



Moving Forward:

National Working Summit on Aboriginal Postsecondary Education

Report on summit participants' views and recommendations
December 15, 2010

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For further information on the summit, please contact:

**The Association of Universities
and Colleges of Canada**

600-350 Albert Street
Ottawa ON K1R 1B1
www.aucc.ca

or

**The National Aboriginal Achievement
Foundation**

PO Box 759
50 Generations Drive
Ohsweken ON N0A 1M0
www.naaf.ca

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Photo: National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Executive summary

Powerful things happen when leaders from diverse backgrounds gather and commit time to dialogue on a single issue. The results of the dialogue are even more powerful when those leaders are well informed and committed to action. When the issue at hand is central to a whole country's future, the results of this dialogue must be shared so that others can join in.

The National Working Summit on Aboriginal Postsecondary Education produced important commitments for action from its participants and substantive policy recommendations for the federal government. The summit was held at Six Nations Polytechnic on October 5, 2010. Over 50 participants from universities, colleges, Aboriginal institutes, charities, Aboriginal organizations and the private sector took part.

Organized by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, the summit ran three concurrent breakout groups. Each one focused on a different component of the Aboriginal postsecondary education challenge: academic programs and support services, relations between postsecondary and K-12 education, and federal government support programs and funding. Each group identified priorities for action, as outlined below.

1. Improve academic programs and support services by:

- **Enhancing community outreach:** Educational institutions will increase outreach activities into Aboriginal communities and target younger students. Outreach is most effective when it starts early in a child's education.
- **Engaging in institutional indigenization:** Educational institutions will adopt local Aboriginal knowledge and culture and incorporate it into campus activities, policies and programs. This process is highly useful for the development of programs and services to share Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives with the broader campus community.
- **Securing sustainable funding:** There are substantive costs to serving the needs of Aboriginal students. Institutions have significant additional costs that need to be covered, from staff-intensive Aboriginal student support programs to curriculum development and remote course delivery. Most of these programs lack sustainable funding.
- **Developing relevant curriculum and implementing with appropriate modes of delivery:** Aboriginal students are most successful when they feel the curriculum applies to their life experiences and incorporates both Western and Aboriginal knowledge. Institutions can help each other in developing relevant and successful curriculums by sharing success stories.
- **Increasing collaboration between all stakeholders:** Participants want to bring about greater collaboration between postsecondary institutions of all kinds, communities and the public and private sectors. Opportunities to collaborate include joint degree offerings, networking opportunities and joint accords for specific actions.

2. Increase high school completion rates and prepare more K-12 students for postsecondary studies by:

- **Building a culture of education:** Develop a curriculum for the public system and on-reserve schools that teaches about Aboriginal identity and history. This curriculum should include a component for instructor professional development and training.
- **Developing community partnerships and initiatives:** Moving forward, institutions must be partnering and building positive relationships – with Aboriginal youth, First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities, school boards, and governments – to evoke change.
- **Increasing collaboration:** Engaging partners at a variety of levels, ranging from governments to

organizations (such as Friendship Centres), school boards, institutions, and grassroots and private sector companies, will help to promote best practices and encourage new approaches to education.

3. Redesign the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs' financial support system to put students first by:

- **Meeting demand:** Every Status Indian and Inuit student who qualifies academically should have access to the postsecondary education they want and Canada needs.
- **Creating a new distribution model:** With funding to meet demand, move to a regional distribution model, as raised in the Assembly of First Nations' recent discussion paper on postsecondary education.
- **Giving the right kind of support:** Status Indian and Inuit students often face significantly higher costs in obtaining an education, yet come from families with very little financial resources or knowledge. Financial support to these students should remain non-repayable.
- **Ensuring transparency:** A demand-driven system requires good data. The federal government, Aboriginal communities and postsecondary institutions should supply timely and accurate information both on finances and student success.

This breakout group also recommended that the federal government consider commissioning the Canadian Council of the Academies to conduct a comprehensive study and analysis of the state of Aboriginal postsecondary education in Canada.

At the end of the summit, all participants committed to the actions identified. This commitment included the following principles: to work collaboratively, share knowledge, and take a holistic approach to ensure more Aboriginal students start and complete their postsecondary studies.

In addition, summit participants welcomed the NAAF's goal of creating a virtual Aboriginal Achievement Institute. This institute will evaluate and share best practices and shape a series of pilot projects driven by Aboriginal communities and designed to improve high school graduation rates.

There is a sense of pride amongst participants about what the summit achieved. It is only a step forward, but it is an important one. Given the economic and demographic challenges facing Canada, fostering the success of young Aboriginal peoples is essential. When they succeed, we will all benefit.



ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS

Photo: University of the Fraser Valley

About the organizers

The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF) is a nationally registered charity dedicated to raising funds to deliver programs that provide the tools necessary for Aboriginal peoples, especially youth, to achieve their potential. Since 1985, the NAAF, through its Education Program, has awarded more than \$37 million in scholarships and bursaries to more than 9,800 First Nations, Inuit and Métis students.

NAAF receives funding from the public and private sectors and individual donors for scholarships and bursaries. However, NAAF is able to meet only 25 percent of the needs of students who apply for financial assistance. NAAF operates several stay-in-school initiatives at the secondary school level. The Foundation plans to develop and implement programs that improve high school completion rates through the establishment of the NAAF Institute. This institute will house programs designed to increase high school completion rates, and will include existing and new programs. It will also include a resource centre for local communities, virtual coaching services, best practices that have been validated by Aboriginal educators, and access to a valuable network.

The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada represents 95 Canadian public and private not-for-profit universities and university-degree level colleges. AUCC's mandate is to facilitate the development of public policy on higher education and to encourage cooperation between Canadian universities and governments, industry, communities and institutions in this country and abroad.

AUCC provides services to member universities in three main areas:

- public policy and advocacy;
- communications, research and information-sharing; and
- scholarships and international program management.

Universities play a central role in the success of Canada's economy and society.

AUCC helps to shape the dialogue on higher education, ensuring recognition of the importance of university education to Canada's future. AUCC member institutions are often on the front lines shaping programming in response to the needs of their student populations. AUCC member institutions have identified Aboriginal higher education as one of the association's most significant priorities.

Both AUCC and the NAAF have identified the crisis of First Nations, Inuit and Métis education as one of the most compelling national issues Canada must face. The two organizations are working together to bring about transformative change for Aboriginal students seeking a postsecondary education.



WHY ACTION, WHY NOW?

Photo: National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Why action, why now?

Canada's population is aging. By 2030, the number of Canadians over the age of 65 will have doubled while the population of working age – between 25 and 64 – is projected to grow by only eight percent. Canada will have proportionately fewer people in the workforce to address the growing demands of its retired population for legal, health, social and financial services, and to ensure national economic productivity. Increasing university participation rates will help address this pending demographic crunch.

Canada's Aboriginal youth population is growing at three times the national average, yet they have the lowest high school completion rate of any demographic group in Canada. Recent Aboriginal high school graduates are 23 percent less likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to go on to postsecondary education within two years of completing high school.

Improving access to education for Aboriginal Canadians requires immediate attention. Unless something is done about education of Aboriginal youth, hundreds of thousands of youth will not be available to help Canada deal with this demographic crunch.

Making sure more Aboriginal students graduate from postsecondary education is not just in Canada's interest, it also gives tremendous personal benefit. For example, Aboriginal Canadians with a university degree earn approximately 50 percent higher incomes over a lifetime than Aboriginal high-school graduates, experience fewer and shorter periods of unemployment and have significantly better health outcomes. These personal benefits also impact local communities, providing the much-needed engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers and entrepreneurs these communities must have to develop and improve their standards of living.

Increasing Aboriginal graduation rates will also have a positive impact on public spending. A study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards illustrates the kind of impact that would result if the education and labour market outcomes of Aboriginal Canadians reached the 2001 level of non-Aboriginal Canadians by 2026. Income would increase by \$36.5 billion, total tax revenue would increase by \$3.5 billion and government expenditures could also decrease by \$14.2 billion.

Aboriginal communities and organizations, universities, colleges, not-for-profit organizations and the private sector are all making efforts to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal Canadians. Often these programs are designed independently from one another and with little information about best practices. Better coordination and collaboration by these stakeholders can help improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal Canadians.



SUMMIT OVERVIEW

Photo: Lakehead University

Summit overview

On October 5, 2010, more than 50 participants from universities, colleges, Aboriginal institutes and organizations, charities and the private sector met at Six Nations Polytechnic in Six Nations of the Grand River territory, near Brantford, Ontario, for the National Working Summit on Aboriginal Postsecondary Education. All participants are already actively engaged in Aboriginal issues, and are committed to working together to improve the state of Aboriginal education in Canada.

The summit was co-chaired by the President of NAAF Roberta Jamieson, and AUCC President Paul Davidson.

The full-day event opened with comments from the co-chairs, setting the stage for candid, thoughtful discussion. Participants were then divided into three breakout groups, each addressing one of three challenges:

- What non-governmental support programs and services for postsecondary students can be developed or enhanced?
- How can universities, colleges and other groups help the K-12 educational system?
- How can the federal government better support Aboriginal students?

The breakout groups met in both the morning and afternoon. Summit participants were able to switch to a different group at midday, giving them the opportunity to contribute in more than one area. Each breakout group was supported by a professional facilitator, who reported on each group's progress during plenary sessions. The first plenary convened after lunch, and the second took place towards the end of the afternoon.

Through consensus, summit participants committed to four key objectives:

- to take a holistic approach to ensure successful transitions for students and to help more Aboriginal students complete their postsecondary education;
- to work collaboratively, seeing opportunities to partner with other interested organizations, to share knowledge about what approaches are most successful;
- to continue to seek increased federal funding for Aboriginal students; and,
- to continue advocating for increased federal funding for Aboriginal-focused support programs at universities and colleges.

These four objectives, and the following two action items identified by the organizers, were announced in a joint release issued on October 5, 2010:

- Together, AUCC and NAAF will survey NAAF bursary recipients to identify the essential features that contribute to student success at a postsecondary institution.
- NAAF will create the NAAF Institute to evaluate and share best practices and shape a series of pilot projects, driven by Aboriginal communities, designed to improve high school graduation rates.



SUMMARY OF BREAKOUT GROUPS

Photo: National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Summary of Breakout Groups

This section provides a summary of the background, good practices, opportunities and next steps discussed in each of the three breakout groups: (i) the “programs and services” breakout group; (ii) the “K-12” breakout group; and (iii) the “federal government support” breakout group. (Note that the discussions from the morning and afternoon sessions have been consolidated.)

Programs and services breakout group

“What non-governmental support programs and services for postsecondary students can be developed or enhanced?”

Background

In 2006, both AUCC and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges produced inventories of the Aboriginal outreach and support programs their members offer. All of these programs, policies and services are geared towards attracting and retaining Aboriginal students, faculty and staff and actively engaging them in campus life. (Note: The AUCC Inventory was updated in Spring 2010 and ACCC’s in November 2010)

Recent research confirms the important role these types of programs and services have in improving retention of Aboriginal students. For example, between 2005 and 2009, a series of programs were offered to Aboriginal undergraduate students at the University of Victoria through the LE,NONET Research Project, a partnership between the university and the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Students who participated in these programs experienced:

- a 100% increase in term-to-term continuation,
- a 20% increase in graduation rates and
- a 67% reduction in withdrawal rates.

The LE,NONET study confirmed findings of several other studies, all of which identified the following principles as being key to student success:

- Reciprocal learning
- Supporting indigenous identity development
- Culturally relevant programming
- Community building
- Relationship building
- Individualized programming

Current activities, successes and improvements

The programs and services breakout group participants were pleased to share information on a wide range of activities taking place within their organizations and communities that help attract and retain Aboriginal students in postsecondary education. Good practice activities highlighted in the discussion include:

Student support programs on campuses: Many institutions now offer a full range of Aboriginal student support services, including pedagogical, social and psychological support and counselling. Examples of such programs include Aboriginal peer mentoring, intensive summer programs as an introduction to the institution, and special Aboriginal admission policies to attract mature Aboriginal students.

Curriculum development: The importance of passing on Aboriginal culture, knowledge and language to students has gained significant recognition. Many academic programs have integrated Aboriginal knowledge and culture in course curriculum. There is now applied research on Aboriginal issues and marketing specifically to Aboriginal populations.

Mainstreaming/integrating Aboriginal issues on campus: Mainstream institutions across the country have Aboriginal education councils, offering a formalized structure to incorporate Aboriginal views and perspectives. There is now a considerable amount of physical space on campuses across the country devoted to Aboriginal education, support programs and cultural events. A number of schools have developed an Aboriginal foundation document or framework that lays out the institution's commitment to Aboriginal peoples and knowledge.

Community outreach and engagement: There are an increasing number of partnerships with First Nations communities in a variety of areas that can help build a connection to education, including athletics and recreation. For example, some universities offer field courses for professional programs where students and instructors will spend weeks at a time on reserves. Universities, colleges and Aboriginal institutions are partnering to offer programs, such as nursing, that include content that addresses priorities for Aboriginal communities. Institutions and provinces are investing in front-line services to help Aboriginal youth improve their grades and obtain a postsecondary education.

Increasing Aboriginal presence and influence on campus: Many postsecondary institutions now have a strong Aboriginal presence among their staff, faculty and governing bodies. Some institutions are recruiting from their alumni for these roles. Institutions are also hiring Aboriginal part-time course instructors.

Opportunities

Participants in the breakout group identified three broad areas where there are major opportunities to improve results for Aboriginal postsecondary students. In each of these areas, they identified a number of more specific opportunities.

Education

- Engage youth early and bring them onto campuses through outreach activities such as campus visits and family nights.
- Hire more Aboriginal faculty members. This need is particularly strong in the sciences, engineering and other non-traditional Aboriginal areas of study. Institutions can bring in more Aboriginal instructors by creating an adjunct professor track.
- “Decolonize” education: break down cultural assumptions and give both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people a clearer sense of the barriers to success. Educate non-Aboriginal faculty, board members and staff about Aboriginal perspectives by having a more integrated approach to Aboriginal knowledge across disciplines.
- Help more students succeed by creating a supportive environment for Aboriginal students. University and college bridging programs create important opportunities. Enhanced and sustainable funding for these programs is required.
- In addition to strengthening existing universities and colleges, strengthen and build more Aboriginal postsecondary institutions. They develop and impart Aboriginal knowledge and give opportunities to some students that the mainstream system may not currently be serving.
- There is a competitive marketplace for education. Institutions can set themselves apart and give

themselves an advantage by branding and marketing their Aboriginal education activities. Positive support of the Aboriginal identity helps create success. Institutions and charities should focus on promoting diversity and creating opportunities to celebrate identities.

- Identify new sources of financial aid for Aboriginal students, most notably look for increased private-sector support.

Continuing dialogue

- First Nations, universities and colleges should be encouraged to work together on partnerships to conduct research and share knowledge. In some cases, existing collaborations should be redefined as full partnerships. There needs to be more dialogue to redefine what postsecondary education is trying to achieve. In particular, there needs to be discussion on why we force students to leave their communities in order to learn.
- In order to build bridges, all parties must let go of their assumptions in order to have frank dialogue.
- It is important that there are celebrations of Aboriginal achievements and knowledge. Such celebrations not only contribute towards the pride of the Aboriginal community, but they also help create and maintain connections with the non-Aboriginal community.

Technology and distance learning

- Advances in technology provide new opportunities for Aboriginal outreach, education, research and knowledge-sharing.
- A number of colleges have used mobile training labs to bring skills development to Aboriginal communities.
- There is a need for a national network with online learning tools for students.
- All orders of government can develop a plan to include/attach technology into their educational plans with Aboriginal communities. In particular, Aboriginal online education should be an important element of the federal digital economy strategy.



Photo: National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Areas of action

Participants in the breakout group placed a priority on the following areas for action that will improve results for Aboriginal postsecondary students.

Community outreach

One of the most important ways educational institutions can achieve more success with Aboriginal students is to increase outreach into Aboriginal communities.

Outreach is most effective when it targets Aboriginal students early in their education, and in their community. For example, summer camps designed with a focus on a specific knowledge area such as math, business and science; hiring Aboriginal recruitment officers to visit high schools; and distance education that brings learning to the student via mobile classrooms and self-paced learning are all effective outreach programs.

Successful outreach efforts are often partnerships. Potential partners include institutions and their liaison officers, Aboriginal communities, NGOs, the private sector and larger groups of First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Memorandums of understanding are useful to avoid confusion and conflict. Provinces can provide support for these activities by incorporating them into other educational plans such as those to curb high school drop out rates. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada can play an important role in Aboriginal community outreach by promoting and heralding effective practices.

Additional resources for outreach activities can sometimes be found by leveraging institutions' strategic plans for existing funding or to make the case for additional funding.

Institutional indigenization

Indigenization is a process where educational institutions incorporate and adopt local Aboriginal knowledge and culture. This process is highly useful for the development of programs and services for Aboriginal students and also to share Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives with the broader campus community.

Successful indigenization of an institution requires a major culture shift. There must be support from the highest levels of the institution, a campus-wide awareness that the process is going on, faculty must be educated in Aboriginal history and issues and more people must be brought in who embody Aboriginal perspectives. Undergoing an indigenizing process can present new opportunities for creating new scholarships, have cross-appointments with Indigenous institutions and collaborative research projects with Aboriginal groups. Indigenization must go beyond words; it must include actions.

The indigenization process often begins with a central, foundational goal or intention. Some institutions have created foundational documents with specific references to Aboriginal peoples and knowledge in their mission statements. Aboriginal representation is useful to provide champions in this process. Representation can take the form of Aboriginal advisory communities, or having Aboriginal people on the board of governors and in roles such as chancellor.

A useful entry point to the process for the broader campus population is an activity that helps to define the institution. For example, the recognition of traditional Aboriginal territory identifies the school as coming from a specific environment and place.

Actions are often best brought about through connecting with Aboriginal students and communities.

Ways to do this include community learning experiences, collaborative research projects and offering co-op learning opportunities in Aboriginal communities.

Sustainable funding

There are substantive costs to serving the needs of Aboriginal students. Financial support needs to go well beyond tuition fees. Other major and necessary expenses include living costs, travel to and from home community, daycare, etc. Institutions too have significant additional costs that need to be covered, from staff-intensive Aboriginal student support programs to curriculum development and remote course delivery. Most of these programs lack sustainable funding.

The postsecondary education sector's success in serving the needs of Aboriginal students relies upon its ability to attract long-term funding. Summit participants believe the sector must "think big" and develop a robust plan to secure funding to cover the costs of education incurred by both students and institutions that deliver vital programs and services specifically for Aboriginal students.

Summit participants believe the sector will be most successful if it speaks with one voice to governments of all levels and the private sector. That voice should be infused with the spirit of cooperation, and supported by an umbrella group of advocates.

The private sector is willing to participate in funding Aboriginal education but wants the public sector to take the lead. Summit participants recognize the need to engage Canadians in the dialogue about Aboriginal postsecondary education, and demonstrate the value in these efforts to build a critical mass of support, which will be instrumental in achieving sustainable funding from the public sector.

Developing curriculum and appropriate modes of delivery

Aboriginal students are most successful when they feel the curriculum applies to their life experiences and incorporates both Western and Aboriginal knowledge. Curriculum means different things to different people. In an Aboriginal context, respect and ownership of Aboriginal knowledge is a very sensitive issue. If Aboriginal communities do not feel ownership of the curriculum, they will not buy into the academic programs that use the curriculum.

Institutions can help each other in developing relevant and successful curriculums by sharing success stories. Some other useful partners that can be brought into the curriculum development process include program evaluators and provincial education ministries.



Photo: National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Advances in technology and pedagogy also allow for new methods of delivering curriculum. The traditional model of teaching where the student comes to the classroom does not always work in the Aboriginal context. Sometimes the classroom will have to come to the student. Institutions and other organizations must optimize their use of online and digital tools for delivery of lessons.

To gain buy-in for curriculum development, postsecondary institutions of all kinds must engage with local communities. Program design, curriculum and delivery all require customized approaches for different contexts. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge contributions to curriculum development. Awards and public recognition for contributions work particularly well.

Collaboration

Participants want to bring about greater collaboration between postsecondary institutions of all kinds. Opportunities to collaborate include joint degree offerings, networking opportunities and joint accords for specific actions. At the institutional level, new ideas and initiatives can be driven by steering committees; once implemented at the institution these can grow to be province-wide initiatives. Provincial education authorities can also help encourage dialogue between mainstream and indigenous institutions. AUCC is seen as a good national forum for dialogue on collaboration.

K-12 breakout group

“How can universities, colleges and other groups help the K-12 educational system?”

Background

Despite many gains across provinces and territories in recent years, student dropout rates among Aboriginal young people remain high while high-school-to-postsecondary transition rates remain low.

On-reserve schools face the additional challenge of delivering curriculum with significantly less funding per student than their provincially funded counterparts. At the same time, Aboriginal children and youth in urban settings often attend schools that do not have programming that includes Aboriginal knowledge, culture and needs in a substantive way.

Other challenges at the K-12 level include:

- Transience levels are very high for Aboriginal students, as individuals and families move frequently.
- There are few Aboriginal teachers.
- Existing curriculums and teaching delivery methods do not sufficiently reflect Aboriginal needs and values.
- Aboriginal children are twice as likely as non-Aboriginal children to live with only one parent.

However, change is happening. Partnerships between different organizations are making changes at local levels. Examples of these types of activities include:

- mentorship programs where university students spend time with an Aboriginal junior or senior high school student each week,
- summer learning camps where students get to participate in active learning on subjects such as the environment or math,
- community or friendship centres that house publicly available computers to help bridge the digital divide, and
- afterschool programs that provide both tutoring and sports.

On a national level, the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation is establishing the NAAF Institute, which will house programs designed to improve high school completion rates such as the REALIZING project, and the Aboriginal Success and Knowledge Centre. The institute will provide an opportunity for communities to access a resource centre, a virtual coaching community, best practices validated by Aboriginal educators and a valuable network of practitioners. The NAAF Institute is looking for partners to work with them on this initiative which will involve the evaluation and showcasing of concrete approaches that have a proven positive impact on high school graduation rates.

Perspective of the breakout group

While there are a number of important programs and promising practices emerging across the country, participants stressed the need for institutions, organizations and communities to help increase success in K-12 education as a means to increase the number of Aboriginal postsecondary graduates. It is generally agreed that outreach needs to begin quite early in a child's education – students as young as six years old – with a view to decreasing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Current activities, successes and improvements

Primary and secondary student support, retention and completion: There are a number of programs already in place to support and retain Aboriginal students at the K-12 level, with the overall aim of improving successful high school completion rates. Examples of these include after-school programs and summer camps that provide tutoring, active learning in subjects such as science and mathematics, and sporting activities.

There are several successful programs geared towards students in grades 7 -12, such as summer camps, science and environment camps, sports performance camps and on-campus activities that demonstrate university life.

High school to postsecondary transition: Programs are in place at several high schools and within Aboriginal communities to promote postsecondary opportunities and support students' transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Many universities and colleges are building relationships with local First Nation communities, or Aboriginal populations in urban centres. These types of community partnerships have been a crucial success factor in the implementation of programs and increasing the number of Aboriginal students on campuses.

One promising practice is the creation of an "opportunity fund" which offers a financial incentive to students for academic and extracurricular achievement by giving "credits" for extra-curricular (accredited only) activities as well as for every B+ or higher earned in school. By the end of grade 12, students could have earned up to \$4,000 in credits to apply towards their postsecondary studies.

Mentorship programs in which Aboriginal high school students are paired with a university student mentor have proven successful. Mentor and mentee spend time together on a weekly basis, and there is a large focus on science, engineering and information technology for K-12 programming. This engages and mentors students in fun, non-intimidating ways to experience a university campus.

Many of the programs detailed here target students in high school. However, some universities employ a full-time K-12 recruiter. On tour throughout the year, these individuals also visit primary schools, and build long-term relationships with school staff, faculty and students.

Improving the quality and relevance of K-12 education: Efforts are under way to improve overall quality and relevance of K-12 curriculum and pedagogy for Aboriginal students. These efforts target a greater incorporation of Aboriginal content into provincially funded public school systems, and

improved learning environments in schools on reserves.

Provincial governments, Ontario in particular, are currently re-writing Aboriginal history for high school curriculum. This process includes having textbooks written and/or reviewed by Aboriginal people and linked online to areas of Aboriginal interest. In addition, there are 11 alternative high schools across the country that offer culturally based, culturally relevant learning for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students are very receptive to these schools. To date, 97 percent of students have graduated.

Within the provincial school system, there is a recognized need for more teacher training. Teachers in public schools require training on new Aboriginal curriculums, how to integrate Aboriginal content into traditional curriculum, and greater information about the unique needs and challenges of Aboriginal students. Teacher training on reserves must focus on improving the quality of education and on improving access to learning technologies. Community or friendship centres have been established that house publicly available computers to increase Internet access and help bridge the digital divide in remote communities. Investment in computers has been made at the elementary level (ages 6-12) to ensure that all children have access to electronic tools to help them learn, advance and succeed.

All forms of teacher training should be conducted in collaboration with provincial faculties of education, school boards, departments responsible for education, professional associations and in consultation with provincial and territorial Aboriginal education organizations.

Opportunities

Participants in the breakout group identified the following opportunities to improve results at the K-12 level so more Aboriginal students are ready for postsecondary studies.

Raising awareness and advocacy

- It is difficult to obtain buy-in for a new Aboriginal education vision and increases in funding; therefore, it is necessary to advocate for Aboriginal education at all levels – local, regional and national.
- There is a need and opportunity to tell more positive stories about Aboriginal children, particularly as they have identified early on that they want to go to university. It is also important to tell a more positive story to Aboriginal children by expressing high aspirations and expectations towards college and university. Building these strong rapports – relationships with the students,



Photo: National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

community awareness, community achievement – will ensure retention and success. It is important that all teachers take a course on Aboriginal history so they can relate to Aboriginal students and teach other Canadians about the history.

- Many university presidents are actively engaging in increasing access to education for Aboriginal students at the local, provincial and national levels.

Building resources

- The resources and networking are in place to build an Aboriginal Resource Group to look at existing practices and success in engaging Aboriginal students and their needs. This group could develop a roadmap of what is currently taking place, as well as establish, maintain and celebrate the successes of institutions in their communities and at the provincial and federal levels. These resources will allow for evidence-based decision-making on the part of governments, institutions and communities.
- Along these lines, NAAF will create a virtual institute that will be a resource for schools, teachers, etc. and a clearing-house for promising practices. As part of the NAAF virtual institute, an online portal will ensure that teachers and students have access to the resources they need. This tool would include capabilities for everything from research, to project papers, curriculum development and training.
- Opportunities exist to get technology into the hands of young Aboriginal students through pilots and partnerships with the private sector that will in turn “level the playing field” by equipping students with the tools for success.
- Adequate funding continues to be a key issue. The number of Aboriginal students continues to grow but funding for instruction is declining. Whereas after a streamlining effort, there are now increases in administrative funding available to a decreased number of school boards.

Developing role models and mentors

- In addition to celebrating Aboriginal achievements in education, there is an opportunity to enhance the role of mentors and role models within communities at the elementary level, connecting children to community heroes to help them succeed in education endeavours. This could include having Aboriginal students return to communities to do their internships/training while they are in college and university programs.
- Developing an Aboriginal Alumni Chapter – having graduates act as ambassadors and role models to reach out to K-12 is one way to formalize a community of role models. An Aboriginal Alumni Chapter would focus on successes and look at factors that helped students overcome adversities.

Areas of action

The K-12 breakout group placed a priority on the following areas for action so that more Aboriginal students are ready for postsecondary studies.

Building a culture of education: Aboriginal students are most successful when curriculum incorporates Aboriginal knowledge, history and culture and is therefore relevant to their life experience and their communities. These components are not only considered important at the university level, but in order to attract and retain students it is necessary to begin this type of curriculum development as early as the third grade. Therefore, curriculum development is required for both the public system and on-reserve schools and needs to incorporate Aboriginal expertise in the development process.

In the same vein, Aboriginal education must be made a priority by all orders of government, whether

provincial, federal or First Nations and Aboriginal governments. Aboriginal education as a priority would include curriculum development, coupled with professional development and training (through teachers' college and school boards), as well as public education around Aboriginal identity and history. Professional development and training would focus on teachers currently getting their credentials, and those who have been in the system for several years and may have little knowledge around Aboriginal content and history.

Community partnerships and initiatives: Community partnerships are integral to the success of any Aboriginal initiative. Successful initiatives are those for which the community feels ownership. Communities will want to shape their own solutions to close education gaps. They must own the issue and implement the solutions to address the problems.

Institutions must partner and build positive relationships — relationships with Aboriginal youth, First Nations and Aboriginal communities, school boards and governments in order to provoke change. For colleges and universities this means building relationships with First Nations and urban Aboriginal communities within close proximity or on whose territory an institution resides, and cultivating the community as a resource for the institution.

Local school boards must be encouraged to take the same approach. There are examples of “transition committees” that have identified effective ways to work with the public system.

Community-based initiatives that can be jointly developed and implemented by institutions and communities include:

- early introduction to campus life and events such as science fairs focusing on interests and concerns of Aboriginal students (i.e., the environment);
- kids with computers – laptops encourage e-learning opportunities, and student responsibility;
- internships – bring Aboriginal students back to communities to share experiences and lessons learned; and
- alternative programs to engage students who would not feel comfortable in a traditional extra-curricular activity setting (i.e., “share the music” or “horse ranch” programs).

Increasing collaboration: Another vital component to improving the K-12 system towards supporting Aboriginal students is collaboration. There are many partners that need to be engaged, on a variety of levels, ranging from governments to organizations (such as Friendship Centres), to school boards, institutions and grassroots. The number of partnerships involving the private sector are increasing. These partnerships can involve individual companies, consortia or whole sectors of the economy. There is tremendous opportunity for the technology sector to help Aboriginal students get the necessary resources in the information age.

Creating formal partnerships between the institutions and foundations will create the opportunity to develop two key action areas: joint initiatives and shared best practices.

Joint initiatives

- Creating a Virtual Institute dedicated to coaching, access, energy motivation, connecting and learning through technology, which provides interactive ways of showing what students are doing (labs, resources, discussions).
- Creating an Aboriginal Advisory Committee at the school board level. While some school boards have adopted this structure, there is still a need to implement it. Aboriginal people need to be part of the policy-making.

Sharing best practices

- Identifying the key learning and success factors contributing to K-12 youth school participation and retention.
- Developing a website to which everyone can contribute on an ongoing basis in order to remain current.

Federal government support breakout group

“How can the federal government better support Aboriginal students?”

Background

Over the next decade, 400,000 Aboriginal Canadians will reach the age to enter the labour market. The Aboriginal youth population is growing at three times the national rate. Although Aboriginal postsecondary participation is increasing, the attainment gap with the non-Aboriginal population is widening.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada currently allocates \$326 million for three Aboriginal postsecondary education programs. The vast majority, approximately \$300 million, is distributed to band councils through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) for purposes of student aid. This funding is distributed to bands and institutions in each region through INAC’s regional offices.

This funding is available to Status Indians and Inuit, supporting approximately 24,000 students annually. Additionally, all Aboriginal students are eligible for the Canada Student Loans Program.

The funding from INAC, aimed specifically at helping Status Indian and Inuit students pay for their education, has not kept pace with demand, demographics or costs. The number of Aboriginal university students supported by INAC fell from 26,493 in 1996-97 to 23,780 in 2006-07. The average allocation under the PSSSP is \$12,316. According to the Assembly of First Nations, between 2001 and 2006, 10,588 qualified Status First Nations students were denied funding from the PSSSP.

Program administration

While PSSSP funding is available across the country, there is no national funding formula. Instead, each regional INAC office uses a different formula to distribute funds. Once the bands receive these funds, they are charged with administering them. This includes determining which students receive



Photo: National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

funding, and the amount. Although there is an expectation from INAC that individual student disbursements will not exceed levels allowed under the Canada Student Loans Program, the decision process varies from band to band, based on their community's needs, resources and student demands.

Additionally, PSSSP is transferred from INAC to individual First Nations through a Comprehensive Funding Arrangement as a Flexible Transfer Payment. This means that First Nations can use these funds for other purposes as the needs of their communities require.

Lastly, PSSSP funding does not provide any money specifically for, or guidelines about, administration costs. Many bands use a portion of their PSSSP funding to pay for an education coordinator in their community. This position helps evaluate who will receive PSSSP funding, helps students select a PSE institution and often helps students complete their high school studies so that they can go on to PSE.

New architecture

The 2008 federal budget stated that “the Government will also continue to review its First Nations and Inuit postsecondary education programs to ensure they are coordinated with other programs and that they provide the support that First Nations and Inuit students need to stay in school and complete their education.”

This language was taken a step further when the 2010 federal budget announced that “the Government will engage in a new approach to providing support to First Nations and Inuit postsecondary students to ensure that students receive the support they need to attend postsecondary education.” The government's commitment to the review was reaffirmed in the March 2010 Speech From The Throne stating “our Government will also work hand-in-hand with Aboriginal communities and provinces and territories to reform and strengthen education, and to support student success and provide greater hope and opportunity.”

This review provides the summit participants with an excellent opportunity to reflect on the success of the program to date. It is also an opportunity to put forth recommendations to ensure future success.



Photo: University of the Fraser Valley

Perspective of the breakout group

The federal government support breakout group identified stakeholder perspectives, policy recommendations and topics for future discussions that serve to strengthen existing programs. Participants were pleased with the level of agreement in the group and believe that if they can continue to speak together, more will be accomplished.

Unrealistic expectations: Participants believe strongly that no funding distribution model will achieve the results that Canada needs and the community desires unless funding levels increase. There is too great a disparity between the level of need and the level of resources available. This is not to say that the current model of distributing funding is ideal, but that the level of success, equity, and confidence in the system cannot occur with present funding levels. Funding levels must also be sustainable to ensure long-term planning and progress.

Lastly, the expectation that Aboriginal students should be provided levels of support in line with those provided by the Canada Student Loan Program does not match up with the realities that these students face. Many Aboriginal students are older, have dependants, come from remote communities and have additional learning needs. The Canada Student Loan Program has not done a good job of serving the needs of students with these kinds of characteristics. Since a large portion of Aboriginal students have these challenges, it makes little sense to use the loan program as a guide.

Rethink the system: The current system of funding Aboriginal students developed over a number of years, and in part addresses the needs of various constituencies such as bands and the federal government. None of the summit participants felt that the current system puts the needs of students first, and that if the system is to succeed, it must do so.

It is vital that INAC have an open and wide engagement on any changes to postsecondary education funding. The community of interest must be able to provide input. The more open the process of engagement, the more the community will buy into changes and help make them a success.

Aboriginal postsecondary institutions play a vital role in the education system. These institutions need and deserve respect from all stakeholders in the system. They are innovators in program content and delivery and create opportunities for many students who otherwise would not access the postsecondary system.

INAC's Indian Studies Support Program helps address Aboriginal students' learning and cultural needs. This program is valued and should be continued and enhanced.

Good reasons to invest: If investments are not made now, Canada will pay a much higher price later. The costs of failing to act include lower productivity and higher costs to government programs such as health care and social services. Aboriginal demographics also dictate that now is the time to act. Canada cannot afford to leave such a large youth cohort behind.

Many participants felt it was important to note that as well as there being strong economic and moral arguments for investing in postsecondary education, there are also legal arguments. Most Status Indians and Inuit believe that access to a postsecondary education is a treaty right and these rights must be honoured.

The group also believes there are a number of myths circulating about Aboriginal education that need to be actively dispelled. One myth is that large amounts of PSSSP funding are being improperly funnelled to other band purposes, as reallocation is allowed under the current terms of the program. Another myth is that all Status Indians and Inuit currently receive free tuition and are fully supported for their costs of living.

Policy recommendations

Participants in the breakout group recommend the following changes to federal government support for Aboriginal postsecondary students.

Need for an improved model: The present funding model for Status Indians and Inuit is seen as static and inflexible. By allocating a pre-determined amount of funding to each band every year, regardless of need, it is creating an educational quota system in many communities.

Participants want to see funding for Status Indians and Inuit students move to a demand-driven model. This would be a dramatic and rewarding change from the current system. Every Status Indian and Inuit student would know that if they got the grades, they can get the postsecondary education they want and Canada needs.

Necessary changes to the current system include:

- More comprehensive collection of data so that demand and need can accurately be determined and supported.
- Funding would no longer be distributed to bands at pre-determined historic levels. This could mean moving to a different model to distribute funds, perhaps a regional distribution model as raised in the Assembly of First Nations' recent discussion paper on postsecondary education.
- The ability of local communities to have flexibility to use postsecondary education funding for other purposes would be removed. If funding for identified needs was moved for other purposes, no matter how legitimate and urgent, it would actively work against the message that every qualified student will get support.

Grant-based funding: Funding to Aboriginal students to support their postsecondary studies must remain non-repayable. Due to distance, age, dependants and additional learning needs, Aboriginal students are likely to face amongst the highest costs towards attaining an education. At the same time, they are likely to come from communities with the lowest levels of resources to support them and the lowest levels of experience with postsecondary education.

Value education coordinators: Education coordinators play an important role in Aboriginal communities. They provide links to postsecondary education institutions and act as a role model for young students. Without them, many communities would lack a connection to postsecondary education and the opportunities it provides. Little, if any investment has been made over the years on the professional development of these coordinators. Given the vital role that they play it makes sense to ensure they have the most up-to-date knowledge, skills and tools to do their jobs more effectively. Participants recommend professional development funds be created for these important components of the system.

Performance accountability: Finding new ways to make performance of postsecondary education funding accountable was a major topic of conversation. There was a strong feeling that the existing program's relationship to INAC had to change. Possibilities included creating new legislation to define the program and remove it from other unrelated funding agreements with bands and to have reports made directly to Parliament on the program's performance.

It is essential that any system be transparent, including timely delivery of accurate information from all stakeholders.

Greater graduate student support: The three federal research granting agencies are encouraged to find ways that they can better support Aboriginal graduate students. Under the present PSSSP, many communities with limited funds choose to support students in acquiring their first degree or diploma over supporting those wishing to pursue graduate studies. It is essential that more Aboriginal Canadians acquire graduate level degrees so that more leadership opportunities are opened to them.

Having a greater pool of Aboriginal Canadians with graduate degrees will also help institutions attract more Aboriginal students. Students look for and succeed when the make up of their school in part reflects them and their experiences. With a large pool of Aboriginal graduate degree holders, institutions will be able to fill more positions with Aboriginal professors and instructors.

Comprehensive study: Much research exists that illustrates both the barriers to education and subsequent rewards for Aboriginal students in postsecondary education, but each lacks a national perspective. Participants recommend the federal government consider commissioning the Canadian Council of the Academies to conduct a comprehensive study and analysis of the state of Aboriginal postsecondary education in Canada.

Part of this study would include an investigation of how the different aspects of the current system interact: How do Aboriginal institutes interact with colleges and universities? How do postsecondary institutions interact with the K-12 sector? How does the PSSSP interact with student loan programs and institutional scholarships and bursaries; and how do education coordinators link students, communities and institutions?

Future conversations

Participants in the breakout group did not discuss all aspects of federal government support for Aboriginal postsecondary students. The following are topics of conversation the community recommends be addressed in future:

Funding for services: Support services such as native student centres, elders' visits, daycare, housing, cultural events, personal and academic counselling and peer support are essential to Aboriginal student success. Many of these support services do not have sustainable funding. It makes little sense to invest in student financial aid without ensuring students have the services they need to succeed. Participants want to see investments in these programs and would welcome dialogue on developing a funding model.

Increase investment impact: Participants were keenly interested in future discussions on how to multiply the impacts of investments in Aboriginal postsecondary education. Possibilities included federal matching funds for investments from the private sector and cost-sharing agreements on new investments between the federal and provincial governments.

Employment outcomes: There was a desire to improve not only the educational outcomes of Aboriginal Canadians, but also employment outcomes. One possible area that can help with both is work-study activities. There is an appetite for discussions around finding increased funding for work-study opportunities for Aboriginal students



APPENDIX: WORKING SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS

Photo: National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Appendix 1: Working Summit Participants

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Title
Peter	Dinsdale	National Association of Friendship Centers	Executive Director
Peter	Garrow	Assembly of First Nations	Director
Tim	Thompson	Assembly of First Nations	
Jennifer	Flanagan	ACTUA	President and CEO
Vivian	Ayoungman	First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium	Executive Director
Wayne	Mason	Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Center	Manager of Training Initiatives
Brent	Stonefish	Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centers	Education Policy Analyst
Dianne	Bascombe	Pathways to Education Canada	Acting Vice-President of Programs
Randell	Morris	Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies	President
Rebecca	Jamieson	Six Nations Polytechnic	President
Mary-Jo	Sullivan	The Ontario Trillium Foundation	Program Manager, Western
Marlene	Brant-Castellano	Trent University	Professor Emeritus
Marie	Battiste	University of Saskatchewan	Academic Director, Aboriginal Research Centre
Wendy	Johnson	The Belinda Stronach Foundation	Director of Aboriginal Programming
Lacey	Hill	Mohawk College	Aboriginal Recruitment and Access Coordinator
April	Krahn	Red River College	Manager-Aboriginal Student Support & Community Relations
Konrad	Jonasson	University College of the North	Community Based Services
Alex	Lougheed	Canadian Alliance of Student Associations	Research and Policy Officer

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Title
Cassandra	Opikokew	Canadian Federation of Students	National Aboriginal Caucus Chair
Noel	Baldwin	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Coordinator, Postsecondary Eductaion
Christy	Bressette	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Coordinator, Aboriginal Eductaion
Cathy	Closs	Brock University	Director of Student Development Center
David	Graham	Concordia University	Provost and Vice-President Academic
Robert	Bailey	Cape Breton University	Vice-President Academic
Bonnie	Patterson	Council of Ontario Universities	President
Angelina	Weenie	First Nations University of Canada	Acting Department Head of Professional Programs
Arja	Vainio-Mattila	Huron University College	Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Beverly	Sabourin	Lakehead University	Vice-Provost (Aboriginal Initiatives)
Linda	Jacobs Starkey	McGill University	Associate Dean of Students
Jeff	Hollett	Mount Saint Vincent University	Associate Vice President Student Experience
Cyndy	Baskin	Ryerson University	Associate Professor - School of Social Work
William	Lindsay	Simon Fraser University	Office for Aboriginal Peoples
Barry	Craig	St. Thomas University	Vice-President Academic
Jennifer	Rattray	The University of Winnipeg	Executive Director, Government, Indigenous and Community Affairs
Vincent	Rousson	Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue	Directeur du Campus de Val-d'Or
Anthony	Secco	University of New Brunswick	Vice-President Academic

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Title
Clarissa	Jacobs	University of Ontario Institute of Technology	Aboriginal Education Counsellor
George	Maslany	University of Regina	Vice-President Academic
Rob	Tiffin	York University	Vice-President Students
Richard	Myers	Algoma University	President
Patrick	Deane	McMaster University	President
Lesley	Lovett-Doust	Nipissing University	President
Sara	Diamond	OCAD University	President
Sean	Riley	St. Francis Xavier	President
Alan	Shaver	Thompson Rivers University	President
Steven	Franklin	Trent University	President
George	Iwama	University of Northern British Columbia	President
Pierre	Zundel	University of Sudbury	President
Ralph	Nilson	Vancouver Island University	President
Max	Blouw	Wilfrid Laurier University	President
Lesley	Cooper	Wilfrid Laurier University	Acting Principal/ Vice-President: Laurier Brantford
Linc	Kesler	University of British Columbia	Director of the First Nations Studies Program
Chris	Lalonde	University of Victoria	Associate Professor
Ron	McLester	Mohawk College	Program Manager - Aboriginal Education
Adrienne	Vedan	University of British Columbia (Okanagan)	Aboriginal Access Advisor
Cara	Wehkamp	University of Guelph	Aboriginal Student Advisor
Sandra	Wong	Brock University	Learning Skills Instructor (Aboriginal focus)

