1940s onward (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, n.d. b). These offered a variety of technology, industrial, apprenticeship and upgrading programs. In 1987 provincial legislation established the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology with four urban campuses to work in partnership with the regional colleges. Agreements were forged with the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) in the late 1980s and early 1990s respectively. In 1997 a major reorganization ensured that SIAST would now be administered as one organization. This would enable strong partnerships between government, industry and communities. Later, in 2005 the Aboriginal Council was established to provide an Aboriginal perspective to the president and the CEO of SIAST.

Today, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) provides post-secondary technical education and skills training (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, n.d. a). It has four main campuses located in Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw and Prince Albert and is largely funded by the provincial government (67.09%) (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, n.d. d). With over 15,000 students enrolled full time in SIAST programs, almost 3,000 of these students declared Aboriginal ancestry representing 18.5% of the student body. In addition to the four campuses, SIAST provides distance education for many students. Mobile Training Labs also make it possible to offer industrial/trades classes like welding, industrial mechanics and electrical in rural, remote, or northern areas of the province (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, n.d. c). Although "91% of Aboriginal students say they'd recommend SIAST to a friend"

(Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, n.d. d)) the administration appointed a multi-disciplinary committee to explore areas for improvement with regard to Aboriginal student success. The committee was asked to identify existing barriers, recommend ways to improve Aboriginal student recruitment and retention, and advocate for institution change to improve Aboriginal student persistence.

The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (2009) published the *Aboriginal Student Success Strategy: Final Report* which outlined an action plan for the next five years based on data collected from more than 600 stakeholders. Barriers included: "low awareness of training-related career paths at the prospective student stage; complex admission processes; difficulties in relocating in an urban environment; financial hardship and funding processes; personal and family circumstances; academic preparedness; and lack of support for English language learners" (p. 4). SIAST plans to address the needs of Aboriginal students (physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional) but also to address "the structures and attitudes of the institution" (p. 5). Based on responses the report suggested:

> Establishing an Aboriginal student success strategy implementation steering committee and hiring a coordinator, establishing key performance indicators for Aboriginal participation and completion giving priority to those programs with the lowest rates of Aboriginal student success, proactively supporting Aboriginal students through the application process, developing specialized information about finance and funding for Aboriginal students, increasing early intervention for Aboriginal students experiencing difficulties, establishing a post-secondary summer transition program at each campus, developing a marketing and communication plan to raise awareness about SIAST among Aboriginal people, offering student support modules in key personal and academic skills,

developing discipline-specific post-secondary preparation programs, implementing a strategy to help English language learners, addressing barriers created by attendance practices, developing targeted student recruitment activities, establishing an Aboriginal alumni network, intensifying SIAST's representative workforce efforts and integrating Aboriginal knowledge and learning into programs. (p. 5)

There were also areas that warranted further investigation. Of particular interest were "barriers specific to basic education students and apprenticeship students" (p. 5).

University of Saskatchewan

The Third Integrated Plan of the University of Saskatchewan included *Aboriginal engagement* as one of the top four priorities. The Aboriginal Student Centre (University of Saskatchewan, 2012) provides supports (intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual) for Aboriginal students such as their *Guide for Aboriginal Students 2013–14* which points out 1,700 students, who have self-identified of Aboriginal ancestry, are presently attending the University of Saskatchewan. The *Native Access Program to Nursing* has been established to support and retain Aboriginal nursing students. The Native Law Centre of Canada, housed at the University of Saskatchewan, offers a *Program of Legal Studies for Native People* (PLSNP). Students accepted or conditionally accepted to a Canadian Law College, who plan to attend full time in the fall, can apply to take this eight week summer course in Property Law. Academic and cultural supports are offered as students make the transition into law studies. Aboriginal students may be accepted into law school on the condition that they complete the PLSNP. The Rawlco Resource Centre was been established in the Edwards School of Business to support the success of Aboriginal students. Aikenhead (2012) highlighted the one-year certificate program in

Indigenous Land Management offered by the College of Agriculture and Bioresources. This program features classes on campus, home-study (readings, assignments, web discussion and projects), the inclusion of Elders and Knowledge Keepers on field-trips and a research and development project to enhance the student's home community. This program has operated for six years and Aikenhead credited it with "an incredible 75% success rate for Indigenous students" (p. 42).

Aikenhead (2012) commented on the *Aboriginal Student Achievement Program* being piloted by the College of Arts and Science during 2012–13. Main features include organization as a community of learning, a current focus on biology, triads of classes which are kept small so relationships can build between students and also between instructors and students, and student advisors and mentors for each triad. Guided by two successful Indigenous university students, first year students meet once a week in a *Learning Community hour* focused on being successful at university. Elders are occasionally part of the Learning Community Hour. This program is being monitored closely and there are plans to extend the program in order to eventually support both first and second year students and to incorporate more mathematics and science preparatory courses.

In addition, the *Aboriginal Equity Access Program* (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. d) has provided reserved seats for Aboriginal students currently residing in Saskatchewan who meet the minimum admission requirements for the colleges of Dentistry (3/28), Law (separate Aboriginal applicant category), Medicine (9/84), Nursing (16%), Nutrition and Dietician (2/28), Pharmacy (4/90), Physical Therapy (5/40) and Veterinary Medicine (2/78). The College of Medicine has an Aboriginal student mentorship program and other colleges are currently planning additional transition programs. The College of Education has established the Aboriginal

Education Research Centre to "explore and develop success strategies for learning and education of the largest growing population in Saskatchewan" (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. a, About AERC).

The Indian Teacher Education program (ITEP) is a four years Bachelor of Education program "designed for First Nations/Aboriginal students" (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. b). ITEP was established in 1972 and has tutorial, academic and counseling supports for students in the program. Students can select an elementary/middle years or a secondary program. Currently the ITEP program is also offered at the community level through Aurora College, Battleford Agency Tribal Chiefs, Big River First Nation, Canoe Lake First Nation, Makwa Shagaiehcan First Nation, and Onion Lake First Nation.

Aikenhead (2012) described a variety of outreach programs offered by the University of Saskatchewan. The *SCI-FI Science camps*, with satellite camps held in the northern communities provide "hand-on science, technology, and engineering experiences" (p. 34) for school age students. *Discovering Engineering* introduces grade eight girls to engineering and has them meet role models. Programs like these let First Nations and Métis students develop a vision of themselves as a scientist or an engineer.

Aikenhead (2012) also described the *Science Ambassador Program* that involves undergraduate (3rd or 4th year) or graduate students from science, engineering or health sciences living in remote Indigenous communities for about six weeks. This provides an opportunity for *two-way learning* where university students learn about Indigenous cultures and the Indigenous students learn about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The university students serve as peer mentors and role models for the Indigenous students and help them to develop aspirations towards post-secondary education. Feedback from students and teachers indicates "a

positive correlation between time spent with science ambassadors and student attitudes towards: enrolling in higher level science classes, considering jobs in science and engineering, and viewing the success of women in these careers" (p. 36). A strong partnership supports this program with funds from the University of Saskatchewan, the Government of Saskatchewan, the National Science and Engineering Research Council, Women in Science and Engineering, and industries such as Cameco and AREVA Resources Canada and local educational organizations.

Northern Teacher Education Program/Northern Professional Access Program

The Northern Teacher Education Program (Northern Teacher Education Program/ Northern Professional Access Program, 2012) was initiated by the Northern School Board (now Northern Lights School Division) to address issues faced in the K–12 school division. At that time only 3% of their teaching staff was of Aboriginal ancestry and the turn-over rate was approximately 75%. Both issues needed to be addressed if Aboriginal student achievement was to improve.

Based in La Ronge, NORTEP, established in 1977, offers a four year Bachelor of Education Program to students living in the far north (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. c). Under affirmative action, this program targets students of Indian and Métis ancestry. Students must be considered a *Northern resident* and preference is given to students who are fluent in an Aboriginal language (Cree or Dene) (Northern Teacher Education Program/Northern Professional Access College, Entrance Requirements). NORTEP's mission statement includes "preserving the northern perspective of cultures, languages and traditional values". In recent years a graduate degree in Curriculum Instruction and Administration has also been offered.

NORTEP to date has over 366 graduates and 91% of these graduates work in northern communities (Fact Sheet). This has greatly reduced teacher turn-over rates.

In 1989 the Northern Professional Access College (NORPAC) was added to fulfill the expressed needs of northern people. In this program, students can take Arts and Science classes and complete their degree or take classes that will count if they choose to transfer to another university to complete their studies. Both the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina offer classes in the NORTEP/NORPAC Programs. Aikenhead (2012) found NORPAC's success may be partially due to its "culturally responsive student support and course content" (p. 33). Practical application for learning, availability of tutoring, and alternative reading weeks when students can return to their home community are positive features of this program.

First Nations University of Canada

"The First Nations University of Canada offers undergraduate and graduate degrees, accredited by the University of Regina, within an environment of Indian culture and history" (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2012, par. 1). Classes include: Indigenous Studies, Indian Languages, Indian Education, Indian Communication Arts, Indigenous Social Work and Indian Fine Arts. Established in 1976, "it is the only First Nations-controlled university in Canada and has the largest concentration of Aboriginal Faculty in one institution in the world" (par. 2).

The First Nations University of Canada offers professional programs in Indigenous Education, Indian Social Work, Business and Public Administration, Nursing Education and Health Sciences (First Nations University of Saskatchewan, n.d.). The university also offers Interdisciplinary Studies in English, Indigenous Health Studies, Indian Communication Arts,

Indian Fine Arts, Indian Languages and Linguistics, Indigenous Studies, Intercultural Leadership Program or Science. Students are also eligible to enroll in classes offered by the University of Regina.

Aikenhead (2012) indicated the "First Nations University of Canada (FNUC) has a natural on-going relationship with on-reserve schools and with their communities" (p. 35). The FNUC also has a transition program for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) support. During 2012–13, 30 First Nations students from Onion Lake are participating. Components of this program include: life skills for surviving in the city; 10 courses at the pre-university level that address skills such as reading, writing and mathematics; and ten success-based courses that extend mathematics and science skills to an introductory university level. Aikenhead claimed students who complete this course receive a certificate for earned admission into engineering and applied sciences at the University of Regina. Throughout the program students are offered culture immersion activities to help them strengthen their Indigenous identity.

Adequate Funding and Other Supports

The needs of Aboriginal students in post-secondary education mirror those of Aboriginal students in K–12 education. Cultural affirmation, sense of belonging, monitoring success, and authentic partnerships are all critical components of successful Aboriginal post-secondary education. However, as there is no access for Aboriginal students without funding, this need is often given precedence.

Aboriginal students in post-secondary education need adequate funding to support their studies. Currently there are a variety of sources available through Aboriginal Affairs and

Northern Development Canada and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (Government of Canada, 2012a & 2012b). Some supports also exist for Aboriginal students as they transition to post-secondary, complete their study program, and transition to employment.

The *Post Secondary Student Support Program* (PSSSP) provides financial support to attend post-secondary studies for Status Indians and some Inuit students (eligible students not covered by a Programs and Services Agreement in Nunavut). Funds are intended to cover tuition, travel to the institution and home twice within the academic year, and living expenses while attending post-secondary either full time or part time. Students are expected to maintain adequate academic standing within their program in order to maintain their funding. The First Nation, or their designate, administers this fund according to national guidelines so prospective students must contact their local band office. Inuit students can contact the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) regional office in the province where they reside to get information regarding applications.

The *Aboriginal Apprenticeship Initiative* is designed to increase the number of Aboriginals pursuing the trades (Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certificate Commission, 2012). The *Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trades Certificate Commission* provides an opportunity for Aboriginal students to pursue training and work experience near their Aboriginal community. Proposals for this program must identify how skill development in a particular trade would benefit their community. The intended outcomes are long-term employment for the apprentice and economic development for the community. Additional upgrading of academic skills to support success in the apprenticeship training can be built into the program when deemed necessary.

For Status Indians and Inuit the *University College Entrance Preparation Program* (UCEPP) provides funding while students work to improve their academic standing so they are eligible to enter degree or diploma programs. In this case, funding is limited to one year of study. *Adult Basic Education Programs* that provide First Nations and Inuit the opportunity to upgrade their academic skills are supported through the *Provincial Training Allowance* (PTA) that assists with living costs during the study program. Upon completion these students are eligible to pursue post-secondary education or training. The *Sask Smart Innovation Fund* provides support for Saskatchewan communities to address their literacy needs. These funds can be used within a one year time frame to assess the literacy needs of the community or to implement a plan to address the community's literacy needs.

The Aboriginal *Human Resource* Council (AHRC) is made up of representatives from Aboriginal groups, the government, and the private sector. The council encourages partnerships to increase skills and training opportunities, share promising practices, develop innovative training and counseling tools for Aboriginal people, and conduct education and awareness sessions to highlight Aboriginal recruitment and retention strategies within the private sector. AHRC runs the *Inclusion Network*, an online national Aboriginal Employment system.

The *Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative* (AWPI) works towards increasing the participation of Aboriginal people in the work force. They raise awareness of Aboriginal employment issues; enhance the capacity of employers to recruit, promote and retain Aboriginal employees; and promote information-sharing and networking among stakeholders.

Within the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy there is a *Skills and Partnership Fund*, new in 2010, available to all Aboriginal organizations. This programs aims to

provide training in areas where there is a long-term need for skilled workers within the community. Aboriginal agreement holders are responsible to deliver the program within the community. In this program there is a strong emphasis on accountability and results. The government funds from 50–75% of the project which must provide skill development for individuals that could lead to future employment. The *Northern Career Quest Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership* gives those in northern Saskatchewan communities the opportunities to learn valuable work skills that may lead to employment.

The *First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative* (FNICCI) provides funds for child care when parents are starting a new job or participating in training. This program supports 8,500 child care spaces in 486 First Nations and Inuit communities across Canada. The local Aboriginal agreement holder will create a program based on the needs of their clients. This will include preschool spaces and may also include an after-school program.

The *Young Canada Works for Aboriginal Urban Youth* and the *First Nations and Inuit Summer Work Experience* help Aboriginal youth (aged 16–30) to participate in summer work experiences. Participants in these programs must be enrolled in full time secondary or post-secondary studies during the academic year and be planning to return to full time studies in the fall. These programs help youth start to explore career choices and gain essential skills and knowledge required to participate in the labour force.

Increased efforts have been made to provide current information to Aboriginal peoples through the Aboriginal Canada Portal. Six major Aboriginal organizations worked with the Canadian government to design the portal and select the most useful information to be included. On this website The *Aboriginal Bursaries Search Tool* makes incoming post-secondary students

aware of bursaries, scholarships and incentives available to First Nations students or Northern residents. In addition, Aboriginal students are eligible to apply to the *Canada Student Loan Program* and the *Canada Student Grants Program.*

Institutions that provide post-secondary education are also supported. The *Indian Studies and Support Program* (ISSP) funds post-secondary institutions to design and to implement college or university level classes for First Nations and Inuit students. These funds are intended to cover actual cost of offering programming. This fund may serve as an incentive to provide more culturally affirming content within courses for First Nations students. The Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network and the Saskatchewan Literacy Network provides funding to support adult literacy.

There is general recognition that Aboriginal students need more support than non-Aboriginal students in order to be successful in post-secondary studies. This need is attributed largely to the legacy of residential schools, poverty, health, and past and present colonizing educational practices. At present, most Aboriginal students are somewhat older than non-Aboriginal students when they pursue post- secondary studies and they are more likely than non-Aboriginal students to have dependents. Past experiences with practices that are aimed at assimilation and that are racist require special efforts to help Aboriginal students overcome risk factors and feel empowered to reach their full potential in terms of education and employment. For these reasons, many post-secondary institutions have acknowledged the need to put extra supports in place.

Aikenhead (2012) focused his study on the reasons Aboriginal students do not typically qualify in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) at the post-secondary level. He stated, "Reserves do not have equitable funding for early childhood

programs, for up-to-date mathematics and science resources and laboratories, and for teacher salaries" (p. 7). This contributes to why many Aboriginal students are unable to meet the entrance requirements for mathematics and science courses at the post-secondary level. Aikenhead also claimed First Nations and Métis students experience more *cultural identity clashes* in trying to pursue studies in mathematics or science. Aikenhead strongly supported, "*Indigenous students should not have to set aside or devalue their cultural knowledge in order to achieve in school science and mathematics*" (p. 12). This researcher acknowledged initial steps to incorporate Indigenous content in the curriculum, to use culturally appropriate instructional strategies and methods, to use fitting verbal and non-verbal interpersonal communication, and to establish a positive learning environment. However, Aikenhead called this a patch-work approach to date that is mainly focused on science rather than mathematics.

Based on quantitative and qualitative research studies, Aikenhead (2012) believed the universities and colleges bear more of the responsibility for First Nation and Métis students dropping out of mathematics and science courses. Aikenhead was concerned many university science and engineering departments fail to accept responsibility for attracting and retaining Aboriginal students. In fact some programs "dissuade or marginalize qualified students from finishing their program" (p. 27). Aikenhead found to support Indigenous students in science and mathematics achievement it is essential to assist students to see themselves in a role related to science, technology, engineering or mathematics; to feel supported as they develop the inner will and strength to successfully complete their education; and perhaps most important to maintain their cultural identity. In order to change the present situation Aikenhead recommended colleges and universities develop programs and projects to nurture Indigenous identities and provide

ongoing support to these students.   To date, Aikenhead acknowledged, "The idea of culturally responsive STEM teaching gains little support in universities" (p. 38).

However, Aikenhead (2012) found companies like AREVA Resources Canada and Cameco are finding ways to support Indigenous learners. Aikenhead found these companies are committed to employing 67% northerners as their direct employees and are "moving beyond their past emphasis on entry-level jobs" (p. 44). These companies have provided financial assistance and developed programs for Indigenous students to explore careers, complete studies and experience job shadowing or summer employment within the industry. They have also cooperated with technical/vocational college to provide on-site training. AREVA Resources Canada and Cameco are actively building better supports for those making the transition from school to work as well as providing on-going career development and advancement for their employees.

Many institutions are finding ways to provide ongoing supports to meet the needs of Aboriginal students. Involving the Aboriginal community working with post-secondary education providers in planning how to do this has emerged as a very effective way to plan for the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.   Particular attention is being paid to transitions from secondary to post-secondary education and transitions from post-secondary to employment. Aboriginal liaison officers, recruitment officers, social workers and counselors have been able to improve student enrolment and retention. Having Elders available to work with students and to guide faculty and staff is becoming a more common practice. In recent years more post-secondary institutions are providing Aboriginal cultural centres so students are more comfortable in these settings. However, to date many questions remain regarding the adequacy

of supports for Aboriginal students. In some cases long wait lists are denying Aboriginal students the funding necessary to access post-secondary education.

Promising Practices

Prairie Research Associates (2012) followed up with graduates who completed their studies at a post-secondary institution in Saskatchewan during 2009–2010. They found approximately 10% of the graduates self declared as Aboriginal. Aboriginal graduates tended to be several years older than non-Aboriginal graduates and 54% had dependents. The researchers specified, during the pre-program phase, 74% of Aboriginal graduates had completed a high school diploma, 9% a GED® and 10% Basic Adult Education. They also found only 30% of Aboriginal respondents started their-secondary training in the year they completed their K–12 studies. The most common source of funding for Aboriginal students was sponsorship by a First Nations band or an Aboriginal funding program. Prairie Research Associates found 82% of the Aboriginal graduates were currently employed.

McCall (2007) in his report, *The Post Secondary Education Accessibility and Affordability Review* made several recommendations to ensure access to post-secondary education for Saskatchewan Aboriginal people. He recommended providing more post-secondary training within small communities, intervening with elementary school students to promote post-secondary training, setting up a Centre of Aboriginal Training Excellence at SIIT, raising awareness of the Aboriginal Access Bursary, ensuring financial assistance for Aboriginal First Nations students, creating a Northern Centre of Learning, and developing more opportunities for learning during work experience.

MacKinnon (2012), Director of The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, supported the use of a Labour Market Intermediary (LMI) to "provide a necessary bridge for successful transition into the labour market of people who have had little or no previous workplace attachment" (p. 1). For Aboriginal people an LMI can match students with suitable employers, provide cultural awareness to employers and give ongoing support to both the employee and the employer. Their research indicated by using an LMI model many complex issues can be addressed and more successful labour attachment occurs. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives stressed an LMI is most successful when working collaboratively with community-based organizations.

Parriag, Chaulk, Wright and MacDonald (2011) examined factors that support successful transitions by Aboriginal people to post-secondary education. They acknowledged a lack of information regarding successful approaches to increasing enrolment in and completion of post-secondary education. They supported conducting future research and evaluation that incorporates both "Aboriginal and mainstream definitions of success" (p. 3). In their study, Métis students had higher post-secondary attainment levels than First Nations or Inuit, Aboriginal women were more likely than Aboriginal men to complete a university degree, and Aboriginal men were more likely than Aboriginal women to earn a trades certificate or college diploma. Aboriginals living on reserves and farther from urban areas complete less post-secondary training that those living in more urban areas. The two challenges most often mentioned by participants in this study were: funding for accessing post-secondary education and lack of academic preparation/low high school graduation rates. Mentoring by role models, orientation to post-secondary education and career counseling have been used effectively in the past. Parriag et al. asserted post-secondary institutions must enhance their responses to the needs

and circumstances of Aboriginal learners, academic preparation must be improved, and a wider range of supports must be included. However, "to be successful, policy changes and interventions must be decided, designed, and implemented in conjunction with Aboriginal groups and organizations" (p. 64).

Promising Practices in Other Jurisdictions

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and The Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians (2010) highlighted the need for a new relationship between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples. The *Education Partnerships Program* and the *First Nation Student Success Program* were evidence of this new relationship. Similarly, *The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy,* announced in 2009, supporting Aboriginals returning to employment or to school also demonstrated this commitment. Aboriginal communities were able to development employment programs to meet their own needs. The *Aboriginal Skill and Employment Strategy*, launched in 2010, aimed to better meet the labour market needs of Aboriginal people.

The First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity and Outcomes Panel (2010) declared the 2% federal cap on increases in post-secondary funding has resulted in a shortfall for Aboriginal students who wish to pursue further education. In order to achieve life-long learning the panel recommended the development of a strategy to ensure accessibility, accountability, data collection and reporting, maintaining student success, effective practices, support for First Nations institutions, and leveraging of other resources. Taking these actions could address the urgent need to nurture Aboriginal enrollment and success in post-secondary education.

The Assembly of First Nations (2012) emphasized the importance of culturally relevant services and content, ongoing support, regular communication between stakeholder groups, access to information and assistance, and funding support and assistance. It is imperative that these remain in place during the completion of post-secondary studies. Further, to date "the success rates of First Nations institutions are largely due to their commitment to student support" (p. 43). The Assembly of First Nations declared, "Canada's approach to First Nations education must respect, reflect, and be grounded in First Nations languages, cultures, and traditions, and address the social and economic realities of their communities" (p. 58).

In British Columbia the building of Aboriginal Gathering Places at six of their post-secondary institutions is one of the strategies to provide a culturally welcoming place for Aboriginal students (Government of British Columbia, 2011). The Government of British Columbia (2012) published the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan: 2020 Vision for the Future.* This guides "all post-secondary education and training programs, including adult basic education, vocational, career, business, trades, undergraduate and graduate degree programs" (p. 2). This work represents the collaboration of representatives from a very broad spectrum of post-secondary institutions with First Nations and Métis people. The Government of British Columbia (2012) acknowledged the existence of 25 public post-secondary institutions and 40 Aboriginal-controlled institutes in the province. "Over the past 15 years, education and employment outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in British Columbia have improved significantly" (p. 4). Nevertheless, there is a continuing commitment for further improvement.

Sanford, Williams, Hopper and McGregor (2012), faculty members in the Teacher Education Program at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, emphasized rejecting the

status quo and conceptualizing education in new ways. Using Indigenous principles these researchers explored new ways to offer a teacher education program. They emphasized, "It is important that the transformation includes all students and provides opportunities for all to think differently about the nature of education, their role as learners and teachers, and alternate ways of creating educational experiences for students" (Indigenous Principles Decolonizing Teacher Education, par. 7). Williams, Hopper and McGregor claimed using and modeling Indigenous principles provided a model for teaching where diversity was viewed as an asset and multiple ways of knowing were valued and nurtured.

At a time when according to Statistics Canada 2006 (cited in Government of Ontario, 2011, p. 7) 21% of Aboriginals in Canada live in Ontario, the Government of Ontario is building stronger relationships with Aboriginal people. The *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework* can be used

> to inform policy development and program design within the ministry, to continue to influence positive action and progress across the postsecondary education and training sectors, and to initiate and enhance meaningful dialogue and partnerships within and among Aboriginal leadership and communities, the ministry, postsecondary education and training stakeholders, and employment and industry leaders. (p. 4)

The five foundational principles include: excellence and accountability; equity, inclusion and respect for diversity; cooperation on and shared responsibility for post-secondary education and training; respect for Constitutional and treaty rights; and respect for Indigenous Knowledge, languages, and cultures. This document asserted Ontario's post-secondary education and training sectors will work

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in partnership with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to support the revitalization of Aboriginal cultures, languages, and identities through the development and delivery of education in these areas for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners and communities, as well as through the encouragement of a broader recognition and inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge. (p. 12)

This strengthening of partnerships will support involvement in planning, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services.

Malatest and Associates (2010) conducted a review of "40 programs in Ontario colleges and universities that were designed to improve recruitment, participation and retention of Aboriginal students in postsecondary education" (p. 8). Significant progress with respect to developing support programs was highlighted. They found all of these programs now have some form of support program and many have several. Malatest and Associates noted "a distinct lack of outcome data" (p. 8) to support claims of positive outcomes. This research specified progress in terms of Aboriginal management bodies to inform, design, and implement programs; Elders playing a more active role; the number of classes offered in the native languages; and the number of Aboriginal teachers available. Negative discoveries included: non-Aboriginal students and faculty resenting resources dedicated to Aboriginal students and reserved seats in programs remaining empty. Malatest and Associates outlined a variety of positive practices observed during the study that might be useful to other post-secondary institutions. However, they cautioned programs must be adapted for the local community. The researchers also encouraged the government to play a more active role in the areas of evaluation, data collection requirements, and facilitating knowledge transfer between institutions.

Similarly the Government of New Zealand's (2008b) *Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-12* applied to all post-secondary education. It supported the development of strong partnerships and within them

> the strategy requires all tertiary education organizations to work with Māori to ensure that education and research supports the development of skills and knowledge that Māori require to manage cultural and economic assets. The Strategy recognizes that a key aspiration of Māori is that Māori knowledge, Māori ways of doing and knowing things, in essence Māori ways of being, are validated across the tertiary education sector. The strategy will continue to support wānanga and other providers to provide education and research in accordance with Kaupapa Māori philosophies. (p. 4)

Based on previous data collection, the Government of New Zealand is targeting higher level qualifications for young New Zealanders under 25 as well as establishing shared responsibility for building literacy and numeracy levels within the workforce.

Conclusion

The challenge of achieving educational parity so Aboriginal people can participate fully in Canadian society, both in terms of employment and wellbeing, is one of long standing. Ladson-Billings (2006) emphasized that by ignoring historical educational inequities the United States is now facing an *education debt* of major proportions. These insights have direct application to the intergenerational consequences of educational disadvantage and cultural and cognitive dissonance experienced by Aboriginal peoples in the Saskatchewan context. Papillon & Cosentino, (2004) and many others have clearly established that hegemonic practices rooted

in colonial and neocolonial mindsets have impeded Aboriginal educational attainment and the accumulated education debt has contributed to economic marginalization and the development of an intergenerational state of dependency and distrust on the part of Aboriginal people. This education debt has profound implications for the future of the province of Saskatchewan given that the links between education, employment, income, and wellbeing have been substantially documented (Howe, 2002, 2011; Mendelson, 2006). Improving educational outcomes, especially attaining a high school diploma, is critical to labour force attachment, which is the main prerequisite to alleviating the poverty and eliminating the wider disparities in quality of life experienced by Aboriginal people in the province. While not discounting deeper systemic issues and the barriers posed by enduring prejudice, a large body of evidence points to the immediate economic and social benefits that attaining a high school diploma confers upon Aboriginal people (Howe, 2002, 2006, 2011; Mendelson, 2006; Sharpe et al., 2009). Achieving greater educational parity and labour force attachment for Aboriginal residents of Saskatchewan is also critical to sustaining cross-cultural harmony and social cohesion in a context where racial animosity is already problematic. Educational success is also critical to the retention and vitalization of Aboriginal languages and cultures and to the realization of Aboriginal people's aspirations for greater self-determination.

Clearly Saskatchewan's continued success and prosperity is contingent upon a future in which Aboriginal communities are empowered, culturally vibrant, healthy, safe, well-educated and engaged in meaningful and remunerative employment. Since publicly funded education constitutes the best tool for promoting individual and collective wellbeing and sustaining social cohesion, responding to the needs of Aboriginal learners to ensure more equitable educational outcomes leading to improved employment opportunities is consequently the most compelling

challenge currently facing Saskatchewan schools. In working to achieve educational parity for Aboriginal students our study demonstrates that Saskatchewan can draw on a large and diverse research base and capitalize on the efforts, insights, successes and failures of educators in multiple other jurisdictions. "It is essential that First Nations become equal partners in the design and development of a modern education system that will truly nurture the learning spirit of all First Nations students" (The National Panel on First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserve, 2012, p. 45).

Research on attaining successful educational outcomes for Aboriginal students provides guidance for those designing education programs for Aboriginal students across the spectrum of early childhood, elementary and secondary school, post-secondary education and work force attachment. The main themes emerging from this literature review are represented in the conceptual framework in Figure 1.3. Key elements within each of the themes are also included.

The *Conceptual Framework*: *Using Current Research to Improve Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People* utilizes the pyramid to visualize imperatives for addressing the Aboriginal education debt emerging from our research. The model's five levels represent the main themes identified in the research literature: Ethical Space, Governance, Planning for Success, Monitoring Success and Local Innovation. The lower levels of the pyramid are foundational to those above and are represented here as broader. Because they bear the most weight they require the greatest investment of time and energy. As programs evolve there will likely be an increasing permeability between the various levels, which will add to the success of the program. This permeability is represented by the white spaces between the layers of the model. On the right of the pyramid, key elements for each theme within the

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Figure 1.3: Conceptual Framework: Using Current Research to Improve Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People

A pyramid diagram with five levels, from top to bottom:

Local Innovation
- Assess local needs
- Consider local assets
- Involve local community

Monitoring Success
- Define success
- Complete appropriate data collection and analysis
- Identify remainng barriers and challeges
- Make decisions based on data
- Realign the program

Planning for Success
- Provide academic and personal supports
- Offer transitional supports
- Affirm cultural identity
- Increase student engagement
- Encourage parental support in the home

Governance
- Establish authentic partnerships
- Engage in shared decision making
- Establish a common purpose
- Agree on common values
- Secure access to adequate funding

Ethical Space
- Honour Aboriginal and Western world views
- Nurture strong working relationships
- Consider new possibilities

literature review are elaborated. Based on insights from our research we suggest that by carefully animating this model, schools will be significantly better positioned to address the *education debt* and achieve more equitable educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners.

Ethical space is the foundation upon which this model depends. It requires honouring both Aboriginal and Western worldviews while nurturing strong, respectful working relationships. With these in place, ethical space allows the consideration of new possibilities and provides hope for all those working towards achieving a common goal. If ethical space is not nurtured and sustained, the model is likely to fail over time.

In turn, governance to determine strategic direction is foundational for planning for success. Effective governance reflects common values and a shared purpose developed through authentic partnerships engaging in shared decision-making. Through these respectful relationships the governance body can work to ensure adequate funding and other resources to enable the program. Without the establishment of such effective governance the success of the program is jeopardized.

With ethical space animated and effective governance in place, the planning for success level of the model can be enabled. At this stage it is important to determine if teachers have the capacity to actively engage students in their learning in order to achieve the desired goals. Professional development is used for capacity building as deemed necessary. It is at this level that critical student supports for the preparatory, in-program (personal or academic), and transitional phases of the program are put in place. Cultural affirmation through integration of First Nations and Métis content, addressing the non-academic challenges many Aboriginal students encounter, and empowering Aboriginal students to see their own potential, must also receive careful examination. Successful planning must also encourage parental support for the program in the home, as this collaboration is critical to success.

Once an initial plan for success is established regular monitoring for success must also occur. Here it is imperative that success is defined in ways that acknowledge both Aboriginal and Western priorities and that appropriate data collection and analysis can take place. Current data will be used to determine future direction and will likely necessitate further work to improve the program. Remaining challenges and barriers may be identified and such data can be used to re-align the program to better address the needs of the students.

Local innovation is an appropriate crown of the pyramid and it emphasizes the importance of community consultation. Acknowledging and respecting the uniqueness of local contexts ensures adaptability and flexibility within the model at any of the levels in order to identify local needs and priorities, to utilize local assets, and to involve the local community. Ultimately it is the members of local communities, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who are best able to devise appropriate responses to their own challenges and determine the most effective means of achieving their own goals.

Perhaps the most challenging shift that is required is for all involved in Saskatchewan education to confront the dominant epistemic and ontological assumptions about teaching and learning and challenge the established curriculum practices and interests that have been traditionally exercised in public schools (Cherubini, 2009b, pp. 12–13). For Aboriginal learners to be successful they must see themselves and their cultures reflected in schools and for this to happen educators and policy makers *must* see "Indigenous peoples' worldviews, social structures, and pedagogy as a legitimate foundation upon which to construct new meanings or knowledge alongside Western traditions and ways of knowing" (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006, p. 17). Ermine's conceptualization of ethical space, which is foundational for authentic partnerships

and which values both Western and Aboriginal worldviews, provides a guide for this shift. Ethical space allows partnerships to develop a common purpose, to recognize common values, to engage in open and honest communication, to forge new ideas and to secure funding. Governance used to build and guide a successful program must take careful note of ensuring ethical space and authentic partnerships.

Each program must take into consideration the needs of its students when planning a range of supports to ensure preparation for the next stage of learning. Research emphasizes the importance of providing additional supports during student transitional periods. A significant body of research (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, 2010; Government of Saskatchewan, 2010; Richards & Scott, 2009) acknowledges early childhood education as a critically important first step to ensuring a much larger return on dollars invested in improving educational outcomes. Recently some research has identified student engagement as an important consideration within this planning process. In this regard, there is some evidence that suggests addressing classroom climate, setting high expectations for students and providing relevant learning experiences can increase the achievement of learning goals. In addition, some studies are looking at the effect of parental expectations and the educational culture in the home as factors contributing to student success.

In recent years, agreement has gradually surfaced regarding the need to monitor success. Defining this success from both an Aboriginal perspective and a Western perspective is the first step in a planned cycle for continuous improvement based on data-informed decisions. Appropriate data collection and analysis can help to identify whether efforts to address barriers and challenges are successful. Effective assessments can help to inform future changes, provide encouragement, highlight promising practices, and foster hope for the future.

The research literature indicates success in the area of improving outcomes for Aboriginal students in education and employment is unlikely unless programs build on a foundation of ethical space, develop authentic partnerships, provide appropriate supports, and monitor progress. Local innovation considers the individual Aboriginal community, its needs and potential assets, and adapts the model to enhance success.

The global search for improved Indigenous education outcomes, in conjunction with the postcolonial turn in education, is an opportunity to fundamentally re-imagine how schools are constructed and operated and to reconfigure how schools relate to learners, their families, and their communities. Drawing on the experiences of others it should be recognized from the outset that this will be extremely challenging work and all involved must expect "that success will require substantially greater change in their organizations than they can make comfortably or easily" (Leithwood, 2009, p. 79). Additionally, given the complexity of the issues contributing to the *education debt*, it is clear that cross-sector collaboration is essential if our province hopes to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal people. Only then will it become possible to address "underlying systemic challenges related to poverty, health, housing, transportation, addiction, dependency, infrastructure [and] location" (Cottrell et al., 2011, p. 86). To achieve this will require cooperation across the various levels of government ─ federal, provincial, municipal and First Nation. None of these changes will come easily; however, in addition to pursuing an unequivocally moral purpose, we are convinced that the rewards will be commensurate with the effort.

SECTION TWO: Lighthouse Programs in Saskatchewan

This section focuses on a variety of Lighthouse Programs located throughout the Province of Saskatchewan. These programs were identified through purposeful sampling based on documented success in facilitating positive learning and employment outcomes for Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan, in all phases of the educational process from early childhood through to post-secondary and labour force attachment. Because of issues relating to access, responsiveness and short timelines, it was not possible for researchers to examine all of the potential Lighthouse Programs in existence in the province. Consequently the programs included here are a sample selected to achieve maximum geographic diversity, to ensure that all of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal cultural and linguistic groups were represented, and to ensure that a variety of governance and delivery models were examined. These programs were also chosen as part of a convenience sample where program personnel and clients were willing and able to participate in the research in a timely fashion. It should also be noted that the programs examined here are dynamic entities which are constantly evolving in response to local and global circumstances and are driven by a constant search for innovation and improvement. Our data, therefore, represents a snapshot in time; and quite likely will not accurately reflect the implications and consequences of this ongoing innovation once even a relatively short period of time has passed.

In analyzing these Lighthouse Programs researchers focused on a number of key characteristics including: background information, governance, planning for success, and monitoring success. Wherever possible researchers sought to highlight aspects of those programs which reflected promising practices from the local, national and international contexts identified in Section One. Researchers also sought to identify features unique to the Saskatchewan

educational and employment contexts. Both the global and the "made in Saskatchewan" practices showing the greatest promise to address the accumulated education debt are synthesized by way of conclusion for each of the Lighthouse Programs. This summary for each Lighthouse Program is presented under the heading *Promising Practices to Address the Education Debt*. The premise of this research is that one of the most effective means of improving educational attainment and labour force attachment for Aboriginal peoples is to learn as much as possible from programs such as these which are currently experiencing the greatest success. Once identified, promising practices may be refined and augmented and then adapted and extended as broadly as possible to ensure the widest possible success.

A proven track record in providing effective learning and training, leading either directly or indirectly to employment for First Nations and Métis peoples, was the main criteria for inclusion in this purposeful sample of Lighthouse Programs. A critical insight from this research is that the uniqueness and diversity of Aboriginal groups and circumstances in Saskatchewan militate against any simple application of global solutions to local circumstances. Furthermore, because of multiple local histories a multitude of unique educational and economic relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities have evolved over time, leading to a wide diversity in current configurations across the provincial educational and employment landscape. Acknowledging and accommodating this diversity by tailoring programs and initiatives to best meet local circumstances and realities, is therefore imperative in the quest to achieve greater success. Having acknowledged this heterogeneity, however, our findings also suggest that some fundamental commonalities can be identified in those institutions and programs which are currently achieving the best results in ensuring equitable educational achievement and employment for Aboriginal peoples.

Strong and shared governance structures; adequate and sustainable funding; the integration of First Nations/Métis culture and worldviews into pedagogy and curricula; a holistic approach to student needs based on the integrated services model; broad, respectful and enduring partnerships; long-term strategic planning based on appropriate data collection and assessment; and authentic relationships with Aboriginal parents and communities grounded in a commitment to animating *ethical space*, are some of the most compelling characteristics of these successful programs.

Sturgeon Lake Central School

Background Information

Sturgeon Lake First Nation is a Cree community located 20 minutes north of Prince Albert. Currently the majority of band members are not employed full time, but because of its location adjacent to employment opportunities in Prince Albert there are high expectations in the community that improved educational outcomes will lead to significantly enhanced employment opportunities for the growing young population. The total enrolment at Sturgeon Lake Central (SLCS) including Head Start to grade 12 is 450 students.

There is a Cree class that starts at pre-K for an hour a day. There is only one Cree teacher in the school but 85% of the teachers on staff speak Cree. There is almost 100% First Nations staff with the exception of two teachers at the high school level.

Governance

Sturgeon Lake is a band administered school under the authority of an elected chief and council who are the employers on the reserve. One of the elected councilors holds the education portfolio and receives guidance from an appointed Education Advisory Group composed of an Elder and parents. The principal is also the Director of Education. The school has a full-time vice-principal and a half-time vice-principal as well.

The Principal/Director has full control of the education budget, and all finance is managed in the school. Consequently Chief and council do not have access to education money. The band receives approximately $3 million in its education budget from AANDC and recently accessed additional funds through the First Nation Student Success Program. While those additional funds have been very beneficial, political and educational leaders at Sturgeon Lake First Nation believe that they are under-funded relative to nearby provincial schools. The principal stated, "All that you hear in the media [about band misspending] is not true. The real issue is chronic underfunding and we experience that here at Sturgeon school every day."

Planning for Success

Critical to current success at SLCS was the development of a five year plan by the Director and the Education Advisory Group in 2007. At the time, CTBS testing revealed that some students were six years behind their grade level and that very few students (less than 20%) were actually at grade level. The first priority was to increase the educational resources for the school since there was a lack of resources, texts, and manipulatives. As there was no money to purchase these items school leaders explored partnerships with educational companies such Nelson Books to access resources cheaply. They toured math and reading programs in the

provincial system and also visited the Opaskwayak Cree Nation School in Manitoba to observe the Guided Reading Program.

Immediate attention was also directed to addressing the use of alcohol in the community, particularly by teaching staff, the chief and the Advisory Council. As a result, a zero tolerance policy for drugs and alcohol for staff was implemented. A term contained within the teacher contracts states *employees must abstain while present on the reserve and during the term of the employment contract*. This zero tolerance policy is meant to set an example for students and parents within the community. The new zero tolerance policy applies to all 60 staff members within the school including the health and ICFS staff. The chief and council are also subject to this policy. They are abstainers which enhances good leadership. To cultivate workplace wellness and to support staff to engage in personal development, programs and supports for teachers struggling with addictions were implemented. The result is a much more effective educational program with positive and consistent role modeling for students.

In addition, change has taken place with respect to teacher contracts. In the past teaching staff had one year contracts but now they will be permanent employees if they have five years of continuous service and meet probationary requirements. As a result there has been little staff turnover, students and teachers develop long term relationships and staff members are familiar with the community. Part of the change regarding teacher contracts included the chief and council deciding not to renew four teacher contracts. These teachers were band members so this decision did cause some hardships for administrative staff who implemented this change.

The next change was to reorganize and reprioritize the academic program in the school. There was a strong desire to invest in early literacy and the Director began by scheduling and

rearranging the early year classes. A full-day kindergarten program was implemented even though the First Nation is only funded for half time. Currently there are two kindergarten classes with 20 students in each. School leaders have been able to implement these changes since it is not mandatory to have a teacher with a Professional A Certificate in each kindergarten classroom. So, local early childhood educators were hired on a daily fee for service. The band went from employing professional staff to employing paraprofessional staff for a lot less pay, partially because they do not provide employee benefits.

SLCS operates a Head Start program which is funded separately through federal health services rather than AANDC education funding. There are about 40 Head Start students in two classes. They have a regular classroom in the school and are part of school planning. The overall strategy was to keep small classroom numbers in the lower elementary level grades. In addition, the Director chose to place the very strongest teachers in the lower grade classrooms along with teacher assistants and extra supports.

It has been two years since the implementation of the Grade 9–12 Triple "A" Student Allowance and Awards. The monthly allowance is based on attendance, attitude and academics. No monthly allowance is given to students who have been suspended during the month. Students get $20 for attendance and $20 for attitude and academics. The amount a student receives is dependent on deductions for late assignments and absenteeism. The semester high school awards are granted on the basis of marks and awards range from $20 for Merit (75% − 80%) to $50 for Great Distinction (96% − 100%). Year-end awards are for the entire school year and include Perfect Attendance, Academics, and Triple "A" (Best all round student), among others. The Triple "A" Club is a travel club and at the end of the year these students go on a trip. There are Grade 12 Scholarships for Highest Academic Achievement, English, Math and Science,

Language and Culture, Athletic, and Social Sciences. There is also the Spirit of Education Scholarship offered to adults.

The awards are given out at the school assembly and students need to be in attendance to receive an award. The younger students get a cheque which they can cash at the band store but high school students get cash. The awards keep kids in school although some people are against giving money to students for achievement. However, many of the students are from poor families and for these students this is the only money they get. So if they lose this reward because of their behavior or non-attendance, this represents a big loss to them.

As part of strategic planning other changes were made at the grade 6, 7, and 8 levels when specialty-teaching classrooms were established. The leadership began by doing a teacher survey and inventory of skills and abilities. For example, one teacher's dream job was to teach math all day. Based on the inventory, a math and science teacher was assigned a classroom to focus on teaching math to grades 6–8. A similar approach was implemented for the English Language Arts and Social Sciences teachers who teach one subject to the grades 6–8 students. This change lets teachers teach in their area of expertise and both the teachers and the students benefit from this. The vice-principal noted that this change was a major contributor to enhanced teacher performance and satisfaction and to significantly reduced staff turnover.

Student retention was a big problem before the block system was introduced. It was apparent that students began dropping out at grade 9. Typically twenty high school students would begin in September and there would be only 8 students remaining in June. In view of this, the grade 9s were moved to the separate high school building and become part of the block

system. This move to the block system has successfully encouraged stronger attendance, notably at the Grade 9 level.

Table 2.1 presents the 2012/13 High School class schedule. Each student takes one course during each block. However, there is a semester program for the computer and gym courses since those classes are more beneficial for students offered over the entire semester. Other changes were also implemented as part of strategic planning. First Nations Student Success Program funds from AANDC flowed through the Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC).

Table 2.1: Copernica Block Schedule: Sturgeon Lake Central School 2012/13

9 – 2 daily	**Block 1** Aug 30 – Oct 2	**Block 2** Oct 4 – Nov 5	**Block 3** Nov 13 – Dec 14	**Block 4** Dec 17 – Jan 31	**Block 5** Feb 4 – Mar 15	**Block 6** March 19 – May 2	**Block 7** May 6 – June 11
Total hours and days	103.5 hours 23 days	108 hours 24 days	108 hours 24 days	108 hours 24 days	112.5 hours 25 days	120 hours 27 days	112.5 hours 25 days
Grade 9	English	Math	Social Studies	Cree 10	Science	Health Career Ed	Art 10
Grade 10	Science 10 Eng 10A	Precal 10 Science 10	Nat St 10 Eng 10A	Eng 10B Media St 20	Physics 20 WP10 Math	Media St 20 N.S 10	Food St 10 Photo 10
Grade 11	Precal 20	Law 30	WP20 Math	Bio 20	Eng 20	Chem 20	Pysch 30
Grade 12	Nat St 30	ELA 30A	Precal 30	Chem 30	ELA 30B	BIO 30	WPA 30

Source: Sturgeon Lake Central School

SLCS writes the proposal, monies flow through the PAGC, and this year $180,000 has been allocated to SLCS. As a result, three positions have been added to the school ─ a literacy/numeracy coordinator, a guidance counsellor, and a hallway monitor. SLCS gets second level special education services through the PAGC. Educational psychologists supported through these funds do the testing and assessments for all schools within the tribal council. The Director

at SLCS expressed great satisfaction with the services provided by PAGC and insisted that there was no need to establish partnerships with the local provincial school division.

Monitoring Success

Data collection to monitor student learning is also an integral part of SLCS strategic planning. As mentioned earlier initial CTBS testing provided benchmark data and identified significant numbers of students not at grade level. Attendance data also identified that the number of students dropping out spiked in Grade 9. SLCS students interviewed for this research expressed a much stronger preference for the block system. They explained in the semester system they had to focus on four subjects whereas in the block system they only have to concentrate on one subject. They stated, "It makes us feel more mature and makes us more ready for university".

This last year SLCS conducted CTBS testing after completion of their five year plan. It was discovered that, on average, student literacy levels improved by five levels. The goal is for all students to be at grade level within the next three years. As well, the number of students graduating has risen from six students five years ago to a total of 19 graduates in 2012. Further growth is anticipated to a potential total of 29 graduates in 2013. These rising numbers indicate a much greater willingness by students to remain in school until successful completion of grade twelve.

Before these changes were implemented there were many incidents of student conflict but this year only two significant incidents occurred. Improving student behavior was part of a community-based discipline plan. It involves parents, students, teachers, the school counsellor, the RCMP and Indian Child and Family Serves (ICFS). This is part of the community school

processes. If students are caught smoking pot, then they need to go to the health department for addictions counseling. Today, student behavior is not a big problem.

Recently many northern schools have invited the SLCS principal to share the SLCS programs and experiences. Saddle Lake First Nation brought their entire high school for a tour of the school and its program. The visiting students were able to spend the class periods with their peers; and the teachers were able to meet and share experiences. This instilled student pride in their school and promoted good school spirit.

Students made a variety of positive statements about their school. The chemistry students stated they "love" their teacher and commented she "explains it very well". The students also mentioned they have a good science lab. In addition, students like coming to school because it has a good social atmosphere, they have friends and they get a good education. Students stated the reward system was good and the money spent was "worth it". They explained it promotes good school spirit, good sports and "keeps a lot of kids in school".

Along with these positive developments there is also a noted change in how students talk about their future aspirations. All students interviewed expressed aspirations regarding a future career. Three students hoped to go to university. One student wanted to go into education but was not sure. Another student wanted to be a library technician because her "kokum is the librarian here". One student wanted to go into the trades; another to become a heavy equipment operator; while another student wanted to be a petroleum engineer.

Despite the good outcomes to date, there are still challenges and barriers to be addressed as identified by the Advisory Council and the Director. There is no parent community council at SLCS. Parental support and involvement in the school is not widely apparent but parents do

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comment that the school does a good job. There are few good employment opportunities on the First Nation and on-reserve employment is low. Most people working on the reserve are employed at the band office and at the education center. Although parents are not necessarily employed, they still support the school and articulate high expectations for the children's future prospects.

The Director of Education clarified that SLCS has no outside formal or informal partnerships or agreements other than with PAGC. There is concern among the First Nation leaders that such partnerships, agreements, and MOUs may negatively impact treaty rights. The principal has indicated that the province is always a willing partner. The government is willing to share but offers no second level resource sharing directly to SLCS; those services are received from PAGC. SLCS do have shared professional development with PAGC and other provincial schools. The provincial schools are always willing to share promising practices but SLCS leaders expressed little interest in establishing closer relationships with provincial schools.

Students also raised some concerns regarding the school. They pointed out the computers and technology is adequate but access to the internet is often problematic. The students felt that course options at SLCS were limited. They commented on the lack of a work education course and they indicated there is an industrial arts shop but no teacher. The school offers physics one year and chemistry the next year. The students also stated that there should be more after school programs offered to a wider variety of different age groups to enhance the range and quality of recreational services available to young people in the community.

Promising Practices to Address the Education Debt

An examination of SLCS identified a number of promising practices to enhance Aboriginal educational outcomes. Some of these mirror initiatives from other jurisdictions identified in our Literature Review while others seem to be unique to this First Nation context. School governance employed at SLCS appears to be particularly effective and to underpin much of the school's success. While similar to the approach employed by many other band-controlled schools, at Sturgeon Lake First Nation there is a strict separation between governance and administration. As the Director stated, "They (Chief and Council) provide direction but they leave administration to the administrators and teaching to the teachers". The result is an impressive professionalization of school business, a safer working environment for staff, and fewer distractions on a daily basis from the main purpose of the school to maximize student learning.

Effective school leadership was also very much in evidence at SLCS. This was provided by a cadre of experienced in-school administrators of Aboriginal ancestry who showed confidence in the capacity of students to learn and who were committed to continuously improving their practice and the work of their staff in order to ensure best outcomes for their students. Also notable in their leadership style was a commitment to ongoing professional development and long-term strategic planning based on regular data collection to monitor success. An insistence that they as administrators and their staff model healthy behaviour to students and parents was also apparent in the leadership cadre. Finally, it appears that the switch to a block system, investment of significant resources into early childhood learning, and ample second level supports from the PAGC contributed to the improved outcomes at SLSC.

Treaty 4 Student Success Program Incorporated

Background Information

Since 2009, bands within the Treaty 4 region of Saskatchewan can choose to be part of the Treaty 4 Student Success Program Incorporated (T4SSP). It is aimed at improving academic success for students within their K–12 schools. Initially, 18 schools were involved but some schools withdrew to pursue their own priorities. In 2012–2013 there are 12 schools with about 2,400 students. This development of a First Nations school district from planning, design, and initial implementation to providing second level services took four years.

T4SSP's mandate is to focus on school improvement in student retention, literacy and numeracy. The T4SSP conceptual framework includes a broad goal for learning, Treaty Four Nation Builders, and a vision. The program is designed to support their schools through the School Success Planning process. T4SSP guided the new process and supplied a school success data analyst to assist school planners. Each school designed a three-year school improvement plan: Year 1 was the planning process, Year 2 was implementation, Year 3 implementation continues. Revisions to the plan are ongoing and the schools use critical and relevant information to identify strengths, capacity, and challenges. Each school can determine their own needs, goals, and aspirations.

School educators gathered data to begin the planning process. Then together with the T4SSP data analyst they analyzed information about the school and the students. Weaknesses were identified and changes to support improvement were established. Again, new data was collected and compared to the initial information on which the first school success plan was based. Teachers then measured the success and made adjustments to instructional strategies. The

T4SSP also planned for future professional development. T4SSP encouraged staff and parents to monitor student achievement levels and other factors that are known to influence student success. With up-to-date and reliable information about how well students are performing, schools are now better able to respond to the needs of students, teachers, and parents.

Governance

The bands joined the program when the First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP) funds were introduced in 2009 by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). The formal arrangements with bands are letters of commitment to T4SSP to participate in the program for a three year block. These letters are signed by a quorum of chief and council. Initially, T4SSP was funded through one member Tribal Council. In year three a board structure was developed and became incorporated. The T4SSP board is composed of an elected representative from each participating band. More recently, an advisory council has been appointed and is composed of a community member from each First Nation. This council provides guidance for the implementation of the T4SSP mandate.

There are two formal partnerships involving professional staff with two neighboring school divisions. T4SSP seconds the Director of Education from one school division and, in return, T4SSP seconds a .2 staff member to provide cultural advocate services. A similar arrangement exists with another school division. The .2 positions are intended to assist the school divisions to engage the 15 First Nations communities within their boundaries and create interest in First Nations school board representation. As well, both T4SSP and the neighboring school divisions hope to create a shared work plan which may include a data sharing protocol.

In most cases no funds come from the bands for the FNSSP portion of services. But three First Nations have entered into contractual agreements with T4SSP to provide additional Director of Education services beyond the FNSSP. Those bands provide funding through a contract.

There are also some informal arrangements with other parties. They have received provincial funding for an Artist in Residence. That arrangement was successful over a two-year period. T4SSP qualify and plan to access other forms of funding through the provincial grants. The Tribal Councils contract professional educators to assist the T4SSP bands with numeracy, science and language arts. They work alongside T4SSP and visit the schools intermittently throughout the year. The professional educators plan to increase the number of visits to each school.

Going into year four, T4SSP has a funding agreement directly with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). This is part of an AANDC initiative to reform First Nations Education. At a national level in 2008, AANDC committed 268 million over five years and 75 million ongoing. The T4SSP budget for 2011–2012 totaled 2.572 million and they employed 17 staff members. Forty-two percent of the budget was allocated to school success planning; 38% to student learning assessments; 11% to performance measurement; and 9% to administration fees. T4SSP priorities are: School Success Planning, Program Administration and Governance, Community Engagement and Cultural Advocacy, and Information and Communications Technology. The budget provides about $1,061 per student annually for the 12 schools.

Funding is proposal driven based on a three year block and is provided annually based on quarterly reports. T4SSP is now going into their second block as they are beginning the fourth year of the program. The Director of Education stated, "Funding is inadequate." They had three years to build the program which is a new model for First Nations schools. By year two they laid a foundation, created a conceptual vision, and collected data. AANDC referred to them as a "model of success". However, the funding proposal based on their vision was not approved and they were given a small increase; not enough to realize their dreams.

Planning for Success

Fullan and Boyle's (2010) research guided the philosophical underpinning of T4SSP. The director stated "Leaders are life-long learners and adapt. That aligned with my understanding of traditional First Nation leadership". The current philosophy and practice of T4SSP is also closely aligned with the recommendations of Leithwood (2009) who emphasized creating good learning conditions both in the classroom and in the home. T4SSP designed a conceptual map for planning based on local First Nation experiences and perspectives as opposed to AANDC, the provincial Ministry of Education or School Division perspectives or models. The T4SSP Director stated they first went "back to the community, back to the land, back to the thinking that already existed in our communities on how to successfully nurture the students or young people [to be] healthy and well balanced". Using this approach, by year three a very strong conceptual map was built with a plan, a vision and a focus. They structured the program on the premise of how young people learned about who they are, and where they came from.

A key concept was capacity building. TheT4SSP presumed everyone (teachers, parents, students, Elders, and principals) has potential strength, has something to offer, and has a purpose.

Rather than bringing in experts, they assumed wisdom already existed in the communities regardless of the current school and community limitations. They assumed strengths already existed locally.

The capacity model was reinforced through professional development focused on instructional strategies and instructional intelligence. That is, teachers think about their practice ─ what they do in their classrooms on a day-to-day basis to meet the needs of students, and how they monitor the effect this is having on student learning. Teachers were introduced to a variety of instructional techniques and strategies to enhance teaching practice and were provided with additional professional resources.

T4SSP began with one cohort of teachers called Success Leaders; one from each school. The Success Leaders trained intensively on three or four strategies that were reinforced. They surmised capacity building is about instruction; teachers "think, talk, breath and eat instruction". Teachers focused on strategies that enhanced student learning such as on questioning, group work, and specific high impact instructional strategies. These success leaders in turn provided in-service to teachers within their home schools.

All schools were provided with new texts and materials; at the time First Nations schools lacked these resources. Each classroom received a Scholastic Guided Reading Package along with the Fountas and Pinnell Test Kit. Math Makes Sense texts along with additional workbooks and manipulatives were provided. There were new science texts and most recently a new grade 7 social studies text. T4SSP actively lobbied Pearson publishers to create materials that include First Nation and Métis content before they would accept their products. All new texts and

reading programs used within the T4SSP now include local First Nation Métis perspectives and are aligned with the provincial curriculum.

The online program, Mathletics, is an additional resource provided to each school. It is an easy-to-use classroom assessment and planning tool available for use at home and at school. It is available 24 hours per day/7 days a week. It identifies student math skills based on checkpoints and is aligned to provincial outcomes and indicators. It reveals student understanding of numeracy concepts and offers links to curriculum and resource support.

Monitoring Success

Many assessment tools are employed to guide school improvement. There are ready-made packages from Scholastic, Pearson, and Fountas and Pinnell. Other assessments were developed and adapted locally by staff to suit the T4SSP schools. The T4SSP student assessment cycle is planned on the four seasons. Fall, winter and spring are for data collection. Summer is for the review of data and revision of goals set out in the School Success Plan. Using this approach school success planning allows individual schools to utilize relevant and timely data. The assessment information provided to T4SSP and the aggregate school data is outlined in the T4SSP 2011–2012 Nation Builder Report.

The provincial system employed the Assessment for Learning (AFL) approach which T4SSP also employed. It is based on 5 principles: the provision of effective feedback to students; the active involvement of students in their own learning; adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment; recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are critical influences on learning; the need for students to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve. The purpose of an Assessment

for Learning (AFL) task is to provide feedback to both the teacher and learner regarding the learner's progress towards achieving the learning objective(s). This feedback is designed to improve teacher practice by assisting them to revise and develop further instruction.

Another assessment tool utilized by T4SSP includes two evidence based assessment instruments designed to provide educators with the data they require to make effective planning and design decisions. It was developed by KSI Research International Inc. and employs a learning bar as a measurement tool. The first is Tell Them From Me (TTFM), a survey evaluation system, which includes student, parent and teacher surveys. It is designed specifically to address the needs of schools by providing reliable data to support school improvement and planning for learning leaders and school administrators. It is designed to empower students by allowing them to have direct input into the improvement of the school. It also helps with student retention. The second is the Early Years Evaluation (EYE) which is an instrument for the direct assessment of children's developmental skills at ages 3 to 6. It consists of two complementary components: the EYE-Teacher Assessment (EYE-TA), a teacher rating scale, and the EYE-Direct Assessment (EYE-DA), an individually-administered measure. Results are provided using colour codes to represent development as: appropriate (green), experiencing some difficulty (yellow), and experiencing significant difficulty (red). It indicates children's development which guides school policy and practice, and helps teachers plan programs to meet each child's learning needs. It assesses children's skills as they prepare for and make the transition to school. Leading indicators can also help parents prepare their children for each successive stage of schooling.

T4SSP uses Fountas and Pinnell testing as part of the Guided Reading Program. It uses a grid to identify the grade level of individual student literacy. Guided reading is a teaching approach designed to help individual readers develop an effective system for processing a variety

of texts. Students are grouped for instruction with other students reading at a similar level. Schools are encouraged to collect data in the fall and again in the spring. Other assessment tools designed to assist literacy are Running Assessments, Running Records, K–2 Sight Words, Checkpoints, and the Basic Reading Inventory.

Numeracy Nets, an assessment tool provided by Pearson, is used by T4SSP to assess progress in mathematics. It is a classroom assessment and planning tool to provide a snapshot of student mathematics proficiency based on big idea "checkpoints". It is aligned to instruction and offers links to curriculum and resource support to advance student learning. It informs classroom practice by uncovering student behaviour and understandings of numeracy concepts and conventions.

T4SSP collects some AFL data but also relies on the Saskatchewan Ministry of Learning who provided annual data for each school in the past. Although the Ministry is planning some changes, T4SSP chooses to continue to follow the AFL data collection and analysis process because of the momentum they have achieved and their familiarity with AFL. T4SSP indicated the AFL research around cultural appropriateness applies to all the work they have done. However, the T4SSP plans to use the data for teacher capacity building as well as to track student learning.

The AFL process follows several principles which support cultural appropriateness (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.). This AFL document pointed out the curriculum principle which "emphasizes resource-based learning and adapting instructional programming to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students" (p. 1). Correspondingly, teacher's instructional practices must recognize that "the principles of inclusion and education equity

entitle all students a barrier-free learning environment where all benefit equally from appropriate instruction, materials and technology" (p. 2). In addition, assessment for learning strategies

> must be sensitive to student, family, classroom, school, and community variables. They must provide all students with every opportunity possible to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and attitudes…. [and with respect to opportunity to learn] It is important that students are seen as individuals with a variety of educational, cultural and social needs that must be addressed through adaptations and alternative approaches to assessment (p. 2).

In view of these principles, the T4SSP Program Director stated,

> They sought to increase the assessment literacy of teachers and parents at the same time so that they understand why schools test and what they do with the data. It is not about comparing students with each other or seeking bad teachers. There is a specific reason to collect data and we use it to build the quality of our instruction.

In short, the T4SSP used the AFL assessment data to design relevant professional development, build instructional strategies, and develop programs that meaningfully engage students and promote learning.

The T4SSP is now challenged to build capacity, and to increase student learning based on assessments. The Director of Education gave an example of relevant program design. Sometimes learning is impacted when rural schools close due to poor weather and some schools are isolated where infrastructure, resources and reliable internet are not available. The question was how to keep children learning at home in those circumstances. A recent Early Childhood Education Initiative involved Kindergarten. The T4SSP cultural advocate prepared a document for the

teacher and the parent based on the provincial curriculum. That document is designed to enable the parent to teach simultaneously with the teacher from home. The Director stated,

> This process was a *test for us* in program design. First, teachers assessed their students to determine what they know and what they don't know… and then [teachers and parents] re-teach [students] what they don't know …so [students] learn they can be the best…and that [teachers know that they] are at a level that is no longer deficit to a model, and the assessment data will prove that.

The T4SSP Director of Education also stated,

> There are residual effects of residential school such as lack of parent involvement. However, there is considerably more early years' parents' involvement…a push, a wave of very critical thinking parents. Parents want more assessment information before giving consent for testing. They ask questions about their children's learning. Parents state that if their child isn't learning at this school then they will move them to a different school.

The Director emphasized that parents no longer blindly deferred to the teacher. The challenge is to "make the best school… focused on kindergarten…and to press the strong parent cohort" to keep aware and involved with their child's education. The community (including families) has to strengthen their own capacity to support their children's education before any education initiative will fully succeed. T4SSP have focused on the K–2 cohort since they will form the new generation of students and parents who press the education system for improvement and results.

A key focus on Early Childhood Education has resulted in the development of an Early Learning Model. That process was guided by two assessments tools which were the Beginning Early And Developing Strong Program (B.E.A.D.S), and Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark

Assessment. In 2013, it was implemented for the first time at one school for 61 K–2 students. The first data collected revealed that the majority of students were struggling. Based on these assessments a number of new teaching strategies and practices were implemented.

B.E.A.D.S. combined with professional development for instruction and assessment strategies is one example where teachers, parents, and school leaders are making an impact on student learning. The assessment data produces a clear starting point for program planning. The data also provides markers for individual progress which makes it easier to make timely adjustments in planning, instruction and assessment. In addition, the data provides a snapshot of current student achievement for easier transition to another school.

Promising Practices to Address the Education Debt

A number of promising practices have been identified. First, the T4SSP leaders and visionaries built the T4SSP based on ethical space and research. The T4SSP Director stated, "We went back to the thinking that existed in our communities… [before colonization]". They built on local Aboriginal strengths and initiatives. Using this foundation they used research on effective teaching and developed programs, and professional development for instruction and assessment for all schools. These were further tailored for each school and for individual student needs.

Both lack of resources and capacity are a legacy of the *education debt*. Some schools are only now in catch-up mode in terms of student achievement. These latest developments give First Nations schools and communities the confidence and the means to tackle improved student achievement.

Second, in the four years the T4SSP has been operating teachers have developed their instructional expertise to a stage where they are capable of designing and implementing programs in Early Childhood Education based on research. Over time, the process should result in a more capable student cohort as they move through the education system. Teachers will need to develop teaching strategies to engage a more astute student cohort. The Education Debt legacy is the lower than provincial average academic assessments for First Nations students. The assessment results will rise over time with a sustained effort by educators and the resources which T4SSP currently provides.

Third, T4SSP planning depends on monitoring the success of each of the 12 schools. The schools have developed a pattern of data collection which is culturally relevant. They have also developed assessment literacy and capacity with their parents and teachers. The assessment process has become more user-friendly. Combined, these inform instructional decisions for school improvement planning.

Fourth, an effective practice within the T4SSP is the engagement of the family and the community. This factor is critical to student achievement. Many other studies have indicated lack of parental involvement leaves a big void in the lives of students, and is a legacy of the Education Debt. Within the T4SSP young families have recently engaged schools more concerning student learning. Families will need to continue to be encouraged to remain an active participant in their child's education.

Cowessess Community Education Centre

Background Information

Cowessess Community Education Centre (CCEC) is located on the Cowessess First Nation (CFN) in the Qu'Appelle Valley where the first school was built in 1883. Later, a residential school opened in 1898 and operated for about 100 years. Five generations of families were impacted by their experiences there. Until 1980 CCEC offered grades 1–8; then they began to offer up to grade 12, and over 200 students have graduated. Head Start has been a recent addition in the school but is managed and funded separately. A new 12 million dollar school opened in 2001 and currently there are about 180 students enrolled. The largest graduate class included 21 students in 2003.

The Catholic Church ceased direct management of the school in 1967 when Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) took over. The CFN chief and council took over direct local control in 1972. No schools existed on the nearby First Nations until the late 1980s and until then students from those communities attended CCEC. As each of the local First Nations opened their own school the CCEC student enrolment decreased. CFN has more school management experience than other local bands.

CFN has its own source revenues from Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) trust funds, land leases, and business operations. CFN education has benefited from these proceeds. CFN contributed $1,000,000 towards the capital cost of the new CCEC School. This was used to increase the size of the facility and provide more classroom space. In addition, an aging facility was renovated at a joint cost of $750,000 from CFN, the provincial government and the Painted Hand Casino. It was designed to house community-based post-secondary programming. The first

post-secondary program offered in September, 2008 was a Licensed Practical Nursing Program (LPN) which enrolled 15 students including students from the neighboring non-Aboriginal communities. The third cohort began in September, 2012. This program has been made possible through a partnership with Southeast Regional College. Other courses offered include Adult Basic Education and Culinary Arts. The computer lab can accommodate 15 students for LPN, ABE and distance education. Wireless internet is accessible within the community. It is anticipated that these investments by CFN will enhance education and training, improve employment opportunities, and result in higher earnings and income for members of CFN.

The CFN Community Plan (2009) identified *education* as an Action Area. The goal specifies "at formal educational institutions, learning opportunities will incorporate academics, day-to-day life skills, specialized training, as well as local cultural knowledge" (p. 86). It further states that "informal education will provide band members with opportunities for lifelong learning and skill development" (p. 86).

CCEC teaching staff consists of the principal, the vice-principal, 10 classroom teachers, and 2 resource teachers. A high school science teacher has recently been added and the physical education teacher has a kinesiology degree. All teaching staff salaries follow the provincial salary grid. The vice-principal offers 4–H annually based from her family ranch on a nearby First Nation. Another teacher is a fitness instructor and offers fitness programs which utilize the school's new fitness equipment. An educational psychologist, a speech and language pathologist, and a therapeutic psychologist are also contracted by CCEC. Support staff includes: 3 teacher assistants, a home/school liaison, an administrative assistant and 2 custodians.

Governance

The CFN council has eight elected councilors. The Education Committee is composed of two elected council members, one of whom is the chairperson, an Elder and four appointed community members. Both the council and the committee have one position designated for an off-reserve member. The council makes policy decisions on education matters and the Education Committee provides recommendations to council. Some members on the Education Committee are parents or grandparents. As part of the AANDC Student Success Program funding requirements, each First Nation community proposal was required to have community consultations. The CCEC Education Committee provided leadership during this consultation process and provided letters of support from community members to accompany the first CFN funding proposal.

Participation from both the council and education committee is good. The CCEC Chairperson is very involved with the school and is also the Chairperson at T4SSP. The CFN chief and former chiefs as well as councilors regularly attend the school for cultural events and other ceremonies. They are highly visible in the community and among the youth and it is well known the councilors' children and grandchildren attend CCEC.

CCEC has many partnerships which are critical to success. The school contracts the Treaty 4 Student Success Program (T4SSP) for Director of Education Services. The T4SSP also provides resources and support. The Yorkton Tribal Council provides teacher support in math, science and language arts. In 2011–2012 Child and Family Services stationed a full time social worker at the school to work with students and families.

The CCEC vice-principal stated, "CCEC successes are due [to] the partnerships with other entities on the reserve…education is not in isolation…we work with health, social services, and the economic entities for student work experiences." CFN Health provides a registered nurse, a dental technician, an addiction counselor, and a recreation coordinator. The CFN Housing and Infrastructure Department provides the salaries of the janitorial staff. CFN provides students from grades 7–12 with a monthly allowance of $20 of which a portion can be deducted if the student's attendance is poor. The local casino provides grant monies for specific activities and outings which enriches the learning experiences for the students. The lunch program is funded by CFN and through community fundraising events.

An authorized expenditure from Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) trust funds is to provide funds for education purposes. The TLE trustees accordingly granted $58,000 from Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) trust funds for the first computer classroom in 1996. Recommendations from a subsequent School Effectiveness Review resulted in a further TLE commitment of $67,000 for updating computers, flat screen monitors, audio and visual equipment; purchasing Smart Boards and laptops for all classrooms; and setting up an additional Mac lab in a separate classroom. It is an asset for student education that CCEC has good internet service. TLE funds also provide annual grants for other school activities such as school field trips.

The CCEC annual budget is about $1,000,000 and a balanced budget is a widely supported goal. A separate budget exists for special education projects and consistently has a deficit of more than $50,000. Unlike the provincial schools, all special education funding from AANDC is proposal driven and relies on student assessments.

Planning for Success

The CCEC teaching staff has many First Nations members who serve as role models for students and who understand the challenges faced by students and their families. The majority of the teachers are part of the first cohort of CFN persons who graduated from the First Nations University of Canada's Teacher Education Program. Classes were offered on the reserve in the early 1990s and upon graduation local First Nations teachers replaced most of the non-First Nations teachers at CCEC. Most teachers have 15 years' experience or more and are members of CFN or nearby First Nations communities. They have raised families locally, their own children attended CCEC, and many teachers' children graduated there. The current principal is non-First Nation and has been with the school about 20 years with over 10 years experience as the principal. He lives less than two kilometers from the school and was recently recognized as a good leader and honoured by the community in a special ceremony.

All professional staff members are involved in school improvement planning. A school review was conducted by the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit (SELU) in 2006 paid for by AANDC. Another school review was conducted in 2008 paid for by CFN and produced 42 recommendations. These reviews resulted in the development of a multi-year School Improvement Plan with well-developed goals and priorities. Since then CCEC has been committed to school improvement. The first School Improvement Plan was followed by successive plans in 2009, 2010, and 2011. Many of the targets set in the original 2008 plan have been achieved and the school is making progress on other targets.

The school follows the Saskatchewan Provincial Core Curriculum and Grade 12 students write provincial departmental exams. The resources and support from T4SSP and the Yorkton Tribal Council make achieving the school success goals more of a reality. Grades 10–12 offer a

full academic course load for students. These courses meet all of the Saskatchewan High School Diploma requirements. Compulsory subjects combined with optional course electives allow students to explore their interests with hopes and dreams of acquiring a trade upon graduation or going to university and acquiring a degree. The school strives to create rich learning experiences which include field experiences and culturally relevant projects.

CFN has a large cohort of early learners. The daycare nearby accommodates 25 toddlers and the Head Start Program currently includes 10 three year olds. The Pre–Kindergarten and Kindergarten class has 18 registered students. Of these, several have been assessed with high needs and one has permanent disabilities; and these needs will continue throughout their school years. Planning has focused on early learning strategies in numeracy, language arts and reading. One program, *Aski,* was recently initiated in Kindergarten as a pilot project in partnership with Saskatchewan Learning. The program utilizes story books, an iPad and a turtle puppet named Aski. Parents are an important part of the process. They have the option of providing home-based learning through access to a website.

The vice-principal is the leader for the Guided Reading Program. A special education teacher has a classroom dedicated to reading intervention. Together, they manage the reading program for grades 1 – 8. This forms part of the T4SSP strategy focused on literacy. Another special education teacher previously had a behavior management class for students until 2012. The Education Committee decided that this teacher would now be assigned specifically for school-wide math intervention. This forms part of the T4SSP focus on numeracy and the Mathletics Program is utilized.

A new initiative was started in grade one based on balanced literacy and Fountas and Pinnell assessments. It targeted struggling students with low literacy levels in sight words, reading, and writing. The T4SSP Director of Education managed the assessment process and provided direction. Six learning centers focused on individually selected reading skills were set up; one utilized the Smart Board. Struggling students were placed in pairs with students with a higher level of literacy skills. Within months all students showed a marked improvement with student performance increasing four reading levels in some cases. The teacher stated that resources are "teacher friendly and easier to use when the curriculum and lesson plans are embedded into the teaching resources."

Monitoring Success

The 2011 T4SSP plan was based on the following identified strengths at CCEC: smaller classroom sizes; available IT resources; ample school-wide space; new resources and materials for implementation of the curriculum in reading, math, science, and social studies; teacher assistants; support staff from the CFN Health Department; professional development for teachers relevant to individual teaching assignments and subject areas; school wide structure of support provided by staff involvement in committees and fundraising; and genuine partnerships that provide professional support.

In view of these, the 2011 CCEC plan included school improvement goals for Writing Achievement, Improved Writing Skills, Reading Fluency and Comprehension Achievement, Math Achievement, and Student Retention. The T4SSP provided assessment tools and support for school success planning and analysis. Teachers became more assessment literate. The CCEC vice-principal indicated in order to raise education levels for graduates, CCEC will continue to "monitor student achievement with data, data, and more data".

Building community capacity is crucial to school improvement. Both the chief and council, and the education committee are important agents for change. The chief and council provided direction to the Education Committee, and the committee spearheaded the community consultation process for the Student Success Planning. A former council member who was the Education Committee chairperson stated that all members of the committee "fanned out from house to house" to explain the student success initiatives in 2008. Once the community understood the purpose of the process the committee received signed letters of support from the majority of parents and community members. The CCEC vice-principal stated that they have a well-experienced, stable teaching staff because the chief and council "are not one of those who fire the whole staff….they trust us with their kids."

Another challenge is instructional leadership. The T4SSP Director of Education stated that First Nations school principals previously spent most of their time on administrative matters and little time was spent on instructional leadership. The CCEC vice-principal stated that as instructional leaders, administrators must "demonstrate teaching, and work with teachers in their classrooms to show them different instructional practices." This is so important because CCEC is "trying to raise the level of education with students so there is no learning deficit when they graduate."

Disparity in funding places extra pressures on staff to accommodate special needs students. Educational assistants (EA) are required to support the learning of special needs students. The CCEC vice-principal stated,

> Unlike the provincial system First Nations schools have to jump through loopholes to get funding for those students. When funding is received, it is not enough to hire a full time EA so they rotate classrooms. Teachers then have to accommodate learning for both

struggling and proficient students. Provincial schools do the same but they get a lot more support.

Gradually parental hope for education and employment opportunities for their children is growing on the CFN reserve. Capacity building has increased parents' confidence because it has shown marked successes in early learning. The grade one teacher stated that the school had an open house where each classroom teacher was required to explain to parents the programs and assessments utilized. The majority of grade one parents attended. The teacher explained the programs and assessment process. Parents were satisfied and the teacher indicated,

> They were able to see where their child was at; the teacher was able to see where the class was at; and others were able see the class results. Now the parents will be more supportive because they will know what goes on as their child moves up through the grades.

Promising Practices to Address the Education Debt

Improving early childhood education has been a strong focus at CCEC and the parents and staff demonstrate confidence with their program changes. The confidence is derived from a steady increase of resources, capacity building, and second level supports. There are cases where CFN children who lived off the reserve have returned either as foster children or to live with extended family. There are challenges with these students if their home lives have not been stable. The CCEC vice-principal stated that this leads to "big learning gaps with students who are cognitively capable but have not been physically in school enough to grasp the material." It is a challenge to know how to catch them up and it "does not happen overnight…but it can be done and we have done it before…but it takes a learning child and a willing family to support them."

CCEC Parent 3 stated that he was "impressed with options available ─ the sports program, the academic program, the technology, the cultural supports, and social supports."

Cultural affirmation is evident at CCEC. All the teachers at CCEC have close community connections; most are First Nations or are married to First Nations people. The CCEC vice-principal stated that they "have a very stable teaching community and they are one of our strengths." They understand the community and the families. CCEC Parent 2 stated that teachers "encouraged and respected my children and listened to their ideas." CCEC Parent 3 stated that in other communities where his child attended school, "teachers just out of university come in and they don't know the community dynamics, don't understand what is acceptable…and they don't engage the community or the students."

Monitoring success has been an important aspect of school improvement at CCEC. T4SSP has assisted CCEC to plan program changes based on data. The CCEC vice-principal stated "the key to our successes ─ we have knowledgeable people who help incorporate good programming." All teachers are becoming more familiar with the various assessments. The T4SSP Director of Education helped to design programs and provide professional development. Two months after the grade one classroom literacy learning centers were constructed the teacher noted there was improvement. The students were more confident after they experienced success. The teacher declared, "I know they will go to the next grade with good skills."

There are many partnerships that contribute to the CCEC programs beyond the T4SSP supports and AANDC funding. CCEC Parent 3 stated, "The fundraising capacity is [a] community strength and…the support goes back to the students." CFN source revenues provided funding for education projects that would otherwise be unfeasible. Finally, the community leaders and the members are willing contributors to school projects and initiatives.

Sakewew High School in North Battleford

    Background Information

Sakewew High School in North Battleford provides Grade 9–12 classes to approximately 225 students, with close to 99% being of First Nations/Métis ancestry. According to the school website, Sakewew staff includes: in-residence Elders, a Cultural Coordinator, a Nutrition Coordinator, an Addictions Counselor, a Family Therapist - Mental Health, a Community Liaison Worker, an Educational Liaison, a Student Services Coordinator, a RCMP Liaison, Public Health Nurses, a Daycare Director and Staff, Educational Assistants, Custodial Staff and Teaching Staff. Although it employs many aspects of the community school model, Sakewew is not eligible for designated community school funding.

Many of the students attending Sakewew come from home backgrounds where poverty, unemployment, addictions, poor living conditions, transience, abuse and gang membership, and interpersonal violence are prevalent. These all pose barriers to attendance and success, as do the fact that many of the students are young parents struggling to raise their own children. The principals affirmed,

> I would say of the graduating class, of 30 people, ten of them are men and twenty are women. I could be wrong but I would say 50% are parents and they have these little kids with them. That whole dynamic puts a lot of pressure [on students] and they do not finish. I was reading the Premier's message yesterday and he is going to track students that finish school in a timely manner, what he means is three years in the credit program. That does not happen. Lots of them finish but it's four and five [years] and they are so proud of that because they have their daughter or son with them.

Particularly helpful from student and staff perspective is the existence of a daycare operated by a separate board from the governance board. Among its other services, the daycare provides transportation for students and children to and from school every day.

The school was selected as a Lighthouse Program because of its unique governance and funding structure and a proven track record of affording academic success to First Nations and Métis students over a long period of time. The school's mission is *Experiencing Culture, Engaging Partnerships, Educating and Empowering youth.* Its vision is *Sakewew rising to success academically and culturally.* Staff members interviewed as part of this research envision Sakewew as a "school where safety, security, and performance are integrated into the total operation of the school. It is a place where students feel welcome and part of the school family. Sakewew is committed to accommodating all students with appropriate programming". On the school website staff stated that they "seek out innovative educational practices to best meet the needs of all types of learners and all learners are encouraged to reach the goals and expectations placed upon them by the staff and the province. The staff envisions an ongoing, consistent support system in place for all students" that addresses individual needs and also challenges individuals to aspire to success.

Governance

The governance structure at Sakewew, often referred to as a *Co-Governance* or *Tri-board*, is unique in Saskatchewan. Since 2002, Sakewew High School has been governed by the Battlefords First Nations Joint Board of Education made up a representative from Light of Christ Roman Catholic School Division, and from Living Sky Public School Division and two representatives from the Battlefords Tribal Council. This governance structure exemplifies a strong spirit of cooperation between North Battleford and the thirteen surrounding First Nations.

According to the current principal of the school,

> They [Board members] come together on a monthly basis and meet as a board with the Director of Education, so they do the hiring of the staff, they set the budget and generally set the direction, expectations and make sure the place is funded.

The governance system evolved over time; previously the Director of the Catholic system was also the Director of Sakewew. Currently Sakewew employs its own Director of Education.

Staff stressed the lack of political interference from First Nations or other provincial and federal agencies in the governance and operation of the school:

> What we wanted to do, what we wanted to accomplish right from the onset of this school is to remain a politically free school. Not worry, but understand what is going on with the rest of the province but keep within our own domain that is First Nations.

The Director added,

> Well, I think the board is pretty aware of the difference between governance and administration. They are more, I would say a more hands-on board than boards that I have...But at the same time, in a very respectful way. Not too much. When I say to them, 'I know the principal has looked after that,' that's all I need to say. But there is a lot of information that filters through to them because they are a small unit. That just comes with the nature. But I do have those chats… [about] what the role of the board is and I am quite prepared to help them with that but I don't say, 'Whoa, that's not your business'.

An additional unique aspect of the school's governance is that the Director's office is located on the urban reserve within the city of North Battleford. This serves to increase the

visibility of First Nations presence in the city and also offers possibilities of attracting more Aboriginal staff to the institution.

The school website outlines the academic program offered in the school. The grade 9─12 courses at Sakewew High school follow the provincial curriculum and students can earn 8 credits in a school year. The high school follows a quad system where each student takes only two classes each day for a quarter of the school year. Courses offered for credit include: Mathematics, English Language Arts, Native Studies, Science, Wellness, Physical Education, Cree, Biology, Chemistry, Food Studies, Graphic Arts, Life Transitions, Practical and Applied Arts, Career and Work Exploration and Culture Credit. Additional courses will be offered as required. The great advantage of the quad system is that students who experience instability in their home and personal lives and especially those who are transient can earn high school credits even if they are unable to attend classes for the full academic year. Students appreciated the flexibility of the quad system but claimed that they often experience boredom because they worked on a small number of subjects for what seemed to be a long time.

Planning for Success

At Sakewew High school, approximately 50% of funding comes from the province and 50% from AANDC. AANDC provides funding for federal students from reserves and the province for the First Nations and Métis students who live off reserve. In 2008, the Board established a flat rate with the province based on an estimated enrollment of 100 provincial students of $1.2 million or $12,000 per student. AANDC funds approximately on the basis of $14,000 per student per year. While the administration generally expressed some satisfaction with funding amounts the Director explained some of the challenges which stem from their anomalous position:

When we budget, [what] we budgeted for this starting fall. We generally get about 120 federal students. Excuse the terminology, that's on-reserve students and 100 provincial students. The AANDC gives us approximately $14,000 per student, per federal student. Then they are getting the 1.2 million dollars from the province so we have about a 3 million dollar budget. But what happened this year, and this is just an example, we have a 120 provincial students and 91 federal students so we decreased by 29 time $14,000. That causes us some stress.

Monitoring Success

Sakewew High School's strategy is to hire the best teachers, but also to prioritize the hiring of strong Aboriginal teaching staff in order to provide positive role models and motivate the students to aspire to success. One of the students shared that seeing Aboriginal people in positions of leadership in the school inspired him "that Aboriginal people can not only be successful but can also legitimately aspire to the top positions within organizations". According to the principal:

When we first hired staff here, our mandate was to hire the best staff available to teach our students and our second mandate was to hire the best First Nations prospects that were out there. In the end, we got the best teachers regardless of race and are hopeful to attract more First Nations [teachers] but they stay where their home is.

As a consequence Sakewew has very low teacher turnover, a factor which contributes to the school's positive climate and the success of students. According to the Director, "Here our budget is set and because of [teachers] being a part of STF and tenure and once they reach tenure we keep them. …. Currently 4 of 17 staff identify as Aboriginal".

Although not designated as a community school, Sakewew does provide a range of other services in the areas of health, social assistance and justice to students and their families:

> We have health working here in a very real way. In fact there are two employees in the school [from] Social Services. We have a number of people that are here full time that aren't paid by us but are paid by other agencies. If there was a student here who is [in] need of any kind of help in our school, there is somebody from those services who will be here and [they] will have access to, on a daily basis.

Cultural affirmation is very evident at Sakewew High School. While Sakewew students come from a wide diversity of multi-generational backgrounds including reserve and urban residence, staff members insist that First Nations culture plays a distinct role in the lives of the students who attend the school. The school's vision is to instill traditional values, knowledge and morals, as guided by the Elders-in-residence. Respect ─ for self, others, and the property of others ─ is a central theme in the vision. With cooperation from the home and through ongoing ceremonies and cultural activities, staff nurture students' respect for First Nations culture, in the hope that they may teach their children, creating a legacy that supports the circle of learning. These cultural activities include participating in sweat lodges, round dances, drumming groups, traditional dancing groups, feasts and powwows.

One way Sakewew High School supports their students is by offering a Culture Program through which students gain knowledge regarding First Nations history and a better understanding of First Nations culture. Through this program students are able to earn a credit for Culture 10, 20 or 30 after attending 100 hours of cultural activities such as round dances, powwows, health fairs, language festivals, Elder and youth gatherings, sweats, talking circles or

culture camps that are held in the school or in the community. Local Plains Cree Elders are consulted regarding the content offered in the Culture Program and both a male and female Elder are available to counsel students or to support teachers who offer the program. A strong emphasis is placed on the oral-tradition so a talking circle is used when Elders make their presentations to the students. Sometimes the Elders speak in their own language and an interpreter is utilized. During these presentations male and female students receive instruction in their gender role within the culture.

A second support for student success is offered through the Sakewew Substance Awareness and Empowerment for Youth Program (SSAEY). Members in this group of Sakewew Youth want to create change in their lives and in their community. This group fosters awareness of substance abuse by hosting special events for students. Members of this group incorporate Aboriginal culture and language as they advocate for change within their lives and within their community.

From the student perspective Sakewew offers a welcoming environment for Aboriginal students to study "with our own kind". Many students expressed that they had experienced racism and other forms of exclusion at previous schools but were made to feel welcome and valued by staff at Sakewew. They pointed to the breakfast and lunch programs, the daycare and transportation support, the caring and dedicated staff, the high level of academic support and the extensive cultural activities as major strengths of the school and as factors contributing to their own success. Many students shared that they had little or no family support and were responsible for getting themselves and other siblings to school every day. Many were optimistic about their prospects of future success and identified a wide range of career plans and post-secondary education. However, many also expressed concern that racism and discrimination constituted

real barriers to the realization of their dreams.

Promising Practices to Address the Education Debt

While many dimensions of Sakewew high school reflect promising practices for Aboriginal students currently employed nationally and internationally, the success of the school also stems from initiatives unique to Saskatchewan. The school's "Tri Board" governance model is an example of the shared governance approach underpinning authentic relationships which researchers in Canada, the U.S., Australia and New Zealand have identified as critical to the creation of postcolonial educational systems. It is also a practical manifestation of the "made in Saskatchewan" ethical space where Aboriginal and Canadian cultures come together on the basis of equality, acknowledging the best of each other's knowledge and work for the best outcomes for all. Factors contributing to success in Sakewew typical of promising practices from other jurisdictions include: culturally congruent curriculum and pedagogical approaches, a representative workforce, systematic data collection to plan for success, the integrated services model to provide for students' holistic needs, and multiple partnerships with external agencies to leverage resources.

Whitecap Dakota First Nation ─ Saskatoon Public School Division Partnership Agreement

Background Information

While all First Nations are unique, Whitecap Dakota First Nation (WDFN) has a very unique history. A small band located just 20 minutes from Saskatoon, the community is descended from the Dakota Oyate who claimed the area as traditional territory. The band came to its current location after the signing of Treaty Six in 1876 and consequently WDFN is a non-

treaty band with a land base much smaller than most other First Nations. Today, of a total population of 518 there are 247 living on reserve. Despite its non-Treaty status WDFN has been able to capitalize on its strategic location vis-à-vis Saskatoon, and, as home to the Dakota Dunes Casino and Dakota Dunes Golf Course, the community is currently experiencing significant economic development with employment opportunities exceeding the on-reserve population. This employment situation creates a climate where clear incentives exist for both parents and young people to value educational success as a stepping-stone to a range of employment opportunities. A critical part of that success is the educational partnership between Whitecap Dakota First Nation and the Saskatoon Public School Division which has been described as an "example of one of the most innovative and inclusive partnerships between a large urban school division and a First Nation in the country". (Saskatoon Public School Division, Website, News Release, 2011, May 6)

Governance

Whitecap Dakota First Nation has always had a school (now Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 6) on the reserve but never a high school. All the grade 7–9 students have attended school off reserve in various Saskatoon Public School Division (SPSD) schools. As with many other cross-cultural initiatives, the partnership between Whitecap Dakota First Nation and the Saskatoon Public School Division grew out of personal relationships between forward-looking individuals in positions of influence. Chief Darcy Bear of WDFN met George Rathwell as a teacher in his high school classroom in Saskatoon in the 1980s. When Bear became chief of WDFN and Rathwell became Director of SPSD that personal relationship became the basis for a formal partnership. The partnership initiative was spearheaded by the chief and council and not so much from parent concerns. It started as an informal partnership but was later replaced by a

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Memorandum of Understanding. The original partnership agreement signed in 2002 was not as broad in scope or developed to near the same extent as the current relationship. It dealt with attendance, resources, and Whitecap Dakota First Nation teachers' attendance at PD sessions with SPSD. It was also meant to ensure that Whitecap Dakota First Nation students could attend a SPSD school.

Based on the success of the WDFN-SPSD partnership a wider initiative bringing together other First Nations within the Saskatoon Tribal Council and the SPSD and Province of Saskatchewan evolved in the early 2000s.

> Following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Saskatoon Tribal Council and Saskatoon Public Schools in June 2003, the members acknowledged that the main purpose of the Partnership was to institute a strategic alliance to promote, strengthen and facilitate First Nations and Métis education in all of their schools and communities. The Memorandum of Understanding and Okicīyapi Partnership was renewed in June 2006 to include the Central Urban Métis Federation Incorporated as a new partner.

> During the course of the 2003–2004 school year the Partnership mapped a course of action for the next three years. Considerable time was spent identifying and validating numerous values that the partners hold in common. At the Education Council meeting in March, 2004 the following guiding principles or core values were approved:

> *Treaty*
> > We value learning consistent with the spirit and intent of the treaties.
> > We value Indigenous Knowledge as integral to learning.

Learning
> We value holistic teaching and learning environments that are spiritually, emotionally, academically and physically safe, secure and positive.

Life-long learning
> We value life-long learning opportunities.

Unity
> We value unity which comes from the spirit of equality and creates cooperation and loyalty to one another.

Communication
> We value communication which is open, honest, timely and effective.

Respect
> We value a culture of mutual respect which is supportive, positive and affirming.

Diversity
> We value cultural diversity, the rich array of participants in our partnership, and the unique contributions each person can make.

Collaboration
> We value cooperative and collaborative relationships based on trust, respect, pride, and responsibility as the means of maximizing learning experiences in our communities and schools.
>
> (Okicīyapi Partnership, 2010)

Highlights of this partnership to date include: creating positions for an Aboriginal Content & Perspectives Coordinator, an Aboriginal Employment Development Officer and a Cultural Resource Liaison; organizing seasonal sweats and other cultural ceremonies for SPSD and STC staff; organizing an Elders Forum; initiating the Nêhiyâwiwin Cree Language and Culture Program; and launching the Grade 4–8 Working in Harmony – A New Way Of Learning And Leading Teacher Resource Binder**.**

Initially the partnership focused on supporting the transition of WDFN students into SPSD elementary and high schools; but over two decades the relationship has broadened and deepened and has also become the catalyst for a larger umbrella agreement with other First Nations within the Saskatoon Tribal Council region. While the focus initially was on assisting *First* Nations students attending schools in the Saskatoon Tribal Council region, increasingly the agreement is geared to providing non-*First* Nation students in these schools with a greater understanding of *First* Nation history and culture.

Planning for Success

According to the Principal of WDFN school the goal of the agreement is to "ensure that …WDFN School provides a comparable range and quality of education to its students as if it was moved 25 miles to the new residential area of Stonebridge". Further the principal indicated from the perspective of SPSD the goal of the agreement is to ensure

> equitable outcomes for all learners within the division's schools and to create an education system that respects and affirms First Nation and Métis ways of knowing; along with the historical, contemporary, and future contributions of Aboriginal peoples; and providing culturally respective learning programs for the benefit of all students.

In October, 2010 the Governments of Canada and Saskatchewan and the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) endorsed a historic Memorandum of Understanding which formalized a commitment to enhance education outcomes for First Nation students. The goal of the agreement was to assist First Nations students attending schools in the Saskatoon Tribal Council region and provide non-First Nation students in these schools with a greater understanding of First Nation culture and people.

"Empowering our children with an education that not only transfers practical knowledge but also instills pride in culture and history is essential to our society," said Tribal Chief Thomas. "This agreement recognizes the need to work together as leaders and educators, both on and off reserve, to develop and refine the learning environments, tools and systems this promising group of young people needs to succeed."

The MOU recognizes the importance of partnerships between First Nation schools in the Saskatoon Tribal Council region and neighbouring provincial school divisions to enhance their capacity to meet the educational needs of First Nation students. To support this objective, partners are committing to:

- the development of joint education action plans;

- providing support for student transitions between grade levels and school systems;

- ongoing assessment of student learning and skills;

- enhanced data management and collection;

- engagement of families and communities to improve students' education outcomes;

    and

- shared professional development and curricular resources.

"The signing of this MOU marks an era of inter-jurisdictional co-operation focused on improving outcomes for First Nations students," said Minister Donna Harpauer (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010, October 14). "Today, the Government of Saskatchewan is signaling our commitment to work collaboratively with the Saskatoon Tribal Council First Nations to improve

First Nations student achievement, for the benefit of students, their communities and the province."

Today the MOU has now been replaced with an *Alliance* agreement. The Whitecap Dakota Elementary School principal stated that it is a "far superior [agreement] and is on the cutting edge". Prekindergarten – Grade 6 Whitecap Dakota First Nation students remain at Whitecap Dakota Elementary School. In the end, the agreement ensures that SPSD provides educational services to grade 7–12 Whitecap Dakota First Nation students. The grade 7 & 8 First Nation students go to Caswell School which is the feeder school for Bedford Road High School. Later, when students enter high school they are bused to Bedford Road High School. In this way, by aligning the feeder school and high school the focus helps to enhance successful student transitions.

Not all Whitecap Dakota First Nation students go to Caswell School since their parents may work in other parts of the city. Parents may take their children to school closer to their work place. Whitecap Dakota First Nation tries to promote students attending the partnership schools but parents can choose schools. In those cases, parents must drive children to those schools as no bus service is provided. This year there are Whitecap Dakota First Nation students in 21 different schools within Saskatoon and also Clavet School which is unique.

The on-reserve prekindergarten–grade 6 enrolment last year began with 38 students but peaked in January with 86 students. This year there were 86 students in September but enrollment now stands at 78. The loss of enrollment is due to transient families. The community is generally stable and attendance is good overall. Many students have perfect attendance every month. The main reason is the high rate of employment for their parents. The school provides busing even if students live across the street. In addition, the school is a good place to be as it

provides a safe, comfortable environment. The principal of the First Nations School stated that at first there were some issues but "more and more parents see the school as an educational institution, not a drop-off zone anymore".

The majority of Whitecap Dakota Elementary School staff is First Nation and all support staff is from the local community. The school has four Educational Assistants based on special education reports. There is a kindergarten class and four other classrooms. They have smaller classroom enrolments of about 17–18 students. There is a shortage of space so every year the smallest class gets the ATCO trailer.

Whitecap Dakota First Nation wants the best staff as teachers. They leave school hiring to an education committee composed of an Elder and band members. The principal attends and there is no political interference regarding who is hired. If the principal sees a potential political issue, he phones his First Nation supervisor to alert them in the same manner a principal would phone a superintendent in a provincial school division. Recently, Whitecap Dakota Elementary School hired four home room teachers and a resource teacher.

The partnership with SPSD will continue to evolve. Currently the Whitecap Dakota Elementary School (Prekindergarten to Grade 6) is a band-run school and SPSD has no say in Whitecap Dakota Elementary School governance. The principal is the first employee to be seconded by SPSD for three years. The principal reports to a SPSD superintendent and they bring SPSD knowledge, support, and staffing. The future Alliance agreement might have a board where three members are Whitecap Dakota First Nation and there is a representative from SPSD, possibly a superintendent. Eventually, Whitecap Dakota First Nation wants to have their school's professional staff to be SPSD employees who are members of the Saskatchewan

Teachers Federation (STF). Whitecap Dakota First Nation wants their school to have the same supports as an urban SPSD school. Then the students will have access to speech and language specialists, education psychologists, school counseling, and all the supports that are not presently provided by AANDC. Whitecap Dakota First Nation currently contracts those services. These new arrangements will ensure Whitecap Dakota First Nation students have an equal opportunity to have comparable education to any SPSD student. That is what the chief and council want ─ access to qualified staff with the expertise to best guide their children's education.

Whitecap Dakota First Nation has a Federal Transfer Agreement which covers the Prekindergarten –Grade 6 First Nations School. They get direct funding from AANDC according to the Nominal Role at the end of September. However, funding is limited to half time for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. Whitecap Dakota Elementary School offers full day pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and pays for the difference in costs from their own revenue sources.

Monitoring Success

Whitecap Dakota First Nation has an education partnership with the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC). STC works like a school division with the schools within their tribal council. They apply to the FNSSP for aggregate funding on behalf of the seven tribal council schools. They get 1.3 million for their FNSSP to hire some of their staff. It covers the academic coach who provides tutoring for high school students and the student transition worker who tracks students in the provincial system. STC also provides professional development, facilitates principal meetings with STC schools, and meets with the Education Advisory Committees. In addition, they provide some second level services and, if money is left over in April, the bands

can recoup for speech and language consultants. Whitecap Dakota First Nation currently contracts a retired SPSD person for this service.

Thus the partnership is funded from a variety of different sources including regular federal Nominal Roll, some provincial funding, and additional funds from AANDC's *First Nations Student Success Program*. It ensures that SPSD provides WDFN with professional development support for its staff, a principal seconded from SPSD, and a number of paraprofessional staff to provide liaison between WDFN parents and SPSD schools. Critical to this is the position of a Student Advisory Counselor who is responsible for facilitating and monitoring transitions, as well as assisting in determining the success of any new directions in student transitions and support. Additional responsibilities include: acting as the liaison person on behalf of the school division with the First Nation; enhancing existing partnerships between the school division and the community; communicating and working with the students and families of the Whitecap Dakota First Nation who attend the Whitecap Dakota Elementary School and Saskatoon Public Schools; and providing student tracking information to the school division and the Whitecap Dakota First Nation.

There have been benefits to the students. The principal made an arrangement with SPSD to do the Early Years Evaluation (EYE) which is an assessment of developmental skills for 3–6 year olds. This testing is currently being done in provincial schools but not all tribal council schools. Whitecap Dakota Elementary School teachers will get more data on their students than many other tribal council schools. Some of assessment will be analyzed by SPSD. Whitecap Dakota Elementary School also administers the Canadian Achievement Tests (CATs), and the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) which can be used to guide reading instruction. The main benefits are that SPSD assists with assessment and data analysis. A resource teacher attends data

team meetings with SPSD teachers to determine what the data indicates about the students' learning. SPSD has offered to be the leaders in this aspect.

The Whitecap Dakota Elementary School kindergarten teacher formed a partnership with Pleasant Hill Elementary School in SPSD. The grades 4–6 classroom teachers have partnerships with Caswell School in SPSD. These partnerships provide connections and relationships to ensure smooth and efficient transitions to Caswell School. Whitecap Dakota Elementary School students will eventually transfer from a school with 80 students to a school with 380. SPSD students also make reciprocal visits to Whitecap Dakota Elementary School. They learn First Nations perspective of history such as the War of 1812. These initiatives help to break down barriers. The initial push for these activities was that Whitecap Dakota First Nation wanted their students to make a good transition.

Other benefits include having access to resources within a provincial school division. SPSD provides supports for human resources and staffing. SPSD can also recommend or refer a qualified teacher suitable for Whitecap Dakota Elementary School.

There is a student transition worker, a shared/joint position with SPSD, who is employed by Whitecap Dakota First Nation. The transition worker tracks high school students and keeps in contact with SPSD high school students. Based on communication with the transition worker the Whitecap Dakota Elementary School principal will follow up with the student and the family. SPSD student services and teachers have attended Whitecap Dakota Elementary School's three-way parent conferences and there has been a good response from parents. This demonstrates a coordinated effort to do what can be done to ensure Whitecap Dakota First Nation students are successful.

There are cultural supports within SPSD. Caswell School is a multicultural learning community. SPSD has cultural advisors on staff and involve Elders for special occasions plus Whitecap Dakota First Nation brings their own Elder to joint events. The principal of Whitecap Dakota Elementary School expressed an opinion that SPSD is a leader in First Nations and Métis education. There are inclusive new text books available such as the science texts, and the treaty kits in K–Grade 6 classrooms. Whitecap Dakota Elementary School teachers and SPSD personnel find teachers include more First Nations content when it is embedded in the resources. The new resources also help teachers who are not familiar with the cultural teachings.

The support for labor force attachment is good. Even the students in the lower grades look at careers options. The fire chief visited those students. The Whitecap Dakota First Nation has their own public works department and all students have summer jobs. However, students will not be hired year round unless they have grade 12 and this motivates students to finish grade 12. The transition worker and the academic coach take students to career fairs to help them explore future career options.

The principal of Whitecap Dakota Elementary School expressed concern regarding the adequacy of on-reserve school funding. In his opinion, Whitecap Dakota Elementary School received approximately $4,400 less per full-time student from AANDC than SPSD had at its disposal for students in its schools. In addition, he suggested that FNSSP monies are aggregate funding which means all the STC schools get the same services as the other schools. If one school has different education priorities, they cannot utilize tribal council FNSSP monies to service those needs.

Furthermore, there are challenges related to staffing. One issue is how to align federally funded First Nations education to a provincially funded school division given the major differences in funding. For example, the provincial special education funding is block funding and the school division can choose how it uses this money to support special needs students. But Whitecap Dakota Elementary School cannot as the AANDC funding is less flexible in terms of how it can be used. The principal stated that in a provincial school, if a student requires supports such as a one-on-one Educational Assistant, they would get it "no ifs, ands, or buts." Under the federal system if there is a level one or two special needs student, "then (AANDC tells you) this is the money you get" regardless of whether it is adequate or comparable to the provincial funding for that same [level of] special needs child. He continued, "The federal government is still in the 1980s in terms of [adequate funding]."

Another challenge is to align school calendars as SPSD will need to honor First Nations holidays. Currently, Whitecap Dakota Elementary School teachers are not covered under the STF. New teachers must make a decision regarding whether to work at the First Nations School without that benefit. Another issue is the Dakota language teacher who offers half an hour of language instruction to each class daily. Will the teachers' time be recognized for teacher preparation time? However, despite these smaller issues there would be a seamless transition if Whitecap Dakota Elementary School's professional staff members become employees of the SPSD.

There continue to be ongoing negotiations at the political level to finalize the Alliance agreement. How much will it cost? AANDC requires Whitecap Dakota First Nation along with the STC partnership, through the federal Education Partnership Program, to draft a proposal that represents what this alliance agreement would look like. Whitecap Dakota First Nation's position

is that the funding for Whitecap Dakota Elementary School should be comparable to any SPSD school; that is, the costs will include the same level of supports.

Data is important and also what is going to be done with that data to improve student learning. It doesn't matter where the school is located. The same process to improve learning must be utilized by all educators in First Nations schools or provincial schools. With the new partnerships with STC and others, there is a full time literacy teacher for early learning. Students who are behind get intense support. Last year, some students jumped four or five levels in their reading. If students want to improve they can but they have to be provided with adequate supports. If students are two grade levels below in reading, then teaching must be intense along with early intervention.

Currently at the Whitecap Dakota Elementary School (PreK–6) there are 12 groups of students (reading at different reading levels) with two or three students to a reading group. The goal is that by the end of the school year about a quarter of the students will be out of the program and able to read at grade level. The rest should demonstrate individual growth. The goal is to gradually decrease the number of reading groups to eight groups and eventually to one or two groups. Then when the Whitecap Dakota First Nation students go to the SPSD schools they won't feel like they are behind.

Promising Practices to Address the Education Debt

The educational partnership between Whitecap Dakota First Nation and the Saskatoon Public School Division is seen as an example of an innovative and inclusive partnership between a large urban school division and a First Nation. Born out of respectful relationships between individuals, the partnership illustrates ethical space animated in the educational realm. Although

funding discrepancies still exist, respectful relationships have succeeded in mobilizing significant resources both to optimize student learning at WDFN and to ensure the smoothest possible transition for those students into SPSD schools. Evidence-driven policy, strategic use of data to monitor success, a commitment to culturally congruent curriculum to foster student engagement, strategic hiring and deployment of effective teachers, and authentic engagement with parents and community are other features contributing to the success of this Lighthouse Program.

Punnichy Community High School Career Transition Program

Background Information

Punnichy Community High School (PCHS) is a Grade 9–12 provincial school within the Horizon School Division (HZSD). The school serves the communities of Punnichy, Daystar First Nation (DFN), George Gordon First Nation (GGFN), and Muskowekwan First Nation (MFN) who do not operate their own high schools. DFN has no school on-reserve and their K–8 students attend Punnichy Elementary School. There are four First Nations board members out of a total of 11 elected representatives on the HZSD board. The bands have a formal partnership with Touchwood Agency Tribal Council (TATC).

The total number of students in the division is approximately 10,000 students. Of these, PCHS has 200 students and Punnichy Elementary has 220 students. Currently, about 7% of HZSD students are within the First Nations communities of DFN, GGFN and MFN. The George Gordon Education Center located on the GGFN is operated by HZSD. The school offers Head Start, pre-K, and full-time Kindergarten. First Nations schools are not eligible for provincial pre-K funding therefore, HZSD funds the pre-K program in the GGFN School. All teaching staff

members are hired by HZSD and are STF members. About 50% of the teachers are First Nations. The First Nation provides the facility and the maintenance. HZSD also operates the George Gordon Outreach Program which is an individualized high school program for young adults at risk who attend this program on a flexible schedule.

PCHS is a designated *Community School*. This high school has a staff component of: 17 full time equivalent teachers, 1 full time personal counselor, 1 career counselor/life skills teacher, a .5 band liaison plus support staff, and 2 outreach workers. They also employ a nutrition coordinator who is responsible for the Nutrition Program which serves hot lunches and snacks.

A major educational component at PCSH is the Punnichy Career Transition Program. Discussions began in 2005 when the First Nations questioned division officials regarding the significant number of their students who dropped out by grade 12. The First Nations questioned HZSD regarding student retention. They asked PCHS what action would be taken to ensure First Nations' student success. There was a desire to form a formal partnership to tackle the issue which over time became a HZSD priority. The Career Transition Program is separate from the PCHS. The village of Punnichy owns a curling rink located next to the school. The HZSD rents this facility for classroom space and has made capital improvements. This is of mutual benefit to both parties.

The Career Transition Program offers Construction Worker Preparation. This includes First Aid/CPR 'C', WHMIS, Transportation of Dangerous Goods, and Fall Protection Training as well as a portion of the SIIT course, Construction Worker Preparation Program. Other classes include Healthy Lifestyles and Hairdressing Preparation. A class from the *Canadian Academy of Travel and Tourism* (CATT) was sponsored. The Director stated this class gave students "lots of

skills in dealing with the public and going out into the workforce" when students completed a volunteer placement. Another class is the Framing Course/Level 1 Carpentry accredited through SIAST but offered at PCHS. Up to 800 hours are credited toward the student's apprenticeship in carpentry.

Governance

Planning and progress continued through two subsequent provincial school division amalgamations. A partnership agreement was signed in 2008 and the Ministry of Education provided three year funding to operationalize the agreement. The partners are the Ministry of Education; GGFN, MFN, and DFN; Horizon School Division (HZSD); Village of Punnichy; Advanced Education, Employment & Immigration (AEEI); Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC); Carlton Trail Regional College (CTRC); Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT); Can-Sask Career & Employment Services; Touchwood Agency Tribal Council (TATC); Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council; Service Canada; Last Mountain Co-operative; and BHP Billiton.

One HZSD administrator stated, "Partnerships and the commitment of those partners has been the key. Without a prescribed direction or endpoint, people knew generally what they wanted to accomplish but the willingness to make it work was what made it succeed."

Another administrator stated,

It is not enough to just get a signed agreement. That interaction and engagement needs to continue because if it doesn't it falls off the rails. They have to start over again building trust. It means you have to get back to the table where you can cooperate and collaborate on what needs to be done. The relationship is continually worked on and nurtured.

There is a mix of funding including public and private sources for the Career Transition Program. It is funded by a separate agreement from the high school tuition agreement. The partners in the separate funding agreement include the three First Nations, AANDC and HZSD. The 2012–2013 funding total is $290,000 of which AANDC provides almost 90%; and the balance comes from HZSD, Career and Employment Services, and the sale of finished product. Over the years, provincial grants provided a total of $245,000. BHP Billiton contributed $25,000 in years 1 and 2 for the purchase of new tools and in the third year they donated a 15 passenger van to transport students to work placements. The Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council (SETC) delivered a culinary course. HZSD funded $11,000 for this and SETC hired a chef who assists the students.

Planning for Success

It became apparent that HZSD needed to do things differently to retain First Nations students. It was essential students be kept interested and engaged; and to do this learning needed to be more hands-on and practical. A survey of the communities (Kelln, 2008) was commissioned by HZSD. Student, staff, community member, and parent questionnaires were developed and administered. These surveys gathered information and data focused on the retention of students and strengthening career development outcomes. The process involved an analysis of the supports, services, and issues related to career education and career planning.

Responses were merged and analyzed. General observations were that student dreams and desires will not become a reality unless changes occur as their diverse learning needs were not being addressed. The teachers were frustrated and unsure of how to affect change to improve student outcomes. First Nations parents lacked a meaningful voice.

Recommendations for change were established. PCHS Career Transition Program staff promoted the Community School philosophy to engage family and community members. Based on the recommended changes the Career Transition Program staff shared responsibility with First Nations communities for the learning and developmental needs of their students. A Career Work Program was planned and implemented. The high school Practical and Applied Arts (PAA) courses incorporated Transition-to-Work Dimensions (Saskatchewan Learning, n.d.) integrated within the curricula. The PAA courses centered on six occupational clusters: agriculture, care and hospitality, communication, design, resources, and transportation. HZSD implemented PAA changes in curricula offered in connecting elementary schools as well.

The PAA Program offered Transitions 20/30 as a mandatory course to all students in the Career Transition Program. This change gave PCHS a way to offer transitional supports to all students and to ensure a higher level of student success. The course assists students to plan their lives and career development, and to effectively manage life changes.

Following the recommendations of Kelln (2008) HZSD and PCHS identified and implemented strategies to increase the success rate of students in the Driver Training Education Program. In addition, HZSD and PCHS hired Family Liaison Workers for each First Nation to develop and implement strategies to increase attendance. Family Liaison Workers also encourage students who have previously dropped out to return in hopes the Career Transition Program will engage them more successfully.

There is an interview process for prospective students wishing to be admitted to the PCHS Career Transition Program. Applicants also need a recommendation from either the PCHS career counselor or principal. Students at risk are identified who are not academically strong but

like hands-on learning. The administrators hope to identify students early when bad habits are not yet established. The principal stated,

> If we can get them into the Transition Program we can keep them in school. They may not graduate, or go on to post-secondary. But we give them a higher level of education and work or life skills which is important.

Generally, the Career Transition Program outcomes hoped for were: to improve student retention and graduation rates; and to enable students to gain experience and skills that will help them to be successful in the next step of their life which is either employment, or further education or training.

Monitoring Success

The student completion rate was 76% in the first work preparation course offered in 2009. The outcomes to date for 97 graduates of the Career Transition Program include: 39% remaining in high school or post-secondary education; 31% employed; 15% parenting; 10% at home; the balance are unknown or other.

A First Nation student who moves to the city loses a huge amount of support. The PCHS principal remains concerned about student transitions after high school. She observed grade 12 graduates return to home communities after unsuccessful adjustment to urban life. She stated, "Living in the city is really different than living on the reserve". The HZSD Superintendent of Schools who remains equally concerned added, "Some parents are fearful of their children moving to the city especially for the young boys." These students are exposed to a lot of pressure and different lifestyles. Further, these urban encounters make it seem that it is "safer on the reserve, because their families are there."

Other barriers are transportation, lifestyle, drugs and alcohol. An administrator indicated BHP Billiton tells students "you cannot be safe under the influence."

Student attendance is an issue for various reasons but a major one is lack of childcare. A daycare is in the planning stage. It will be available to both students and school staff of PCHS, Punnichy Elementary school and those persons involved in programs held locally by Carlton Trail Regional College. In addition, outreach workers have been hired on each reserve to advocate for the students and check on absenteeism.

In 2012, the partners for the Career Transition Program met at graduation to observe the students impacted. The partners want to see further growth in the program. The question is: how can the program move forward "without taking on a big chunk too fast?" At this point however, the program cannot offer more training and program options without a higher student enrollment.

Success is not always grade 12 graduation. Board members emphasized, "A successful person is someone who can take care of themselves. They put food on the table, take care of their own family, and they do not need to be dependent on somebody else." Measuring success needs to take this definition into consideration. It will affect what data is collected and how the analysis is conducted. For example: some of the adult students drop out in the spring to find jobs to provide for their families. That situation can be considered success; a board member stated, "We have given them the skills that are required to successfully get a job." These students have made the choice to feed their families with long-term employment income. Another example is: some students do not finish within three years. The principal maintained,

Even if it takes 4 years what matters is A – that they finished; B – we sent them off into the real world where they can provide for their families, and if they chose to go to post-secondary, we have them ready to go.

One of the students who finished the Canadian Academy of Travel and Tourism (CATT) course participated in the mock restaurant class. When the school cook was hurt and unable to work, this student became the school cook for six weeks. She later enrolled in the SIAST cooking program in Saskatoon. She had a great resume and excellent skills as PCHS prepared her well. However, her transition to urban life did not go well. She declared, "Living in the city is really different than living on the reserve."

Upon completion of the courses students have all the tickets required for a worksite. A teacher pointed out,

A student completed a program and immediately got a job in Regina starting at $17.00 an hour. He was ahead of the workers who had been on the job for a year or two because they don't learn on the job all of the fundamental things we teach them here.

Students in the Career Transition Program built full size double garages which will be sold to the Four Directions Treatment Center. When asked what they wanted to do when they graduate, responses included: construction, mining, attending SIAST, finishing carpentry, and joining the military.

Promising Practices to Address the Education Debt

Students in the PCHS Career Transition Program develop increased self-esteem through hands-on learning. These students need to develop the skills to support their transition to the next stage of life (either entry to employment or to further education) while they are still attending

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high school. The principal noticed adult students are more likely to drop out in the spring before courses end. She stated, "They take the opportunity to get a job, make some money and provide for their families".

The Career Transition Program has been successful in engaging and retaining students who formerly dropped out. The testimonial from an adult student included,

> I dropped out of school in Grade 9 and ended up with legal troubles. I became aware of the program and went back to school so I could get into it. The program kept me in school. Now every week-end I can't wait for Monday.

Assoon, Bedel, Norse and Bedel (2012) reported the number of employed graduates has increased from 17 to 30. Therefore, it is important to continue tracking over the long term.

Strong authentic partnerships including federal, provincial and local governments; industry; education; and training institutions have contributed to the success of the PCHS Career Transition Program. Funding came from provincial grants, AANDC and industry. The First Nations have relinquished direct control of their children's education, their own federal funding for schools, and rely on the provincial system. However, both the elected leadership and the community provided guidance for important changes to the system. The Director commented, "They know that by being part of a provincial system they get the best of both worlds…they get funded the same as provincial schools, yet directly participate in school governance."

Regina Trades and Skills Centre

Background Information

The Regina Trades and Skills Centre (RTSC) is a short term trades and skills training facility located on Albert Street in north central Regina. Their location strengthens this post-secondary program as it is accessible and central to both a large industrial district and a large residential district of working class families. RTSC has a three year awareness and marketing strategy. They own a large electronic sign located on their property, and 50% of their clients are referred by word of mouth. RTSC buys radio ads, have their own website, and are on Facebook.

RTSC's primary objective is to provide students with necessary trades and skills to find full time employment. All students are admitted to RTSC on merit and there are no quota systems for male, female, First Nations, non-First Nations or immigrants. Demographically, 33% of graduates of RTSC are First Nations, 25% are females, and 26% are immigrants. The target age is 17–30 but older applicants are admitted if better suited for a particular program.

The RTSC Industry Advisory Committee meets in October to identify the industry labour demands for the following January to June. The courses sponsored are offered a couple months ahead of the hiring pattern, and courses are designed to meet the trades and skills demands in Regina and surrounding areas. For example, recently the committee identified the need for fourteen courses. Taking into consideration internal capacity to offer courses, RTSC selected six. Courses offered at this time were residential and commercial construction courses, cooking, entry level administration and customer relations, and high school courses.

Each course runs between 8 and 12 weeks. Potential employers for student work placements are identified before the start of each course. The last two weeks students are placed

with these employers and 95% of the hiring occurs in this final stage. Students pay no tuition for the courses and are paid $9.50 hourly for a 30 hours week for the entire length of the course including the practicum.

The knowledge or skills required for admission depends on the course. Some courses require a grade twelve equivalent while for other courses grade 10 is sufficient. In some cases students are admitted on merit and job-related experience. Another factor for admission is the service provider such as SIAST who provide instructors and curricula, and who may have minimum requirements. Courses aim to provide 30% classroom instruction and 70% work-related learning.

RTSC holds an open house several weeks in advance of the course. Students have only one chance to enter RTSC programs and cannot return to take a second course. For example, students cannot take plumbing, be successful, and return a year later to take electrical training.

Potential students must demonstrate motivation to complete the program. RTSC tries to match acceptance with those students who have the best chance of completion and employment; currently the success rate is 85%. There are a number of reasons that the remaining 15% do not finish the course or fail to become employed. The Director stated some students are "course jumpers; students who take course after course but never intend to work." Some agencies require clients to take a training course as a condition for continue benefits. Once complete those persons may go back to the agency to continue to receive benefits. Some parents force their grown children to take a course instead of staying at home unemployed. At times, only part of the class finished because some students dropped out or were fired. Some courses had empty spaces that were not initially filled because applicants were not prepared to finish and become employed.

These incidents disappoint RTSC since other potentially successful applicants were denied the same chance. Therefore considerable attention is given to vetting applicants to ensure the best prospects of success.

Governance

RTSC is currently registered as a non-profit organization with partners who formed a board of directors and have charitable status. The process to establish the Regina Trades and Skills Centre (RTSC) began as a steering committee with twelve partner organizations in 2009. Currently, partners are: Saskatchewan Learning; Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration (AEEI); Ministry of the Economy; Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission (ATCC); Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council; Saskatchewan Construction Association; City of Regina; File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council; Regina and District Chamber of Commerce; Regina Catholic Schools; Regina Public Schools; Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT); Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST); Dumont Technical Institute (DTI); North Central Community Association (NCCA); and Regina Habitat for Humanity,

Improvements are currently proposed for the management structure. RTSC wants to include more industry representatives. The Director stated, "They provide a different perspective for planning than public bodies." In particular, industry provides good direction related to labour trades requirements.

The RTSC operates a small but efficient administration of four full-time staff. RTSC contracts up to 16 people when courses are sponsored. They typically offer 14–18 courses a year but during recession they offer eight. The Director stated, "A very strong and effective board of directors is crucial." Students stated, "Our instructor is awesome and gets along with everybody

in the classroom. He started when he was 16 and has many years experience. He also has his Bachelor of Education and is really well organized."

The RTSC has other partnerships with SIIT and DTI who meet to discuss their respective roles. Both have stated their Aboriginal students feel comfortable with the services at RTSC. The objective is to complement each other and not duplicate work. RTSC plans to renew a similar arrangement with the First Nations Employment Centre. Representatives from First Nations bands have approached RTSC to offer training for their students. Students would go through the same selection process and RTSC would assist in identifying potential students. In these cases, the First Nations would provide daily busing to the RTSC.

The RTSC has forged local partnerships. Since 2009, they have built nine houses for Habitat for Humanity through the high school program. RTSC revenue monies sponsored this initiative without government involvement. RTSC built the Transition to Trades Program two storage sheds. The North Central Community Association (NCCA) helped to identify homeowners who required roof or exterior siding work on their houses. RTSC located local suppliers who provided materials at a discount. The RTSC students provided free labour so the only cost to the homeowner was materials.

The RTSC is funded by Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration (AEEI) for programs and operations through an annual funding arrangement. RTSC owns the strip mall in which they are located. Two thirds of the building's extra space is leased for own source revenue. The Director stated, "The money for the purchase originally came from the provincial government, and we are somewhat unique in that we also self-generate funds through the leasing of retail space." These revenues provide 32% of their total budget.

The provincial government contributed start-up funds. After purchasing the strip mall, RTSC had enough funds left to purchase a second building located several blocks south of the first location. The larger facility was renovated to include additional programs and opened January, 2013. Workshops increased from three to five; it also includes a computer room and office space. The two properties are expected to appreciate in value. If RTSC ceases operations, the properties revert to the government who will recoup their initial investment.

Ownership of the properties makes the organization more stable since RTSC is not 100% reliant on public funds. This allows for longer term plans with flexibility and options to enhance programs. As an example, the board decided to offer three high school programs and they do not receive public funds to support these programs.

Planning for Success

The process for admissions begins with an application; an open house; and an interview. RTSC utilizes multiple strategies to provide supports to students accepted into the program. Expectations in RTSC courses are the same as at a work site. The RTSC is managed like a business and students are fired for poor attendance. The goal is 90–95% attendance and students are warned if their attendance drops below the acceptable standard. Students punch a time clock ─ For one minute late they are deducted 15 minutes pay; and for 15 minutes they are deducted 30 minutes. Students are fired if they miss two days without a valid reason. The Director indicated,

> Most employers' questions to RTSC about the students' ability to become good employees are: Do they show up on time? Are they there until the end of the day? How about the day after? How about the day after their first pay check?

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The first week of course work consists of safety training, and students also complete the Test of Essential Workplace Skills (TOWES). In the latter case, students are tested in three areas: literacy, reading and comprehension, and numeracy. Other tests are designed to assess skills necessary for success in individual courses.

There is a need to assist individuals to make big adjustments in their personal lives. The board of directors considered whether the RTSC is the organization to do that. The central question is what is their niche? The RTSC focuses on being a short term training institution, and those persons immediately capable and ready for trades and skills courses. Other organizations provide life skills and work preparation approaches such as the Transitions to Trades and the Work Prep Centre. RTSC relies on those organizations rather than providing duplicate services.

The RTSC provides preparation for workplace dynamics such as conflict resolution. Trainees are assisted with resumes and the interview process. RTSC provides program coordinators for individual and group counseling. RTSC staff help students balance their private lives, work lives, and school lives and to separate negative aspects from the positives.

RTSC training often leads to higher education and the RTSC has established a feeder system to SIAST. All courses are accredited by the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission (ATCC). Apprenticeship involves 1540 hours of hands-on training annually and six weeks of academic work at SIAST. At RTSC students receive credit for between 180 and 320 hours towards their first year apprenticeship. At SIAST the Bruce Pearce Scholarship is for a selected RTSC trainee who enters an apprenticeship. This approach meets two RTSC objectives: students become employed and become career journey people.

Monitoring Success

Assessments are held throughout the course. Students are tested on skills and hands-on experience, and there is a final exam to ensure students have developed and met all of the skills criteria. Students commented they find tasks "very challenging…everyone compares with others and wants to do better… the copper project sequence was tough." After course completion, student certificates specify the number of hours recognized towards their first year apprenticeship.

Some companies refer potential employees to RTSC for training as RTSC provides the skill set and safety training companies require. Trainees are instilled with basic workplace ethics such as responsibility and accountability. The company commits to the work experience portion of the course, and the trainee follows the same admission process. RTSC's reputation with employers depends on the quality of people they train so they establish high standards. RTSC follows up with trainees who have difficulty with responsibility and accountability such as absenteeism.

A range of barriers and challenges are faced by RTSC students. Those struggles include single parenting, aging, no high school completion, little or no work experience, and lack of essential skills. Other students struggle with work ethic and attendance. The RTSC director stated, "If employees show up for work the job related skills can be taught on the job site, but if not, employers do not want them." That is because it costs money, and impacts work crew schedules and safety. Absenteeism prevents students from becoming the good employees which industry needs.

The RTSC is a fairly recently established program that already includes success stories. The Perseverance Award is given to students who best exemplify the attributes of perseverance. The first recipient was a single mother who wanted a better life for her two young children. She entered the painting course and finished top in her class; was hired in practicum; within three months had her own crew; now she is part of management. The second recipient was a young man referred by a friend because he was unemployed and lacked direction in his life. Now he works in camp at the potash mine; has limited living expenses; and is saving to buy his own house. Other success stories include a 36 year old First Nation woman with six children who applied to the Culinary Arts course because she wanted a better life for herself and her family. She was admitted even though the primary target age is 17–30. The Director stated that another First Nation student in her 40s "never thought anyone would give a 40 year old Aboriginal woman a chance." She took the painting course and is still painting three years later and doing well.

RTSC is providing students with skills and hope for their future employment. Students maintained,

> In the trades we make enough to support a family…with a little bit of extra money for vacations, savings, and good benefits; my ideal job would be to work in a safe environment on projects where I can be creative from start to end; the training provides confidence we can build a future.

Promising Practices to Address the Education Debt

Innovation is evident in the governance model at RTSC, especially the presence on the Board of directors from industry who are intimately and strategically aware of the skills currently

required in the job market. They contribute expert planning and critical resources to make training immediately relevant, maximizing the prospects of clients securing the employment they desire. Sustainable funding is another critical asset enjoyed by RTSC. In particular, ownership of their property allows RTSC to operate on a combination of public funding and lease revenue. This stable and predictable funding base further allows RTSC to offer funding to students and students identify this as critical to their success. A student stated, "We get minimum wage and the students' time investment is priceless."

Appropriate programming is also a feature of RTSC's success. The courses are short and highly focused and RTSC do not admit students to take a course if the individual is not employable, or if no one is hiring in that area. In this way RTSC's planning cycle is very effective. A heterogeneous peer cohort was also identified by our research as an asset in this context. The RTSC student population is a mix of First Nations and non-First Nations, male and female and non-immigrant and immigrant. This diverse learning environment prepares students to form relationships on worksites with trades people from other cultures. An immigrant student stated, "We all get along and help each other on tough projects."

It should also be noted that many of RTSC's strategies would likely have not met with the level of success they have enjoyed, was it not for a booming local economy. The high demand for skilled labour in the area opened new opportunities for Aboriginal workers and the training and partnerships RTSC forged with employers prepared students for immediate work. The director asserted, "Our bottom line is to get them jobs. One employer required 14 workers. RTSC provided eight." While gaining valuable work experience students contributed to the community by making improvements to local homes. The Director emphasized, "It is important for the board to give back to the community, and we try to make a difference."

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Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program

Background Information

In 1976 a group of Métis and Non-Status Indian citizens identified the education and employment levels of Métis and Non-Status Indian people of Saskatchewan were at inequitable levels. Concern was raised, along with a desire expressed to possess an institution to provide culturally relevant education for the Métis and Non-Status Indian people and the generations to follow. Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research (GDI) was incorporated in 1980 as a non-profit corporation through funding from the Government of Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) was created in 1980 to address the chronic shortage of Aboriginal, specifically Métis, teachers in the province's education system, particularly in larger urban centres.

GDI was developed as a result of an identified need by members of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MN–S) to have an official representation of the Métis people. A growing population of First Nations and Métis people was identified along with the priority to provide teacher training programming. Members of the Métis public were invited to comprise the board of governors. These governors determined the programs needed and worked on the partnerships necessary to allow the programs to evolve. The Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MN-S) mandates Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) with the role of educational and cultural services distributor to the Saskatchewan Métis people. GDI is the only entirely Métis owned and controlled education institution of its kind in Canada.

Since 1980 the institute's mission has always been to promote the renewal and development of First Nations and Métis culture while meeting the needs of future generations through supporting and providing training for First Nations and Métis students.

The Institute is designated as the official education arm of the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (MN-S). GDI offers a variety of accredited educational, vocational and skills training opportunities for the province's Métis in partnership with the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, the province's various regional colleges, and Service Canada. (Gabriel Dumont Institute, n.d. a, Overview of GDI)

Additional partnerships with employers who can provide on-the-job learning experiences for students such as: SaskEnergy, SaskTel, Cameco and the Saskatoon Health Region have also been developed.

Governance

Gabriel Dumont Institute (n.d. a) briefly outlined the history of their educational institution. In 1993 an Affiliation Agreement was signed between the University of Saskatchewan and GDI to establish the Gabriel Dumont College. Two years later a Métis Teacher Associate Certificate Program was developed through this partnership and in 1996, the Gabriel Dumont College began to offer Arts and Science classes. In 2001, the gradual expansion of programs led to the purchase of a central administration building located in Saskatoon and in 2003 the establishment of training centres in Regina and Saskatoon. In 2003 the Gabriel Dumont Institute also launched the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture. Finally, in 2006 Gabriel Dumont Training and Employment (GDIT&E) was established to improve educational and employment outcomes to Métis students across the province.

GDI offers education through two primary sources. The Dumont Technical Institute (DTI) provides basic education and skills training. The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) provides university training for students to become teachers.

Three centres were identified as critical locations to the success of the program: Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert. Each centre offers a fully accredited four year Bachelor of Education Program in cooperation with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration, the University of Regina, and the University of Saskatchewan. Each of these centres is designed to meet the educational needs of Métis students as well as address the strong need for trained and qualified Métis educators. The SUNTEP program offers a solid foundation for its students providing Native Studies and cross-cultural education with an emphasis on Métis and First Nations history and culture in addition to the theories and skills of teaching. SUNTEP students experience fieldwork in urban schools working closely with teachers and students.

The primary goals of SUNTEP are:

- To ensure that people of Métis ancestry are trained as educators to be representative in the teaching workforce in the province of Saskatchewan.

- To ensure that SUNTEP graduates are educated to be sensitive to the individual educational needs of students, particularly those students of Métis and First Nation ancestry.

Planning for Success

Each SUNTEP centre is unique and provides its students with a quality education, focusing on different cultural aspects. SUNTEP Prince Albert specializes in drama and has its own theatre troupe, SUNTEP Saskatoon emphasizes Métis history, and SUNTEP Regina excels at traditional Métis dancing. The Prince Albert centre, due to a large First Nations enrollment, weaves Métis and First Nations culture into its programming. Other Aboriginal educational institutions in Canada have emulated SUNTEP's successful example of personal empowerment. SUNTEP remains, however, the only Aboriginal

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Teacher Education Program (TEP) with a specifically Métis focus. Many of its graduates have become employed in a variety of fields other than teaching, including administration, consulting, curriculum development and Métis governance. (Préfontaine, 2007b)

Since its inception, SUNTEP has graduated 35–45 students per year with a Bachelor of Education degree. To qualify for the program, the candidates are required to complete the application by May 1st and submit three letters of reference and a handwritten statement declaring reasons for applying to the program. Entrance requirements for SUNTEP are regular university entrance requirements and standard grade average expectations or adult special admission requirements.

Applicants are interviewed by a screening committee. Successful applicants should demonstrate:

- A commitment to the program and a strong desire to work toward becoming an effective teacher;

- A desire to work with children and adults in educational settings;

- The ability and willingness to work full-time in a teacher training program and continue the program to its completion;

- Experience working with Métis and First Nations children as a teacher associate or previous involvement in education (e.g. as a member of an education committee, a coach, or parent-teacher group) or relevant work experience; and

- Interest in learning about Aboriginal cultures and working with and for Métis and First Nations peoples. (Gabriel Dumont Institute, n.d. b).

Qualified students of Métis ancestry have the University tuition fees covered. Living expenses are subsidized through the Canada and Saskatchewan Student Loan Programs while attending university. Tuition ranges from $4,875 to $6,153 with 38 scholarships available to accepted students. Many of the SUNTEP students interviewed indicated that "without this financial support [they] would not have been able to access post-secondary education".

The University of Saskatchewan offers SUNTEP in Prince Albert and Saskatoon for Métis and Non-Status Aboriginal students. The University of Regina offers SUNTEP in Regina. SUNTEP is built on the foundation of the teaching theories and skills for elementary, middle years or secondary level education as well as Native Studies and cross-cultural education with an emphasis on Métis and First Nations History.

Prince Albert SUNTEP is direct entry and students have opportunities for field experience in urban centers in both traditional and holistic approaches incorporating Aboriginal culture throughout the training. Field experience begins the first year of the program which includes various formats ranging from one week school visits to three week teaching periods. The internship is sixteen weeks in the final year of the program allowing for classroom and school activity involvement under the mentorship of both an experienced teacher and a college supervisor.

These experiences allow the student to integrate theory and practical knowledge. SUNTEP Prince Albert teacher candidates experience a varied and holistic experience which prepares them for the challenges and excitement of rewarding teacher opportunities. Similarly, a former SUNTEP Saskatoon student expressed a belief that SUNTEP had helped her to develop a sense of herself as a teacher by providing school experiences, cultural knowledge and a supportive community.

Monitoring Success

The Prince Albert Daily Herald, October 5, 2012, announced that GDI in partnership with the University of Regina will offer a two-and-a-half year community-based Master's Program to graduates of a four-year Bachelor of Education degree with an academic average of 70 percent or higher and a minimum of two years work experience in the education field. The program will begin in July, 2013.

The concept was introduced one year ago and approximately 60 B.Ed. graduates (half were former SUNTEP graduates) have expressed interest prior to formal advertising. The program is expected to accommodate 20–25 students. Classes will be conducted through in-class delivery (Di Pietro, 2012, October 5).

The directive of GDI is to design, develop and deliver education and cultural programs to the Saskatchewan Métis people. GDI offers the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) and Dumont Technical Institute (DMI) offers technical and vocational training. As outlined by Gabriel Dumont Institute (n.d. a) GDI is independent and maintains a Métis identity while being affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Regina and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). There is a network of learning centers across Saskatchewan, partnering with regional colleges and school divisions, servicing the Métis population needs in areas such as La Loche, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Lloydminster, Cumberland House, North Battleford, and other areas where interests may be supported.

GDI and the SUNTEP Program delivered in Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert is guided by the policy and program decisions made by of the Board of Governors. Programs and activities

are focused on the needs of the Métis people. The GDI Board of Governors is responsible to oversee the policies and operations of:

- GDI operations which include finance, administration, library services, curriculum development, publishing and research

- DTI technical and vocational programs

- SUNTEP: Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert

- Gabriel Dumont College: Arts and Science Program: and

- Other university programming in association with the University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan

The GDI Board of Governors includes twelve representatives from the twelve regions of the MN-S and the Minister of Education for the MN-S serves as the Board of Governors' Chairperson.

Since 1980, SUNTEP has been successful in producing nearly 1000 graduates with a Bachelor of Education Degree. Graduates of the SUNTEP Program have gained a positive reputation as teachers and role models in various school divisions within the province of Saskatchewan and Western Canada as a result of their extensive classroom experience and knowledge of the issues facing students.

Howe (2011) recommended investing in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan because of its benefits not only to Aboriginal people but to all residents of the province. He calculated, "Bridging the Aboriginal education gap in Saskatchewan would increase the present value of lifetime earnings for our population by $16.2 billion" (p. 32). Aside from individual monetary benefits, he also pointed to the individual non-monetary benefits such as improved health, longevity, greater job satisfaction and enhanced job

benefits. Howe asserted, "Add individual nonmonetary benefits and the yield increases to $64.8 billion" (p. 34).

Howe (2011) also emphasized the multiple indirect benefits to Saskatchewan society from equitable Aboriginal school outcomes. These include: fewer criminal activities, reduced need for welfare and social assistance and government assistance, lower levels of unemployment, and decreased health care needs. Increased education results in increased economic growth; reduced teen childbearing, child abuse and neglect; and improved civic mindedness. After taking into consideration these indirect benefits to our Saskatchewan society Howe pointed out, "The total social benefit of bridging the Aboriginal education gap in Saskatchewan measured in 2011 dollars is $90.0 billion" (p. 35). In the introduction to Howe's book, Lafleur placed these benefits in context when he concluded, "The economic benefit of closing the Aboriginal education gap in Saskatchewan amounts to 20% more than all sales of potash in the history of Saskatchewan" (p.1)

According to Howe (2011) the economic benefit of the 975 SUNTEP graduates to Saskatchewan's economy amounts to $4.7 billion dollars (p. 37). There is also enhanced value due to the impact of Aboriginal teachers who provide positive role models and cultural sensitivity for the students. Howe declared, "Benefits that result when SUNTEP graduates affect the educational attainment of Aboriginal students including monetary and individual nonmonetary benefits as well as external social benefits," range from a low estimate of $3.4 billion to a high estimate of $17.3 billion (p. 38).

Promising Practices to Address the Education Debt

An examination of SUNTEP identified a number of promising practices to improve Aboriginal educational outcomes and foster greater employment. Some of these practices mirror

initiatives in the post-secondary realm from other jurisdictions identified in our literature review, while others seem to be unique to this Saskatchewan Métis context. The governance model employed at GDI appears to be particularly effective and to underpin much of that organization's success. As with the approach employed at Sturgeon Lake First Nation there is a strict separation between governance and administration. As the Director of SUNTEP stated,

> The board of GDI concerns itself with governance and policy and they trust that the professionals they hire will administer the program effectively and that the instructors they hire are the best people to ensure the success of the students.

SUNTEP's empathetic staff members provide a welter of supports to assist Métis students, many of whom come from marginalized backgrounds, to successfully make the transition to university life. A critical aspect of this support system is the Cultural Program offered by Métis Elders and community-building field trips to Métis historic sites. Funding assistance with student tuition is also critical to student success in SUNTEP. Authentic partnerships with both provincial universities and with a variety of provincial, Métis and First Nation schools contribute to the educational success of SUNTEP students and the exceptionally high rates of employment of these students in the Saskatchewan K–12 school system.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that fundamental commonalities can be identified in the institutions and programs that are currently achieving the best results in ensuring equitable educational achievement and employment for Aboriginal peoples. The Lighthouse Programs in this study each included some of the elements of ethical space, governance, planning for success, monitoring success and local innovation.

Although programming and curriculum varied considerably among the Lighthouse Programs all demonstrated a deep respect for Aboriginal cultures and privileged Indigenous peoples' worldviews, social structures, and pedagogy as a valuable foundation upon which to construct new meanings or knowledge alongside Western traditions and ways of knowing. Although not all were explicitly modeled on Ermine's conceptualization of ethical space, they all evidenced within their governance a commitment to cooperate for a common purpose, to recognize common values, to engage in open and honest communication, to forge new ideas and secure adequate funding as a means of working towards a shared future based on reciprocity, respect and equality.

Global educational research stresses the criticality of leadership in effecting change, and the Lighthouse Programs examined here demonstrate the importance of good governance and leadership in implementing change at the local level. While the governance models examined here vary significantly, they also share some common characteristics. These include the courage to embrace potentially threatening change, the capacity to see the best in those who differ from them, the willingness to invest resources where they are most needed and the confidence, once staffing decisions have been made, to allow professional educators and administrators to do the jobs they are trained to do without constant interference or micro-managing. Another striking feature of effective leadership and governance demonstrated in these programs was a commitment to ensuring that all education dollars are spent on education, rather than other, potentially more politically attractive or expedient options.

Based on the examples of these Lighthouse Programs effective leadership and governance also have the capacity to build authentic partnerships in order to maximize prospects of success for clients. A very wide range of partnerships were in evidence here ─ with students,

parents, communities, tribal councils, provincial school divisions, employers, non-profit organizations and multinational corporations ─ but all shared a commitment to authenticity and a recognition that external assistance and support is critical to the success of all educational endeavors.

The Lighthouse Programs in Saskatchewan acknowledged the need to address the reality of heterogeneity. While varying again in their approaches when planning for success, all the Lighthouse Programs embraced a holistic view of students consistent with Aboriginal philosophy. Recognizing that learners and clients were human beings with spiritual, physical and emotional needs, in addition to intellectual capacities, successful programs developed a range of supports to ensure that all the needs of their students were met to the greatest possible extent. Most importantly, virtually all programs recognized and emphasized the importance of providing additional supports during student transitional periods. This "integrated services" approach additionally recognizes early childhood education and pre-natal education as a vital first step towards successful lifelong learning and fulfilling employment.

The success of these Lighthouse Programs demonstrates the importance of strategic planning informed by effective data collection to monitor success, defined from both an Aboriginal and a Western perspective. In each of these cases appropriate data collection and analysis helped to identify whether efforts to address barriers and challenges were successful. Effective assessments helped to inform future changes, provide encouragement, celebrate successes and highlight promising practices, and foster hope for the future.

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction to this section, the uniqueness and diversity of Aboriginal groups and circumstances in Saskatchewan militate against any simple application of

global solutions or *one size fits all approaches* to local circumstances. Efforts to address the education debt and improve outcomes for Aboriginal students are unlikely to be successful unless this diversity is acknowledged and accommodated and programs are tailored to best meet local circumstances and realities. The Lighthouse Programs examined here exemplify this diversity and also demonstrate an impressive capacity among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals and communities across Saskatchewan to devise effective and visionary responses to their own local circumstances and challenges. This local innovation is a key element in building successful education programs and fostering hope for the future. It is a testament to the resilience of Aboriginal communities that hope is still very much alive in multiple local contexts across the province of Saskatchewan.

Each Lighthouse program must continue to evolve to face new challenges in future years. A cycle of continuous improvement is imperative in order to successfully address the *education debt* and ensure equitable outcomes for First Nations and Métis students. It is essential that each program continue to nurture and maintain ethical space, provide strong governance to support current goals, plan for success and monitor progress. Embedded in the process is ongoing consultation with the community in order to use local innovation to ensure success.

SECTION THREE: First Nations and Métis Student and Parent Perspectives on

Current Educational Issues

This section presents, analyses, and synthesizes data collected during on-site personal interviews and focus groups with twelve Directors of Education, ten teachers, one hundred and twenty-five students and fifteen parents. The researchers visited educational settings and institutions from the southeastern corner to the northwestern corner of Saskatchewan and engaged with rural, urban, and northern First Nation and Métis contexts. The research sites were identified by Elders, First Nations and Métis leaders, educators, Ministry officials, researchers and others.   These included: First Nation controlled and Provincial K–12 schools, Adult Education and Training Centers, two Teacher Education Programs, a First Nation School Division, and two Provincial Correctional Centers. Additionally, data was collected from over fifty documents identified by participants as important in understanding local community and program contexts. Local administrators assisted the research team to identify and meet with interviewees.

In developing the data collection instruments, engaging with participants in collecting the data, and in the subsequent analysis and synthesis of that data, researchers were guided by the principles of appreciative inquiry. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) defined appreciative inquiry as:

> the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organization, and the world around them. It involves systemic discovery of what gives life to an organization or community when it is most effective and most capable in economic, ecological and human terms (p. 7).

In analyzing this data researchers were further guided by insights derived from Sections One and Two of this report. Consequently the synthesis that follows echoes many of the themes identified in these earlier sections and, hopefully, helps to clarify and elaborate the model and the "promising practices" presented in those sections. Although rarely articulated in these precise terms, participants spoke eloquently of the historical *education debt* and its malign, pervasive and continued implications for Aboriginal peoples and educators in Saskatchewan today. Participants were also mindful of the ongoing impact of that *education debt* on the many, frequently well-intentioned non-Aboriginal educators and administrators currently serving in contexts with large Aboriginal student populations.

In stark contrast to those sentiments, many participants expressed considerable hope and optimism for the future and stressed that from their perspectives educational developments were generally moving in a positive direction. Many also confided that they were hopeful that their children were growing up at a time of unprecedented opportunity and were confident that if those opportunities could be seized Aboriginal people could legitimately aspire to enjoying the same standard of living and quality of life as currently enjoyed by the non-Aboriginal majority. Again, although rarely articulated in that exact phrase, participants provided multiple examples from multiple perspectives of the concept of *ethical space* as a prerequisite for addressing the inter-generational consequences and manifestations of that *education debt*, leading to improved educational outcomes and employment opportunities for Aboriginal peoples. In defining what that ethical space might look like once actualized on a daily basis in Aboriginal educational contexts, participants spoke of the criticality of strategic *planning for success*. In the minds of participants, much of this planning required developing the supports necessary to assist students through difficult transitions within the educational cycle and ultimately in making the transition

from school to employment. Finally, participants repeatedly fore-grounded local contexts as the most appropriate frame for determining, implementing and evaluating innovations to animate the *ethical space,* leading to the broader desired improvements for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples province-wide.

Education Debt

Despite the adoption of an appreciative inquiry lens during data collection, many participants articulated a deep sense of grievance regarding unjust historical and contemporary policies and circumstances contributing to the Aboriginal education debt. Parents, students and Aboriginal education leaders were adamant regarding the malign effects of colonial policies, especially residential schools and the Indian Act, in contributing to current education inequities, economic marginalization and social challenges. A Muskowekan First Nation student volunteered,

> I spent my early years in residence. My parents were never around. That is why some parents won't come in the door. They are afraid. They think they are not educated enough to talk to teachers. That is the wrong way of looking at it but it's deeply ingrained among our people that they are not good enough. And it's not surprising if you tell people for five or six or seven generations that they are not good enough that they will eventually come to believe that.

A grandparent from Keeseekosse First Nation described his experiences in the following terms:

Many years ago, when I reached grade 9 I got sent out from my community. [I was] totally lost in a white school. Ukrainians didn't understand. First day on the bus [I] got into a big fight. They put me in the front seat and that whole year I sat in the front seat of the bus, every day and pretty much every day was a fight. Needless to say I didn't do well in that school, quit pretty quickly and didn't want anything to do with school or White people after that.

In addition to expressing their own opinions on this painful legacy many participants pointed to a significant body of scholarship produced by members of their communities over time which documented these developments and validated community responses and current assessments (Adams, 1975; Ahenakew, 1973; Ahenakew, 1989; Brass, 1987; Campbell, 1973; Cardinal, 1977; Kennedy, 1972; Lerat, 2005; Sluman and Goodwill, 1982; & Tyman, 1989).

As a result of this, participants expressed a generalized sense of deprivation, a belief that many current difficulties stem from historical injustices and also a sense that some of these injustices continue. Here, specifically, participants pointed to perceptions of significant underfunding for Aboriginal education, especially on reserve or in Aboriginal-controlled institutions. A Muskowekan First Nation parent stated, "They used to have a youth group, but again its funds. Because of how the bands are funded it's hard to find funds designated just [for] children or youth. We are never given enough."

In addition, many participants, especially young people, pointed to pervasive and systemic racism as a barrier to education or employment success. A Red Pheasant First Nation student stated, "In the city I got called a savage." Another Red Pheasant student added, "In the town store I got called a 'f'en native.' "

Many participants expressed negative views of the Department of Indian Affairs (now AANDC) which administers the First Nations K–12 programs and acts under powers given by the Indian Act, combined with the general powers of the Federal Crown to expend monies conferred by appropriations statutes. Some participants felt that AANDC's stake in these developments is not the future of First Nations education but national fiscal priorities of which First Nations' funding is subordinate. Although provincial education standards are applicable to First Nations schools by Section 88 of the Indian Act, participants felt there is no mechanism to ensure federal funding is adequate to achieve those standards. As well, participants felt First Nations education funding seemingly is not contingent on Section 25 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Section 35 of the Canada Act, 1982. Furthermore, Provincial Human Rights provisions do not apply on First Nations and are therefore ineffective to ensure First Nations children on the reserves have the same standard of education as those First Nations children in nearby provincial schools. The principal at Whitecap Dakota First Nation School was appalled by the stark disparity in funding for "special needs students in schools only 15 minutes apart." Ultimately many participants felt that the reason for the consistently lower education standards for First Nations students on reserves is that they are "Indians (according to the Indian Act) who live on reserves, are governed under a federal statute, and that the constitutional protections available to other Canadians have been set aside".

Participants also expressed a concern that historically AANDC have off-loaded many of their responsibilities for First Nations to provincial authorities which has resulted in mistrust in the relationships. In total, AANDC can be viewed as a reluctant, parsimonious and suspect partner who contributes little to the partnership other than funding. This can be illustrated by using experiences of Whitecap Dakota First Nation and Cowessess First Nation people. The

Whitecap Dakota Elementary School principal declared, "The federal government funding guidelines for special needs students are still in the 1980s." He commented that provincial schools provide adequate special needs funding but the CCEC vice-principal stated that on reserve administrators "have to jump through loopholes" for special education funding which in the end is inadequate to hire a full-time educational assistant. In the minds of many participants, "off-loading and underfunding is the legacy of AANDC involvement in First Nation education". In attempting to explain this, some participants blamed the busy lifestyles of working parents while others stated that older parents and grandparents are less inclined to be involved with the school. Participants pointed to the residential school syndrome resulting in a negative view of schools which still exists in the minds of the majority of survivors. During the time of residential schools, parents were excluded from their child's education and upbringing. In those days, parents brought their children to the residence and left them for an extended period. In a sad way, that view of schools prevents residential school survivors from feeling genuinely welcome. They send their kids to school and leave them; just as it was done to them. Respondents were unanimous in asserting that significantly greater parental involvement was critical to improving educational and employment opportunities for Aboriginal peoples.

Hope and Optimism

Despite a profound sense of historical grievance and lingering suspicions regarding non-Aboriginal society and institutions, most participants saw current education trends in a positive light. At all sites both students and parents expressed a strong desire for equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students in terms of education attainment and employment attainment. All

participants saw education as a key to future success both in terms of formal education and wellbeing and a great many participants expressed confidence that greater opportunities were currently available to Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan than at any time since the creation of the province. As an RTSC student stated, "I live outside the city in a small town about ten minutes [away]. It is [an] up and coming [community] and there will be a lot of opportunities for employment out there. It's a great little town". Another RTSC student added, "I live within a half an hour walking distance of RTSC. Employment opportunities in the field we are studying are abundant. Skilled tradesmen work a lot. Saskatchewan is full of opportunities. I am very optimistic". A third RTSC student had the following to say:

> I travel back and forth from my nearby First Nation. I see a lot of people that are jobless on reservations. I see a bunch of people struggling. I think; how can our people be helped? How could they be improved? That is [perhaps] to provide workshops for people to come and learn a basic trade or skill, or any type of job listing out there in the work force. Also, it helps peoples better themselves for the future. Good training courses that can provide people to help their families; to help other people around them; and teach the younger children of today to become better people when they grow up and are older.

When asked to describe her ideal job a student from Red Pheasant First Nation stated,

> An ideal job would provide me with the income to be able to provide my family with a life and have more than just to pay bills. I want to have savings and vacations. An ideal job would be a safe work environment where I can work on projects and be creative on projects from start to end. Not a monotonous job but something interesting with benefits including dental benefits.

Many participants acknowledged that location, especially proximity of post-secondary educational institutions and career opportunities, bodes well for student success. In this sense, a factor that may be a large barrier is the location of some First Nations. Students who live in more isolated or remote areas have far less knowledge and experience of the outside world and their view of post-secondary or employment options is often limited in scope to career options offered within their communities such as the band office or the school. Location also impacts the development of partnerships with outside entities which brings valuable resources and knowledge. Students see more positive career options when located closer to resource activity such as potash and uranium mining, or near an urban center. Transitions into post-secondary or the labour force are much more likely to meet with success when students have opportunities to benefit from these outside connections.

However, it has become apparent that success does not necessarily look the same for all students. It has been suggested by some parents and students that schools offer basic life-skills training combined with trades and skills training in high school. First, this training is valuable for all students who take it and second not all students want to take post-secondary education. Third, other students do not finish grade 12 within the three year period. Some students leave for a year or so, and others do not return. If life-skills and trades training were offered at an earlier grade, then if students should leave before graduation and not return, then the school would have, at least, provided the minimum of education and training in order to enable students to succeed.

Ethical Space

One of the most important factors underlying the general sense of optimism expressed by many participants is a perception that relationships within *mainstream* institutions and governance structures are undergoing profound and positive transformation. That transformation is best encapsulated in Ermine's conception of ethical space, or, as it was expressed by a First Nations principal: "a shift towards mutual cultural acceptance and respect". While concern exists within some First Nations regarding partnerships with the Saskatchewan provincial government because it is not seen as a treaty partner, the provincial government and many school divisions have been willing partners with those First Nations who have approached them. The partnerships with the provincial authorities began with each party affirming the alternate worldview. The First Nations accepted the provincial school authorities and their Western worldview including models for structures and pedagogy. The provincial authorities conversely did the same by validating the First Nations' concerns. They then acted on those concerns with investment and concrete commitment to change; implemented and managed change. The T4SSP Director of Education was seconded from a provincial school division and provides professional expertise and teacher training. Although a non-First Nations person, the Director provided the guidance to identify Eurocentric materials utilized in First Nations schools, and "directed the research and writing, and talked to communities about making their own materials." That is an example of respect and validation of First Nations worldviews and utilizing local knowledge to produce new knowledge.

Because *investments in education today will decrease social costs tomorrow* the provincial government is becoming a stable partner which provides funding, resources and professional staff to assist with capacity building. According to the HZSD Director, the First

Nations "get the best of both worlds." A visible investment in First Nations education that has made a big difference has been the new curriculum, materials and texts. First Nations worldviews are embedded in these to a greater extent than ever before and as a student from Whitecap Dakota First Nation declared,

> When I go to school and read the texts, especially the Social Studies text, I hear about my community's contribution to building Saskatchewan and Canada and even some of my own family members and ancestors are mentioned in those texts. That is pretty cool and it makes me very proud. I also see that the White kids look at us different because now they know that if [it] wasn't for the Dakota and other First Nations maybe Canada would not exist.

Many participants pointed to new governance arrangements as evidence of the shift towards ethical space and commended school division personnel for a new willingness to share power in the management of schools. A parent from Gordon's First Nation expressed the following opinion:

> In the old days they did not want us in their [provincial] schools and Indian Affairs didn't want us in the residential schools past grade 3 because they were too cheap to foot the bill. But now our young people are seen as an asset by Horizon and they have set aside seats on their board for representatives from our community. So we now have an equal say in the running of the schools that our kids attend and our culture is respected and celebrated in the school and the principal and director and board chair visits our community to celebrate our young people graduating and it is like night and day from

when I was growing up. It is a good thing and we are very thankful that things are going

so much better for our kids.

Planning for Success

Industry has been a valuable funding and planning partner in the creation of this ethical

space. They increasingly understand that the local Aboriginal peoples are a valuable commodity

both now and in the future as elements of a stable and skilled workforce. Industry is willing to

invest in the development of a skilled labour force. As a partner, the First Nations are a

beneficiary of those natural resources both with the immediate investments in education, and

having access to long-term employment with local industry. The PCHS principal stated, "Their

partnership with industry is unique." PCHS invited a mining company to attend a school career

fair. The principal stated, "Two First Nations gentlemen from Yellowknife were flown in to hang

out with students for four hours; that was the definition of amazing."

In a multitude of different ways participants identified the importance of strategic

planning in improving educational outcomes and employment rates for Aboriginal peoples. In

identifying the key elements of planning, participants noted the importance of integrating

Aboriginal languages and culture into curriculum and stressed the importance of having well

qualified Aboriginal people at all levels within educational institutions. According to a

Keeseekoose parent:

Back then, I think we didn't have the resources we have today and even the technology.

The way we could teach our students with the computers, the smart board, we never had

that back in the day. All we had was a chalk board [laughs]. Back then we didn't see any

teachers from the community so I believe it wasn't as caring as it is today. It is more caring today because people from your community care more for your own people.

A teacher from Cowessess First Nation described the contribution of an Elder to their Head Start program:

[The class has a Moshum who visits the Head Start Program everyday]. He comes and talks to the kids and he does art work with them. We get him to come in and do art. He's also an artist. He comes in here and I think it's really good for the little ones. They all call him "Moshum". He's the janitor. He went to residential school here. It's good that the kids have that Moshum figure. Some of them don't have Moshums.

A parent from Cowessess First Nation added:

He's positive. He's very traditional. He comes in once in a while when the children are here and will just stand at the door and the kids will say "Hi Moshum" and go shake his hand [laughs]. We started using him last year, it was during literacy month. He was originally supposed to do a story with them because February is story telling month but he wanted to do art with them. So that is what he did. He sat at the table and children came and did art with him. It was really nice.

In the same vein a student from FNUC explained the impact of Elder presence and culturally congruent curricula on her academic and cultural wellbeing:

I saw [our late Elder] walk out onto the grass with a little suitcase. He put it down, sat in his chair, and just sits by himself. I went walking out there and he says, "I am just going to pray for a little bit." So I sat down with him. He opened up his suitcase and got his

pipe out. Then another person came. Soon there was about five of us sitting around. He loaded his pipe, said his prayers, smoked his pipe, and passed the pipe around. Then we sat and visited. This is the only institution I have ever seen where [this ceremony could be performed]. That moment was a real testament to what this university is all about. It's about education, becoming professionals in our industries, being leaders in our communities. It's about being strong First Nations people who are going to provide the next generation of experts. But at the same time we are also very strongly rooted to who we are and our way of life.

In identifying the supports necessary for student success many participants stressed the need for adequate and predictable financial support, either from First Nations or institutions. An RTSC student emphasized that in his case financial support is actually similar to a wage:

It's not a training allowance because that is by the government. We are employed. We get pay stubs, it is all tax deductible. It is minimum wage. Our pay checks are from Regina Skills and Trades. I have two other jobs supporting me through this time. We are provided with all of the tools … required to complete projects. We provide our own meals and transportation. Transportation allowance would be a perk but so is getting paid. I was surprised. I thought we were going to have to pay for tuition. I already paid one student loan off. Getting paid for taking a training program is kind of cool. Plus you get about 300 hours toward your first year journeyman.

You can go to university and do a four year degree or you can go to SIAST and take [a] plumbing course for two years. But you don't get a training allowance. Or you can come here and get paid to go for seven weeks of training and have 300 hours towards

your first year apprentice. For me, I can't afford to go to university. So the journey position seems [like a] really good opportunity.

Adequate and affordable daycare, affordable accommodation and access to driver's licenses were identified by other participants as critical aspects of planning for success. A Métis student attending SUNTEP stated, "Daycare has been a problem. The student population ratio is three women to one male. Everybody struggles with childcare." A FNUC student spoke to the challenges of affordable housing:

The housing vacancy rate in Regina now is .6%. If you factor in the low amount of funding that we get it is pretty difficult [financially]. I have a problem right now looking for a place because rent is so high. That is a major problem for students. If we don't have a place to live that is always on our mind.

From the perspective of a post-secondary instructor challenges with driver's licenses was a major barrier for students:

Something that is a real stumbling block for many people [is] getting a driver's license. You cannot just go write the learners test, get in a car, then take a driver test …. it costs around $100 per hour for the SGI approved instructor and car. That is the stumbling block. I am up front with my students, a stumbling [block] for me placing them in certain workplaces because they don't have their driver's license…. *I make mention of that stumbling block*! If you can remove that, I don't care what background they are, immigrant or not, help them with the driver's license. That's a big one. I just want to put that little seed in [this report]. Many have their driver's and that is great but some don't. It is going to put a little strike against them. Not a big one, but it's a strike.

In planning for success many participants spoke of the importance of smaller class sizes and implementing strong supports for students during periods of transition. SUNTEP and FNUC both offer smaller class sizes than available at larger post-secondary institutions and this clearly was appreciated by students:

There is an open door policy for the profs. The environment is a [bit] different than [at] the larger universities who have about 20,000 students. FNUC has far fewer students so there are different avenues of support available. One important focus is having Elders available. So we also encourage Aboriginal youth that have lost their culture. That does help with the focus.

Formal support and transition programs were also appreciated by students, as explained by a FNUC participant:

I work in the [Student Success] office. We are there to help our students. I accessed the office quite a lot before I … ever thought of working there. It was for anything from photocopying to a shoulder to listen to you, or a place to hang out. Everybody feels like it is home central. Everybody comes to fax, photocopy, you name it we do it for the students. [The Student Success Director] does everything for our students to be successful. Whether it is buying a bus pass for somebody or sitting down with them and filling out a scholarship application. I think our boss is pretty much as hands-on as the rest of us. He is very active in the student's daily lives as much as he can be.

Another FNUC student confirmed the importance of such supports:

I am in [the] Student Success Office [on] a daily basis not always just looking for help. I go up there to just hang out and talk to everybody and visit. They make sure we have

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everything we need for school. They are very professional. What is unique is they are more than just a professional system. They are fun and friendly…. FNUC is a really close-knit community. Student Success Services is the place that is the central hub for student involvement. There are volunteering activities [that students can participate in]. One unique program is the Star Program. It is a student transition and retention program. A student cohort will take three of the same classes and the fourth class is on their own. It helps with the transition coming from on reserve to off reserve. They meet other students and create a community for themselves to make it less shell shocking.

Clearly these kinds of formal mentoring and transition supports, especially when provided in culturally affirming ways by respected Aboriginal people, are critical to Aboriginal student success.

Conclusion

In soliciting the opinions of Aboriginal parents, students and educational leaders regarding current educational circumstances it is evident that many Aboriginal peoples and communities still resonate with the wounds of colonialism. A deep sense of grievance stemming from historical injustices was expressed by the multiple generations which participated in our research; and there was also a consensus that the current education debt is a product of past inequities and disadvantage. A minority of participants expressed the view that Aboriginal communities today continue to be victimized by colonial policies; and they pointed to perceptions of funding inequities as compelling evidence of continued discrimination.

Despite these lingering suspicions most of the participants who spoke with us were hopeful that Aboriginal educational circumstances were improving and were optimistic that the Aboriginal youth of today would enjoy a better life than their predecessors. All participants saw education as a key to future success in terms of material wealth, cultural pride and personal wellbeing. Especially striking was the fact that many participants expressed confidence that greater opportunities were currently available to Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan than at any time since the creation of the province. Underlying the general sense of optimism expressed by many participants was a perception that relationships between Aboriginal peoples and the larger Canadian society were improving as a result of greater mutual cultural acceptance and respect. This perception corresponds closely to Ermine's concept of ethical space.

Finally, participants were virtually unanimous on the importance of strategic planning in improving educational outcomes and employment rates for Aboriginal peoples. In identifying the key elements of planning, participants noted the importance of forging respectful and shared governance arrangements and of integrating Aboriginal languages and culture into curriculum. Participants also stressed the value of having well qualified Aboriginal people at all levels within educational institutions; emphasized the need for adequate and predictable financial support; and highlighted the need for strong supports for students during periods of transition. With these pieces in place most participants expressed confidence that the dream of a shared, prosperous and harmonious future for all peoples of Saskatchewan was attainable.

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